

RE-IMAGINING WESTPHALIA: IDENTITY IN IR AND THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF THE RUSSIAN STATE

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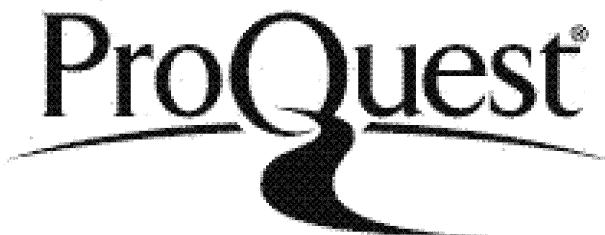


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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Re-imagining Westphalia: Identity in IR and the discursive construction of the Russian state

This thesis examines assumptions about state and identity in constructivist IR theory and the analysis of Russian foreign policy through the looking glass of Russian representations of “state identity” – representations of the Russian state as “Russia” – in the political discourse of the Russian elite since the end of the Soviet Union.

Drawing on empirical research into the discursive representation of the new Russian state, it shows that categories of statehood and identity are more variable in meaning and indeed more ambiguous than allowed for by current dominant conceptions of state identity in IR, which revolve around the categories of the Westphalian system. This becomes evident when studying Russia – a country which is at the same time outsider and insider, a constitutive part of the Westphalian system, defining the state in strongly Westphalian terms, and yet excluded from the West. In the case of Russia, instead of the clear-cut categories and binary distinctions of the Westphalian system there emerges a conceptual field in which inside and outside, identity and difference are inherently ambiguous and diffuse.

It is argued that constructivist assumptions about identity face a problem of the relationship between theory and substantive research, insofar as theoretical commitments may obscure actual representations of identity in Russia, neglecting where and why categories of identity are actually produced, and equating categories of identity with identifications. They also face a normative problem, given that IR constructivism reinforces a problematic account of subjectivity inherent in the Westphalian narrative and is in danger of reifying a binary choice between identity and difference as the only possible relationship between the West and the non-Western world.

The thesis develops a conceptualization of identity drawing on Gadamerian hermeneutics and a framework for empirical research based on conceptual history that allows for an investigation of the context-dependent meaning of categories of statehood and identity and can go some way to escaping the logic of binary oppositions that has characterized conceptions of identity in IR.

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND CITATION

I use the Library of Congress transliteration system for Russian names and for citations of Russian-language materials. I make exceptions in the case of names (including place names) current in the British press, such as Chechnya and Yeltsin. Also, when citing English-language material by Russian authors or citing Russian names, I have retained the spelling as given in the article.

All foreign names and expressions are in italics.

I have cited electronic databases with static URL as on-line archives rather than as websites and have not included access dates for these.

GLOSSARY OF RUSSIAN TERMS

<i>blizhnee zarubezhie</i>	near abroad
<i>Bol'shia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia</i>	Great Soviet Encyclopaedia
<i>Delovaia Rossiiia</i>	Business Russia (here: an economic forum)
<i>demokratiia</i>	democracy
<i>Den' konstitutsii</i>	Constitution Day (12 th June, until 2002)
<i>Den' Rossii</i>	Russia Day (12 th June, from 2003)
<i>Derzhava</i>	Great Power
<i>derzhavnik</i>	somebody advocating Russia's Great Power status
<i>derzhavnost'</i>	Strong-state-ness
<i>dukhovnost'</i>	spirituality
<i>Duma</i>	lower house of the Russian parliament
<i>Edinstvo</i>	Unity (here: the "presidential party" founded in 1999)
<i>gospodar</i>	ruler
<i>gosudar</i>	ruler (older name for tsar)
<i>gosudar samoderchev</i>	autocratic ruler (sole sovereign)
<i>gosudarstvennichestvo</i>	statism
<i>gosudarstvennik</i>	statist
<i>gosudarstvennost'</i>	statehood
<i>gosudarstvo</i>	state
<i>imperiia</i>	empire
<i>mirovaia velikaia derzhava</i>	global Great Power
<i>narod</i>	the people

<i>narodnost'</i>	people-hood (commonly translated as nationality)
<i>narodovlastie</i>	democracy
<i>obshchestvennost'</i>	public self-consciousness
<i>ogromnaia strana</i>	enormous country
<i>otechestvo</i>	fatherland
<i>Pamyat'</i>	memory (here: an ultra-nationalist organization)
<i>pravovoe gosudarstvo</i>	rule-of-law state
<i>Rodina</i>	motherland (here: a nationalist party)
<i>Rossiia</i>	Russia
<i>rossiiskaia idea</i>	Russian (state) idea
<i>rossiiskii</i>	Russian (in the non-ethnic form)
<i>Rus'</i>	name for the medieval Kievan kingdom
<i>Russkaia idea</i>	Russian idea
<i>russkii</i>	Russian (ethno-cultural connotations)
<i>samobytnost'</i>	uniqueness
<i>samo-derzhavie</i>	autocracy
<i>samo-derzhavnost'</i>	autocracy
<i>samostoiatelnost'</i>	independence
<i>sobornost'</i>	togetherness
<i>sootechestvenniki</i>	compatriots
<i>spravedlivii</i>	just
<i>sverkhderzhava</i>	superpower
<i>trudiashchiisia</i>	toilers
<i>velikii</i>	great

<i>vlast'</i>	power
<i>voichinik</i>	proprietor
<i>Vserossiiskaia Imperiia</i>	all-Russian empire
<i>Vserossiiskii imperator</i>	all-Russian emperor
<i>Yabloko</i>	Apple (here: the name of a liberal party)
<i>zapatniki</i>	Westernizers
<i>Zemstvo</i>	Institution of 19 th century local self-government

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABM	Anti-Ballistic Missile
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CPD	Congress of People's Deputies
CPRF	Communist Party of the Russian Federation
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
EU	European Union
FPA	Foreign Policy Analysis
FSB	<i>Federal'naia Sluzhba Bezopasnosti</i> (Federal Security Service)
FSU	Former Soviet Union
G7/G8	Group of 7/8
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KGB	<i>Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti</i> (Committee for State Security)
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
LDPR	Liberal Democratic Party of Russia
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MGIMO	<i>Moskovskii Gosudarstvenniy Institut Mezhdunarondnykh Otnoshenii</i> (Moscow State Institute for International Relations)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic

SU	Soviet Union
UN	United Nations
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WWII	Second World War

CHAPTER I

Introduction

This is a thesis about identity and the state, how this issue has been approached in International Relations and what developments in post-Soviet Russia tell us about the implicit assumptions that underlie approaches to identity in IR.¹ In doing this, it proposes a way of conducting empirical research on culture in IR that may pay more attention to the demands of contingency and particularity of cultures and identities than the approaches which currently dominate the “cultural turn” in IR. As such, this thesis is about theory as well as about empirical questions and, not least, it is a reflection on how to do empirical research on cultural issues in IR. Throughout the thesis, I have attempted to let empirical insights about Russia’s “state identity” guide my approach to the uses of identity in IR, and have used conceptual insights about identity, the state, and the nature of foundational political concepts to approach the complex issue of state and identity in Russia.

1. Scope and significance of the thesis

Concepts of identity and the state, like many other concepts used in social analysis, are both concepts of political practice and concepts of academic analysis.² This is a core assumption of this thesis, which proceeds on the basis that there is a reflexive relationship between these levels which needs to be explored. This reflexive relationship plays its part both in academic analyses of Russia and in the way identity has been approached in IR as an exclusive problem of difference and boundaries. Exploring it therefore throws up questions both about the international

¹ This thesis follows the convention of denoting the discipline of International Relations (IR) with capitals to distinguish it from empirical international relations.

² Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond "Identity"," *Theory and Society* 29, no. 1 (2000).

dimension of Russia's post-Soviet identity formation and about theoretical approaches to identity in IR.

The Russian question:

Questions of identification, or the perception of the other as either alien or similar, have been part of relations between Russia and the West for centuries. It could be said that Europeans needed Russia as a mirror for their own selves, as a measuring device against which they could assess their own civilizational development. If Europe was civilized, modern, developed and enlightened, Russia was not, or at best to a much lesser degree. In European perceptions, a dichotomy between Europe and Russia was created in which Russia was at best admitted to be a pupil, eternally lagging behind and "on its way" to becoming a fully-fledged member of European culture and civilization, never able to achieve this ultimate glorious goal. As Iver Neumann has perceptively pointed out, this meant that the boundary between Russia and Europe has traditionally been not only spatial, a geo-cultural reality, but above all temporal – the division between a system of European states already more advanced on their developmental path, and Russia following but never quite able to catch up.³ Mixed in with this more benign view was an even stronger dichotomy in which Russians were alien, Scythians, barbaric Asians that could never be fully integrated into the cultural community of Europe, a view in which Russia is firmly beyond the boundary of "Western civilization". In this, the European gaze upon Russia perpetuated in modified form a still broader antithesis, that of the West against the Oriental world, of civilization against barbarism, and of rational thought against irrational sentiment.

These perceptions persisted throughout centuries of relations between Europe and Russia, whether or not Russia played a part as an acknowledged member of Europe's political concert of Great Powers, whether or not Russia's internal politics were in accordance or in contrast with European reformist ideas. And in a curious twist that in many ways is representative of the complex interrelationship between Russian and European thought, the very European view of Russia as Europe's "Other", backward or alien, is reflected in many strands of Russian thinking. In fact,

³ Iver B. Neumann, "Russia as Europe's Other," *RSC Working paper 34* (1996).

the European gaze on Russia was and is mirrored in the self-perception of parts of Russia's intellectual elite, reflecting the way in which Western European ideas were habitually absorbed and transformed in Russian culture. The metaphor of Russia as pupil, as modernizing country that is eternally lagging behind, is one of the staples of the Westernizing arguments in the great Russian debate between Westernizers and Slavophiles about Russia's identity. This debate revolved of course around these very questions – Russia's cultural place as a part of Europe or on the contrary its essential *difference* that made any attempt at full integration with the West impossible, and, in the eyes of the Slavophiles, undesirable.

Arguably, from a Western perspective this is still the dominant way in which post-Soviet Russia's identity is perceived – as hovering on the brink of a choice between Europe and Asia, civilization and barbarism, inclusion and conflict. In recent years, furthermore, the balance seemed to be tipping decidedly into the direction of difference and antagonism. In the short history of post-Soviet Russia's relations with the West, this is not the first time that a more or less prolonged period of cooling relations is interpreted as a decisive shift in Russia's identity. Any negative reaction to Western initiatives, such as Primakov's Atlantic turn-around during the Kosovo crisis of 1999 (when the airplane carrying him to a visit to the US turned around in mid-air as the NATO bombardments were announced), or, more recently, the spat over the "democratic revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine, is immediately interpreted as a rejection of a Western and European identity, while a pragmatic or cooperative stance, most recently Putin's joining of the "war on terror" in 2001, is perceived as a "turn to the West".

All this, it seems, is corroborated by the vivid debate about identity and foreign policy in post-Soviet Russia itself, a debate which once again explicitly took up the questions of Russia's identification with or difference from the West. Given the terms of the debate within Russia and the common European perceptions of Russia outlined above, it is not surprising that many Western observers put the question of Russia's identification with Europe and the West at the centre of their assessment of Russia's policy towards Europe. In fact, in the academic analysis of Russia's foreign policy, some reference to Russian foreign policy behaviour in terms of its identity formation and especially as a dynamics of identity and difference with Europe and

the United States, became almost *de rigueur*.⁴ From the Western media as well as from many Western academic analyses one could glean a picture of Russian foreign policy, and indeed Russia itself, as oscillating between identification and difference, westernizing or nationalizing, friendship or threat.

Of course, the tension between Russia's "Asian" and "European" identities is a central part of Russian identity discourses, and Russia's relations with the West are part of the way in which they evolve.⁵ However, an exclusive focus on the dynamics of identification with and differentiation from the West leaves a lot of questions about Russia's post-Soviet identity and international relations unanswered. So far, Russia has failed to be pressed neatly into one of the narrow categories presented to it by the West; neither unconditional identification with nor total rejection of the West appear in dominant self-descriptions within Russia, and any tendencies towards one or the other direction have so far always been reversed.

In fact, there exists a much broader and much more complex identity discourse within Russia, and some of the themes in these representations of "Russia" equally touch on the external relations of the Russian state. These conceptual clusters only partly overlap with the binary logic of identity and difference that is such a dominant theme in Western analyses of Russia's identity and foreign policy. Instead, they revolve around classic representations of the Westphalian state: its depiction as an agent, and its depiction as space.

It may just be the case that many Western frames of analysis reproduce the cultural representations of Eurocentrism outlined above by focussing on only one aspect of Russia's identity discourse. They do so because of a history of framing Russia in this way in European and Western thought, because identification with the West is a recurrent theme in Russian discourse itself, but also because current analyses of identity formation and nationalism in Russia tend to focus on a specific theoretical framework of identity formation understood as a tension between identification with or differentiation from a "Significant Other".

In this thesis, I argue that this frame is not so much wrong as incomplete. It leaves out too many elements that matter to collective identity formation and too

⁴See the overview in Peter Shearman, "The Sources of Russian Conduct: Understanding Russian Foreign Policy," *Review of International Studies* 27 (2001).

⁵ This thesis follows the usage of putting concepts into quotation marks. Thus, "Europe" and "Russia" refer to (identity) concepts, while they appear in their everyday meaning without quotation marks. The only exception is "The West", which is always a conceptual "imagined space" and will therefore not be differentiated by putting it in quotation marks.

many representations of identity which may be equally relational, but do not follow the logic of identity/difference where relations between states are concerned. Furthermore, the way that this relationality is explored in studies of Russian foreign policy leaves open questions about the conceptualization of identity – in what kind of meaningful way can we speak about the identity of the Russian state, and to what extent is it shaped by concrete external interactions?

In this, I too approach only a small part of a vast and multi-layered discourse; I neither claim that this is a complete picture, nor that the concepts of Russia's "state identity" that I trace are in themselves more truthful as a representation of "Russia" than the questions of the Slavophile/Westernizer debate. Nevertheless, it seems clear that we must be careful to question Eurocentric patterns in an analysis of Russia, and that the ambiguity and openness of Russian self-representations, and their invariable contradictions, must be acknowledged when studying Russian identity formation and the state. In this sense, this thesis is an exercise in reflexivity as well as an addition, drawing attention to a field of representations of identity which have so far been subsumed under the all-pervasive focus on Russia and the West.

The question of identity in IR:

The question of Eurocentrism and the focus on identity/difference does not only appear in Western views of Russia; the very same focus on identity and difference, with the same normative implications, has informed the study of identity in moderate constructivism in IR. In fact, since the "cultural turn" made it a central preoccupation of constructivist and post-structuralist theories, identity in IR has overwhelmingly been approached as a problem of difference and boundaries, in particular when posed in connection with states. Often enough, this has focussed around the basic premises of the Westphalian nation-state, the construction and policing of its borders and sovereignty, or how interactions between states in the international system could be understood as an issue of collective identity formation, on the basis of either identification with or differentiation from each other.

In many ways, this focus on identity and difference is only too natural. After all, sociological theories of group formation, as well as theories of the formation of the self in interaction with the Other tell us exactly this – boundaries and differentiation are an inevitable precondition for group-ness. "We" are always

constituted by a differentiation from what “we” are not, and it is therefore necessary to understand identity as difference. This is indeed true for the formation of group identities, and yet it falls far short of the messy, multi-dimensional implications that the concept of identity has long carried, a state of affairs that has not been helped by the way that its application in IR has often conflated several different levels of meaning.

First of all, the concept of identity is by no means simple and clear cut, but possibly one of the most ambiguous and problematic concepts in the theoretical arsenal of the social sciences. Its meaning has been heavily contested and re-defined, so much so that there is an irretrievable tension at the most basic level between modernist theories on identity as self-sameness over time and post-modern theories of identity as the product of the irreducible play of differences (alterity). Added to this are a whole host of more concrete questions about what identity and, specifically, collective identity refers to – the collective identity of an individual, or group-ness? Representations, attributes, or simply another term for “the self” or “the subject”? And which of these definitions can possibly be addressed in conceptualizations of identity and the state in IR?

Apart from the inherent ambiguity of the concept of identity, its uses in IR theory after the “cultural turn” come perilously close to reifying some of the more problematic normative assumptions that are implicit in what could perhaps be called the “Westphalian narrative” – the dominant ontology of IR, which depicts the world as one of state-agents, clearly separating inside and outside in its focus on territorial sovereignty as a concept that indicates sharply bound spaces. Above all, the Westphalian narrative perpetuates a normative account in which sameness is privileged over difference, and yet difference is constitutive of sameness.

It was one of the main aims of the “cultural turn” in IR to expose the Westphalian narrative as precisely this – a narrative, constructed, contingent and possibly changeable. In many ways, this has been achieved. The institutions of Westphalia, in particular sovereignty and the distinction between inside and outside, have been thoroughly deconstructed, and the account of the historical development of the Westphalian system has been exposed as a narrative which brushes over a multitude of inconsistencies and ruptures. In fact, this thesis builds on this work and its unveiling of contingencies and normative assumptions. And yet, it is not an exaggeration to say that moderate constructivism in IR has reified some of the

implicit assumptions about identity and subjectivity that are contained in the Westphalian narrative in an unprecedented manner, and that the post-structuralist critique ultimately remains within its bounds.⁶

This may seem surprising, given the differences between moderate constructivist and critical engagements with IR theory. Moderate constructivism, after all, has consciously sought engagement with “mainstream IR”, and in so doing has taken up and elaborated some of the core Westphalian assumptions about state and subjectivity, arriving at the coinage of a new concept of “state identity”. However, it can be argued that even critical approaches influenced by post-structuralism have remained bound by the questions posed by the Westphalian narrative, if not by its habitual answers.

While moderate constructivism has reified the hierarchical privileging of sameness and stability over difference and anarchy, post-structuralist approaches to identity have challenged this hierarchy and exposed identity as inherently unstable, fluid and contingent. And yet, this challenge has both exposed this contingency and claimed that this image of sharply bound spatiality is constitutive of the modern state as such, that there is either this form of statehood or the supersession of the state by something new. This may in itself be an Eurocentric assumption and, indeed, the very focus on the Westphalian narrative and the European experience means that the post-structuralist critique fails to seek an engagement with real, empirical Others. There thus remains a puzzle about the way that identity and the state are currently conceptualized in IR theory, and this puzzle raises broader questions about the relationship between theory and empirical research in IR.

2. Research process

The focus of this thesis is on the way in which Russian representations of “state identity”, expressed in the very same Westphalian terms that are normalized in the Westphalian narrative, to a certain extent cross-cut the normative account of

⁶ “moderate constructivism” is one of the labels that has been given to the kind of constructivist work in IR that explicitly aims at bridge-building with the rationalist “mainstream”. See also the discussion in Chapter II.

identity/difference that is provided by the Westphalian narrative. As such, it is also about the way that the meaning of concepts cannot be assumed as fixed, stable given, but must be understood to be changing and fluid and dependent on cultural context. To do this, I analyze both the development of representations of “state identity” in post-Soviet Russia and the way that identity has been approached in IR.

Research questions:

My research has been guided by the following primary questions:

- why has the cultural turn in IR enabled a conception of identity as a dichotomy between identity and difference between states?
- does this correspond to representations of identity and the state in Russia, and if not, what does this tell us both about collective identity formation and the state in post-Soviet Russia and about the concept of identity and its uses in IR?

These two main questions spawned several other questions during the actual process of empirical and conceptual research. These concerned the scope of the concept of identity in those academic fields where it originally emerged; the possibility of alternative kinds of conceptualizations of state and identity, and how to understand the function of uses of representations of “state identity” by the Russian political elite as well as the relationship between changes in the meaning of these concepts and the context they were used in. In all this, however, there emerged a question about the relationship between theory and empirical research in IR in general and in the “cultural turn” in particular – more specifically, why the cultural turn in IR, drawing on theories which emphasize the contingent and particular, did not lead to a re-valuation of empirical research, but instead ushered in the meta-theoretical “Third Debate”. Some preliminary answers are implicit in the argument made in chapter II, though it would be beyond the scope of this thesis to provide an exhaustive answer to this question. Nevertheless, the search for a framework of analysis that would allow for a greater “openness to surprise”⁷ in researching culture

⁷ John Agnew, “Open to Surprise?,” *Progress in Human Geography* 30, no. 1 (2006).

and identity in IR, a way to be reflexive about and break free from the narrow confines of the Westphalian narratives, led me to a revaluation of the hermeneutical turn inside the cultural turn and thus to philosophical hermeneutics and conceptual history as framework that could provide some answers to the dilemma of empirical research on culture in IR.

Theory and method:

In the broadest possible sense, this is a social constructivist thesis, though it remains at the margins of the specific meaning that this term has acquired in IR. This label refers to a focus on the way that social action is inherently meaningful and meaning is intersubjectively constituted in social interaction. It also implies that the institutions that populate the social world, such as the state, have to be understood as social constructions. In this, a distinction between “cultural factors” and material factors, as is prevalent in many “moderate constructivist” approaches in IR, is a false dichotomy. Instead, everything that constitutes the social world is linguistically mediated and interpreted – and it is through language that we can share these interpretations.

This broadly constructionist focus also determines my way of seeing the relationship between theory and empirical research.⁸ Understanding and interpretation, rather than causal explanation, correlation and modelling are at the basis of the constructivist research process.⁹ Theory, or conceptualizations, will inevitably simplify an external reality that is always more complex than the categories we use in interpreting it. However, the aim of theory is neither to model nor to predict. Instead, conceptualizations serve as a guide to empirical research, framing the kinds of questions that can conceivably be asked of the empirical material, while standing in a reflexive relationship with it. In other words, this is a process in which conceptual frameworks are open through ongoing revision by what is being found in empirical context, as well as conceptualizing and interpreting this empirical context – an open process of understanding which does not fall within

⁸ See also Colin Hay, *Political Analysis - a Critical Introduction* (Houndsill, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 47.

⁹ Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

either an inductive or a deductive paradigm, and could be labelled as constructivist grounded theory.¹⁰

More than social constructivist, however, my approach in this thesis is grounded in philosophical hermeneutics, especially the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Gadamer develops a hermeneutic approach that emphasises understanding as a linguistically mediated process that involves both the researcher and what is being researched, and stresses the inescapable nature of tradition or “prejudice” or pre-judgement (*Vorurteil*) in influencing the research process, prejudices which must be openly acknowledged and engaged rather than managed or escaped.¹¹ Philosophical hermeneutics also stresses the open-ended, ambiguous nature of meaning, and the way that it is always dependent upon cultural and historical background.

This turn towards philosophical hermeneutics was the result of a process in which it became increasingly clear that the uses of identity in IR theory revealed just such inescapable “prejudices”. And during the empirical research process it also became clear that Russian concepts of “state identity”, while ostensibly participating in the semantic field that constitutes the Westphalian narrative, conveyed nevertheless sometimes very different meanings, ones that did not square easily with key Westphalian assumptions about space, territoriality and subjectivity.

Philosophical hermeneutics and the associated method of conceptual history open up the possibility of a closer, reflexive relationship between empirical research on cultures outside of the immediate Western European experience and theory formation in IR. One of the reasons for this is the focus that philosophical hermeneutics puts on the process of empirical research as a dialogical process, in which the researcher must acknowledge his or her situatedness in broader socio-cultural traditions – the inevitability of holding prejudices – as a condition of possibility for understanding. At the same time understanding – being confronted with something that is outside of one’s habitual horizon of experience – is an act of dislocation that changes the prejudices of the researcher as much as it leads her to a

¹⁰ Kathy Charmaz, "Grounded Theory: Objectivist and Constructivist Method," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (London; New York: Sage, 2000).

¹¹ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1993), Thomas A. Schwandt, "Three Epistemological Stances for Qualitative Enquiry: Interpretivism, Hermeneutics and Social Constructionism," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (London; New York: Sage, 2000).

new (though always open-ended and contingent) interpretation. This insight was a central inspiration in locating the Westphalian narrative in the European experience and exploring the Eurocentric assumptions of research on identity in IR, as well as in my own background as a historian with a training in European history.

Philosophical hermeneutics points to the way that understanding is social and as such mediated in language. It therefore suggests that the level of representations, and especially representations expressed in language, should be the focus of empirical research. This is at the basis of my approach to Russia's "state identity" as a representation of a collective identity of "Russia". This kind of linguistic focus is taken up by the conceptual history approach developed by the German historian, Reinhart Koselleck. Unlike discourse analysis, the main focus is on individual concepts, especially political concepts, and it makes no structuralist assumptions about the ordering of language in discourse.

In conceptual history, the meaning of a concept is relational – determined both by its relation to other concepts in a semantic field, and in relation to an extralinguistic context (which is nevertheless interpreted and mediated through language) in which these concepts are being used. An important part of this context is diachronic or historical, in the sense that the meaning of concepts inevitably carries traces of their past uses. This diachronic aspect, as well as the context-dependency of concepts, indicates that the meaning of political concepts is inherently ambiguous and cannot be fixed. At the same time, their use as concepts of practice consists in precisely such attempts to fix and "occupy" them. The reason is that they convey legitimacy and thus power – political concepts constitute a space for legitimate action. Conceptual history postulates that the meaning of political concepts will therefore always be heavily contested, at least as long as there is a public political space in which such a contestation can take place. In fact, this contestation, which is an attempt to fix meaning, is a major reason why the meaning of political concepts cannot be fixed.

Arguably conceptions of post-Soviet Russian "state identity" – concepts of Russia as Great Power/strong state and democracy – are such foundational political concepts, and their legitimizing function was of prime importance in identifying the new Russian state as "Russia". Conceptual history provided a tool for exploring the subtle changes in meaning that characterized the development of representations of Russia's "state identity". In its focus on the historical dimension and the linguistic

and extra-linguistic context of concepts, it allows the tracing of shifts in meaning in response to a developing context and the relating of these concepts of “state identity” to other semantic fields that provided their immediate context, such as that of representations of “Russia” and the “West” as imagined spaces.

Conceptual history, in a more metaphorical and less stringent form, also provides an entry point for my analysis of the concept of identity in IR. Above, I have pointed out the reflexive relationship between concepts of analysis and concepts of political practice. While conceptual history focuses on concepts of political practice, much of what is said here could be applied to concepts of analysis, too, at least if we base ourselves on a view of academic research as an area not immune from the “politics of knowledge”. The legitimate “occupation” of concepts of analysis equally involves questions of power – in this case, access to publication and funding – and they too, are heavily contested. Indeed, the contestation of concepts, and attempts to “fix” their meaning, could be said to be the very essence of theory formation in the social sciences. However, like foundational political concepts (indeed, they are often foundational political concepts), the meaning of concepts of social analysis cannot be fixed but remains essentially contested. All this is certainly true for the concepts of identity and the state which are at the core of this thesis. Context – tradition – matters; the central concepts of the Westphalian narrative all have a history which partly determines their meaning, something especially visible in conceptions of sovereignty and the state. In this sense, this thesis is inspired by conceptual history in its analysis of the uses of identity in IR, as well as following this approach in the empirical analysis of the semantic field of Russia’s post-Soviet “state identity”.

This overall hermeneutic framework has been complemented by a mix of conceptual insights from different disciplines. I have drawn on critical theory in IR, especially the work of Blaney and Inayatullah, as well as work on Eurocentrism in relation to Eastern Europe, in particular the work by Maria Todorova and Larry Wolff, to frame my critique of the uses of identity in IR.¹² I have also used literature on critical geopolitics which has alerted me to the importance of space in general and “imagined spaces” in particular; sociological theory on collective identity formation,

¹² Naeem Inayatullah and David L. Blaney, *International Relations and the Problem of Difference* (New York: Routledge, 2004), Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: the Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

categorization and the power of “naming”; and literature on the state in anthropology and cultural sociology to arrive at conceptualizations that enlarged the scope for the empirical analysis of Russian conceptions of “state identity”.

Scope of empirical research and sources:

The empirical part of this thesis focuses on two periods – that of the very emergence of the new Russian state in 1991/92, and that from a renewed escalation of “statehood in crisis” in 1999 to the apparent consolidation of the Putin years. The choice of periods rather than case studies as a frame for empirical research in this thesis was determined by two factors: first of all, I felt that it was necessary to look at the semantic field of state identity in its entirety and in relation to issues that were perceived as important by the actors themselves at the time, rather than pre-selecting on the basis of issue areas or themes. Secondly, due to the text-based, in-depth approach I took and the vast amount of material now available (several thousand individual documents were sighted altogether to reach “saturation point”), it was out of the question to research the whole period of Russia’s post-Soviet history in equal depth. In an initial survey of the material and secondary literature, it became clear that there were two points at which there was an acute perception that the legitimacy of the Russian state itself was challenged, of “statehood in crisis”. This concerned the open contestation of the new Russian state during the process of its emergence in 1991/92, and the “crisis year” of 1999, where Western and Russian observers alike predicted an imminent collapse of the Russian state, as an economic and political crisis – externally in the shape of Kosovo, internally as the corruption of the Yeltsin “family” was laid open – exacerbated the precarious centrifugal tendencies that threatened the unity of the central state. It also seemed an obvious choice to include a chapter about the very beginning of the new Russian state, a period in which it disentangled itself from the Soviet Union and where both the state and the semantic field of post-Soviet “state identity” first emerged. The transition to Putin and the way that “state patriotism” took up the concepts of state identity was a natural extension of the scope of the second focus on 1999, which allowed me to trace the development of the semantic field of Russia’s “state identity” over a period of some six years, which included some major twists and turns in Russia’s relations with the West as well as the transformation of Russia’s domestic scene.

The focus of the thesis is on the Russian “state elite” as “carriers” of concepts of Russian state identity. While representations of state identity reach beyond them, and the focus is not on the world-view or ideological position of any one individual, this choice was motivated by the fact that especially in the context of Russia’s emerging statehood, these people quite specifically claimed the power (whether they really had this power remains open to investigation, though not in this thesis) to “name the state” for all Russians. It was the state elite, the vice-president as well as the parliamentary opposition, that openly contested the equation of the new Russian state with “Russia” in 1991/2 and 1999, and it was this elite which instrumentalised representations of the state and identity on slogans of “state patriotism” under Putin. In this sense, this thesis deals with “official representations of the official”, to borrow a phrase from Bourdieu.¹³ The basis for this focus is outlined in greater detail in Chapter III.

My empirical research started with a diachronic stage – the recovery of historic layers of meaning of the core concepts of Russia’s state identity (Chapter IV). It then went on to the recovery of a broad variety of texts, from a number of different sources, always with the caveat that they were produced by what could broadly be defined as “state elite” – in itself a fluid concept, given the ambiguous reach of the Russian state. This generally excluded journalists and political commentators and academics, as long as they were not known to be in some ways associated with state power (though I have on occasions quoted journalists when they made a more general observation, and not as examples of the semantic field of “state identity”). Sources had to be public. They included newspaper articles, transcripts of interviews on Russian TV and radio, transcripts of press conferences, party manifestos, programmatic statements, official documents and speeches. My work would have been impossible without the availability of electronic full text databases, including both newspapers and TV/Radio transcripts as well as press conferences. These were first of all www.integrum.ru (in Russian, material from the mid-1990s), www.lexis-nexis.com (including BBC Summary of World Broadcasts and press agency transcripts), and to a lesser degree www.eastview.com (in Russian). I also used party websites and the official websites of the Russian government.

¹³ Pierre Bourdieu, “Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field,” in *State/Culture: State-Formation after the Cultural Turn*, ed. George Steinmetz (London: Cornell, 1999).

3. Chapter summaries

Chapter II deals with the implications of the Westphalian narrative for the study of identity in IR and the analysis of Russian foreign policy. In this it considers approaches to identity and the state in what could broadly be labelled the “cultural turn”: moderate constructivism, interpretivist and poststructuralist alternatives and the rise in interest in the “identity-foreign policy” link in analyses of post-Soviet Russian foreign policy. It argues that the consequences of the Westphalian narrative for the reception of identity in IR have turned out highly problematic, both for the possibility of empirical research and in their normative implications.

Chapter III elaborates an alternative understanding of Russia’s “state identity”, based on the premises of philosophical hermeneutics and conceptualizations of collective identity and the state drawn from sociology and anthropology. It also introduces a way to approach empirical research on cultures and identities in IR, based on philosophical hermeneutics and Begriffsgeschichte. This approach takes account of the ambiguity and fluidity of meaning in the Russian semantic field of “state identity”, and the way that this potentially cross-cuts understandings in the Westphalian narrative.

Chapter IV provides a genealogy of the foundational concepts of “state identity” of the new Russian Federation - concepts of state power and the concept of democracy - through the tsarist and Soviet periods. It shows their place within the broader semantic field of representations of “Russia”.

Chapter V moves to the formative phase of the new Russian state, the prolonged period of its “becoming sovereign” in 1991/92. In this period, Russia's statehood was re-constituted in a very real sense, and the foundational concepts of “state identity” were very much present as essentially contested concepts in the discourse of the state elite. At the same time, the period was characterized by a persistent ambiguity over the meaning of “Russia”, Russian imagined spaces, and whether or not the Russian Federation represented them.

Chapter VII deals with the continuing ambiguities of imagined spaces, both of “Russia” and the West, and the way this affected representations of the territoriality of the Russian state, a decade and more after its inception. It argues that while there may be a move towards the bounded territoriality assumed in the Westphalian narrative, this is counteracted by persistent representations of

ambiguity, and especially the persisting ambiguity of the imagined space of the West and Europe with regard to Russia.

Chapter VII takes up these spatial representations and shows how they affect and are affected by representations of state agency - the core of the semantic field of "state identity". In this, it shows that there has been a considerable development in the meaning of this semantic field from the early 1990s, especially affecting the meaning of democracy and its relation to the imagined space of the West. At the same time, all concepts retained the intertwining of domestic and external reference that contributes to the persistent ambiguity of space.

CHAPTER II

Identity, IR and the Westphalian narrative

One of the major powers of the state is to produce and impose...categories of thought that we spontaneously apply to all things of the social world – including the state itself. (...) From its inception, social science itself has been part and parcel of this work of construction of representations of the state which makes up part of the reality of the state itself.

Pierre Bourdieu¹

1. Introduction

The concept of identity is central to the cultural turn in IR in all its various guises, from radical post-structuralist critiques to moderate constructivism. Indeed, an interest in identities, their constitution and their performative power (or, for moderate constructivists, the identity-interest-action triad) is one of the few common threads that still unites these extremely heterogeneous approaches.² At the same time, differences in understandings of identity, between a modernist conception of identity as self-sameness and a post-structuralist one centred on difference, is one of the fault lines that separates moderate, “mainstream” constructivism from post-structuralist approaches in IR.

¹ Ibid.

² Price and Reus-Smith define this as one of four common stances shared between constructivism and critical theory in IR, together with methodological pluralism, a normative commitment and a rejection of positivism (though these latter points have since been almost eradicated in conventional constructivism). See Richard Price and Christian Reus-Smith, "Dangerous Liaisons? Critical International Theory and Constructivism," *European Journal of International Relations* 4, no. 3 (1998): 267. See also Stefano Guzzini, "A Reconstruction of Constructivism in International Relations," *European Journal of International Relations* 6, no. 2 (2000).

The centrality of identity to the cultural turn in IR arguably does not only derive from its current fashionableness in social theory. It also derives from an underlying, hidden account of identity and subjectivity that is implicit in the core ontology of the discipline of IR, what could be called the “Westphalian narrative”. This dominant ontology comprises what Rob Walker has described as “the decisive demarcation between inside and outside, between self and other, identity and difference, community and anarchy that is constitutive of our modern understanding of political space”.³ The boundary between domestic and external space, encapsulated in the concept of territorial sovereignty, creates a separate domain of “the international” which forms the proper subject matter of IR and legitimizes its existence as an independent discipline. It also underlies a focus on the state as the core actor in international affairs, depicting it as a unitary actor that possesses interests and acts according to those interests. In this narrative, identity and subjectivity are implicit in the distinction between inside (identity, sameness, homogeneity) and outside (difference and danger). It is also implicit in the way that the state is presented as an actor, almost a person, with interests and intentions.

This is a very mainstream, traditional account of what IR is about, and one intention of the cultural turn (at least its critical wing) was precisely the deconstruction of these assumptions. Yet, as I will try to show in this chapter, both moderate constructivist and poststructuralist uses of identity in IR ultimately fail to break with the Westphalian narrative, although in very different ways. This has to do with the reflexive relationship between the inherent account of identity and subjectivity in the Westphalian narrative and the uses of identity in interpretivist theories in IR. It is a relationship which moderate constructivism is happy to embrace, but as I will argue, even poststructuralist critiques ultimately do not escape its logic.

The first part of this chapter explores the assumptions about identity and subjectivity inherent in the Westphalian narrative. It then goes on to show how these implicit assumptions have been reproduced by the “cultural turn”, first and foremost in moderate constructivism and its coinage of “state identity” as a sociological identity of state-selves, and in alternative approaches, including the deconstructive critique delivered by post-structuralists.

³ R. B. J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 174.

As I will show in the last section, this is not just a question of theory-determinism. Research on Russian identity and foreign policy has equally had a tendency to reproduce Westphalian assumptions. This was perhaps unavoidable, given the highly normative nature of the subject during the Cold War. It was also facilitated by the way that empirical research on Russian foreign policy has traditionally been either theory-averse, and thus unreflexive of its own assumptions, or in the position of adapting the more sophisticated theoretical arsenal of IR – thus absorbing the assumptions of the Westphalian narrative in the process.

As I will argue, all this is problematic, not only because it may not adequately depict empirical realities of Russia's post-Soviet identity formation, but also because it presents a highly normative, exclusionary account – one which is challenged, but not overcome, by post-structuralist critiques, and may even be reified and reinforced by moderate constructivist depictions of “state identity”. In this, the cultural turn in IR fails to escape its Eurocentric logic.

2. Westphalia and identity

The depiction of identity and the state that emerges in IR constructivism as well as the conceptions of identity employed in the poststructuralist critique of state and identity in IR do not reflect purely abstract preoccupations; like all concepts of political analysis, they have a close and sometimes mutually constitutive relationship with concepts of political praxis.⁴ Both “state” and “identity” are foundational political concepts as well as concepts of analysis in this sense, endlessly reiterated and reinscribed with meaning in political discourse and practices as well as within academic analysis.

In fact, both concepts have been central to a narrative of modernity that posits the territorial state, and more specifically the nation-state, as the normal and desirable form of political community.⁵ This narrative has both been reproduced in European, and eventually global, political discourse and has been foundational to the

⁴On the reflexive relationship between concepts of analysis and concepts of practice see Brubaker and Cooper, “Beyond “Identity”,” 312.

⁵Jens Bartelson explores this point in relation to international theory. See Jens Bartelson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), 31 pp.

social sciences. It endows nation and state with certain essential properties, of which the most central is territorial boundedness, a sharp distinction between domestic and external space, and continuity over time. As the anthropologist Richard Handler put it,

our notions of “nation” and “state” imply similar senses of boundedness, continuity and homogeneity encompassing diversity. The state is viewed as rational, instrumental, power-concentrating organization. The nation is imagined to represent less calculating, more sentimental aspects of collective reality. Yet, both are, in principle, integrated: well-organized and precisely delimited social organisms. And, in principle, the two coincide.⁶

In IR, this narrative has habitually taken the form of an idealized account of the “system of Westphalia”, with its emphasis on the concept of territorial sovereignty.⁷ The narrative of the Westphalian system puts the state at the centre of the ontology of IR – and more specifically, a reading of the state as a reified entity in which the concept of territorial sovereignty marks a line of absolute distinction between an ordered, bounded inside and the anarchical, threatening outside that constitutes both the state as an agent and the international as a distinct sphere of social reality. In its basic form, pervasive in mainstream IR, this assumption is not argued out as a theoretical stance, but instead is posed as historical fact, anchored in a real event, the Peace of Westphalia of 1648 that established the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* and thus the primacy of territorial sovereignty.⁸

Identity matters for this Westphalian narrative, even though it was not explicitly theorized in IR until the advent of constructivist scholarship. Underlying the Westphalian narrative, as well as that of the emergence of the modern state more broadly, is the assumption of a deep rupture between pre-modern and modern conceptions of state, centred on the nation as the embodiment of sovereignty and political community. In this reading, the peace of Westphalia, while not exactly creating the modern nation-state, was nevertheless its founding act. Territorial sovereignty was the condition of possibility for the spread of the idea of the nation

⁶ Richard Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).

⁷ Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory*. See also Richard K. Ashley, “Untying the Sovereign State: A Double Reading of the Anarchy Problematique,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 17 (1988), Andreas Osiander, “Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth,” *International Organization* 55 (2001).

⁸ On the lack of theorizing about the state in IR theory generally and among Realists in particular, see Bartelson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty*., also Stephen Hobden, “Theorising the International System: Perspectives from Historical Sociology,” *Review of International Studies* 25 (1999).

that found its culmination in the emergence and subsequent internationalization of the nation-state during the 19th and 20th centuries, and thus the establishment of a truly international Westphalian system.⁹ Effectively, the Westphalian narrative traces a decisive shift in the meaning of the concept of sovereignty, away from a pre-modern understanding of sovereignty as personal power invested in the body of the king, and towards the metaphorical establishment of the body of the people – the nation as sovereign that heralded the establishment of democracy. In this way, the mainly static account of the Westphalian system prevalent in IR is underpinned by a teleological narrative of modernity and the formation of collective subjectivity. The idea of the unitary sovereign subject, central to medieval understandings of sovereignty, was both transformed and preserved in this account of the sovereign nation and its relationship with the modern state. It constitutes a layer of meaning which has remained present in the concept of sovereignty and which has arguably been brought to the fore again by the focus on identity in the “cultural turn”

This history, arguably, matters, and the territorial meaning of the concept of sovereignty is not separate from the account of sovereign subjectivity. As will be seen in this section, the account of the Westphalian system as one of sharp territorial divisions between inside and outside and the narrative of modern subjectivity in form of the nation feed off each other. Both inform the underlying ontology of “mainstream IR” in multiple ways, both in its (neo-)realist and in its (neo-)liberal incarnations. This is not contradicted by the rise of globalization studies and the burgeoning literature about the supersession of the nation state and the rise of transnational actors. On the contrary, there is a sense in which the invocation of the end of the nation state which is currently such a fashionable topic in IR confirms the underlying assumptions of the Westphalian narrative. As soon as the sharp distinction between inside and outside can no longer be upheld because of the growth of transnational structures, as soon as the narrative of the nation as monolithic subject is challenged by migratory flows and the pressures of a multicultural society, the system of Westphalia, in this account, is bound to vanish. In this kind of literature, it almost appears as if a state and a collective identity without these foundational features have become unthinkable – there appears no possibility for

⁹See for example Mathias Albert and Lothar Brock, "What Keeps Westphalia Together? Normative Differentiation in the Modern System of States," in *Identities, Borders, Orders*, ed. Mathias Albert, David Jacobsen, and Yosef Lapid (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

statehood beyond the Westphalian state. In this sense, the literature on the end of the nation-state re-affirms the Westphalian narrative of the state – with a teleology of post-modernity replacing the teleology of modernity outlined above, but as its negation, thus remaining deeply entangled with it.

At the same time, it would be wrong to read the Westphalian narrative as a pure celebration of difference enshrined in the doctrine of territorial sovereignty – the idea of the nation that it contains prevents this. The picture of the modern state and identity given in the Westphalian narrative has its roots in the nationalizing ideologies of the 19th century, which aimed to legitimize the nation-building projects of continental Europe. Having become the legitimizing narrative of the new European nation-states, it was codified into the emerging international law and found its culmination in the doctrine of national self-determination and absolute domestic sovereignty enshrined in the UN charter.¹⁰ In this, the Westphalian account of the nation contains a pervasive, if implicit, understanding of identity as exclusionary, homogenous and stable, drawing absolute territorial distinctions between “us” (sameness) and “them” (difference).

Taking up the issue of the reflexive relationship between concepts of practice and concepts of analysis, David Blaney and Naeem Inayatullah have pointed out the problematic normative implications of precisely this connection between the Westphalian narrative and dominant Western representations of identity and political community.¹¹ As they put it,

the bounded political community constructs (and is constructed by) “the other”, both beyond its boundaries, lurking as a perpetual threat in the form of other states, foreign groups, imported goods and alien ideas, and as difference within, vitiating the presumed but rarely, if ever, achieved “sameness”. [...] Our responses to the “other” seem to be perpetually drawn towards the equation: difference/inferiority/ eradication.¹²

Drawing on this, the “problem of difference” inherent in the Westphalian narrative has been reflected in the account of international anarchy as a realm of danger and insecurity that forms the underlying ontology of IR.¹³ The distinction

¹⁰ Osiander, "Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth."

¹¹ David L. Blaney and Naeem Inayatullah, "The Westphalian Deferral," *International Studies Review* 2, no. 2 (2000). See also Inayatullah and Blaney, *International Relations and the Problem of Difference*.

¹² Blaney and Inayatullah, "The Westphalian Deferral," 45.

¹³ On this see also Louisa Odysseos, "Dangerous Ontologies: the Ethos of Survival and Ethical Theorizing in International Relations," *Review of International Studies* 28, no. 2 (2002)., Beate Jahn,

between international and domestic in the Westphalian narrative is not just the line of a boundary between states: it is a distinction between two qualitatively different spaces, of which one is represented as homogenous political community or “body politic”. The abstracted, imagined space of “the international”, on the other hand, is populated by changing, but always threatening Others.

Thus, the representation of anarchy and the inside/outside distinction in the Westphalian ontology of IR draws on a normative account in which sameness is privileged over difference, and in which the acknowledgement of difference in the principle of territorial sovereignty only serves to protect sameness.

Given that this narrative emerges from Europe, it all too easily slips into a hierarchy in which sameness, “being like us” takes on the sense of being European or Western and accepting the values of European high modernity. At this point, it becomes clear why cosmopolitan accounts in IR advocating the end of the nation-state do not necessarily constitute a break with the account of identity and difference that it contains (though, as will be seen below, they do constitute a break with an account of subjectivity that posits the nation-state as an organic “body politic”). As long as they are based on a declared universality of common values, more often than not those of democracy and human right, or any other form of universalist argument with a basis in Western thought, they run danger of re-producing the pattern of inclusion and exclusion on a different level, between those who adhere to these universal values and those who reject them. The underlying dynamics of identity and difference in this remains unbroken.

The normative bias of the Westphalian narrative finds its reflection in the way that “identity” in IR constructivism is approached as a problem of difference and boundaries. IR theory in its conventional form has long helped to reproduce this, but arguably the new focus on identity in the wake of poststructuralist and constructivist theorizing in IR has not helped to overcome the “problem of difference”; in fact, it helped to reify it.

¹“IR and the State of Nature: the Cultural Origins of a Ruling Ideology,” *Review of International Studies* 25, no. 3 (1999).

3. “Moderate constructivism” in IR and the concept of identity

As has been pointed out above, mainstream IR in its various permutations relied on the ontology of the Westphalian narrative. Identity therefore matters in a very specific way in IR, if in a hidden and normalized form that became wholly invisible as the discipline ushered in the neo-neo consensus and relied on an ever greater abstraction of state agency and systemic pressures.¹⁴ This changed with the “cultural turn”, the arrival of critical (poststructuralist) theory in IR and the subsequent emergence of the “constructivist paradigm”, approaches which in different ways put culture and identity at the centre of their research agenda.

Critical approaches challenged the Westphalian narrative, deconstructing and historicizing its core elements, while at the same time attacking the positivist assumptions prevalent in IR that underpinned the clear distinctions between inside and outside.¹⁵ Developing in their wake, constructivist approaches (often called “moderate” constructivism) were more interested in taking up “culture” or identity as an explanatory factor in IR, while retaining the ontological framework of the Westphalian narrative and a commitment to positivist epistemology.¹⁶ In this, they were challenging the immutable nature of anarchy and embracing conceptions of “bounded rationality” and the link between identity, interests and actions to explain state behaviour. Whether explicitly problematised or brought out through a new focus on cultural explanatory factors, the largely implicit account of identity in the Westphalian narrative now came out into the open.

¹⁴ The concept of normalized knowledge is borrowed from Foucault. See Michel Foucault, *Il Faut Défendre La Société: Cours Au Collège De France, 1975-1976* (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 1997).

¹⁵ See Richard K. Ashley, “The Geopolitics of Geopolitical Space: Toward a Critical Social Theory of International Politics,” *Alternatives* 12, no. 4 (1987), James Der Derian and Michael J. Shapiro, *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1989), Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory*.

¹⁶ See Christian Reus-Smith, “Constructivism,” in *Theories of International Relations*, ed. Andrew Linklater, Scott Burchill, and Christian Reus-Smith (Hounds-mills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), and for similar classifications Emmanuel Adler, “Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics,” *European Journal of International Relations* 4, no. 4 (1997). Ted Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory,” *International Security* 23, no. 1 (1998). The by now common distinction between the “constructivist paradigm” (“thin”, “conventional constructivism” “middle ground” etc.) and “critical”, post-modern, or post-structuralist theory obscures the genealogy of constructivist approaches, and their overlapping themes. Nevertheless, there is a dividing line, which is assiduously patrolled from both sides – the obsession with “bridge-building” to rationalist approaches and the embracing of a scientific methodology on the side of “thin” constructivists and a strident critique of these attempts on the side of critical theorists. See also John Kurt Jacobsen, “Duelling Constructivisms: A Post-Mortem on the Ideas Debate in Mainstream IR/IPE,” *Review of International Studies* 29 (2003). and Price and Reus-Smith, “Dangerous Liaisons? Critical International Theory and Constructivism.”

It did so, however, not in a homogenous way, as different strands of the “cultural turn” embraced very different, and in fact diametrically opposed, conceptions of identity. The consequences of this – namely the way in which moderate constructivism ended up re-affirming the Westphalian narrative in unprecedented form and in this reifying the normative account of identity it contains – are explored in this section. Arguably, this reification of identity is a product of the conceptualization of identity used in much moderate constructivist work. This draws on a central concern of the post-structuralist critique of IR epistemology – the way in which scientific categorizations – concepts of analysis – both reflect and reinforce deeply normative “normalized knowledge”, in this case that of privileging identity and sameness over difference.

3.1. Moderate constructivism and “state identity” in IR

Moderate constructivist authors depict their use of identity in IR as a radical break with mainstream “rationalist” assumptions, in particular in the way in which they posit identities as constitutive of interests. At the same time, moderate constructivism aims to remain in dialogue with mainstream rationalist IR approaches and their positivist epistemology. Many moderate constructivists have found that there was much to unite them – and as will be seen below, this is not all that surprising. As poststructuralist critics have pointed out, moderate constructivism does not overcome the Westphalian narrative – and as I will argue below, its underlying assumptions about identity are on the contrary reified in an unprecedented manner in moderate constructivist approaches. This reification hinges on the modernist bias of concepts of identity in moderate constructivism, and, crucially, its connection with the concept of the state, creating a new concept unique to IR constructivism: that of “state identity”.

In the case of moderate constructivism, identity becomes central as the result of a basic ontological assumption which is what differentiates it from the “rationalist” mainstream in IR: that identity, rather than instrumental rationality, constitutes interests and thus determines the behaviour of agents in the international system, and that interest cannot therefore be taken to be stable givens.¹⁷ This is

¹⁷ Identity is a key factor in the concept of “bounded rationality” borrowed from neo-institutionalism. See for example John Gerard Ruggie, “What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-Utilitarianism

something that is a result of disciplinary politics - the conscious engagement with “mainstream IR” and its ontology, and especially realist theories – as much as it is a statement about the ontology of the international system. Consequently, these agents are conceptualized often, though by no means exclusively, as states, thus explicitly taking up the Westphalian narrative. Ruggie expresses this when he claims that it is the “core foundational question” of social constructivism “how the constituent actors – in International Relations, territorial states – came to acquire their current identity and the interests that are supposed to go along with it.”¹⁸

In this formulation, Ruggie refers to a concept that has become commonplace in the kind of constructivism that consciously engages with mainstream IR – the concept of state identity. It is a concept that is most closely associated with Alexander Wendt’s provocative statement that “states are people, too”, a dictum which has sparked considerable debate.¹⁹ However, “state identity” is, implicitly or explicitly, part of much more constructivist work than just Wendt’s. In fact, it is pervasive in moderate constructivist literature, where it often remains largely implicit, and, like the concept of identity itself, is used without much further theoretical reflection.²⁰ Arguably, in its current use in moderate constructivism the concept is inherently problematic, quite apart from the question whether or not states can be persons and collective actors which has been debated in the wake of Wendt’s use of the term.

“State identity” in moderate constructivism carries the rich and highly ambiguous meanings of its composite foundational concepts; however there are some core meanings on which current usage converges, and, given the relative novelty of the concept, these core meanings are arguably dominated by the work of relatively few authors, first and foremost Alexander Wendt, who has extensively theorized it.

and the Social Constructivist Challenge,” *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998). The concept of “bounded rationality” is elaborated in James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, “The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life,” *American Political Science Review* 78, no. 3 (1984).

¹⁸ Ruggie, “What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-Utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge,” 863.

¹⁹ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), 215. For the debate see for example “Forum on the State as a Person,” *Review of International Studies* 30 (2004).

²⁰ For examples see Thomas Banchoff, “German Identity and European Integration,” *European Journal of International Relations* 5, no. 3 (1999), Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change,” *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998), Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory.”, Bahar Rumelili, “Constructing Identity and Relating to Difference: Understanding the EU’s Mode of Differentiation,” *Review of International Studies* 30 (2004).

Whatever form it has taken in various strands of moderate constructivist scholarship, “state identity” is commonly used with sociological or even psychological connotations, rather than understanding identity simply as the properties that make the state “identical with itself”, as Jens Bartelson put it.²¹ In this, “state identity” cannot fail to refer to a host of implied meanings relating to collective identities, the nation or the self.

In fact, ascribing a social identity to the state is conceptualized on the basis of the link between identity, interests and action that has been identified above as a fundamental axiom of the moderate constructivist project. By way of this link the concept of “state identity” has been a feature in the agency-structure debate, most prominently in the work of Wendt, who was indeed a major contributor.²² In this sense, it quite obviously refers to states as agents, and represents them as bounded entities, as individuated subjects and selves to whom a personal identity can be ascribed.

However, not all uses of this concept imply that the state is posited as a unitary agent. There are constructivist accounts which see state identity as a predominantly domestic feature, the expression of the collective identity of the community represented by the state, even though this societal identity may be influenced through international interaction.²³ Be that as it may, the basic image of boundedness, of an entity which is distinct from other entities by virtue of its unique identity remains firmly in place, and so does the distinction between inside and outside, identity and difference that permeates the Westphalian narrative. In the practice of constructivist research, this means that there are differing accounts as to where a state’s identity is formed, either at the level of domestic national (collective) identity which is then expressed in state actions, or at the level of systemic interaction, whether in its structuralist or its structurationist variants.²⁴

²¹ In fact, Bartelson’s concept of state identity is fundamentally different from moderate constructivist state identity and should not be confused with it. See Jens Bartelson, “Second Natures: Is the State Identical with Itself?,” *European Journal of International Relations* 4, no. 3 (1998).

²² Alexander Wendt, “The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations,” *International Organization* 41, no. 3 (1987).

²³ Compare for example Buzan’s stress on the nation as central to the “idea of the state”. Barry Buzan, *People, States, and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: L. Rienner, 1991), 70. See also Valerie M. Hudson, “Culture and Foreign Policy: Developing a Research Agenda,” in *Culture and Foreign Policy*, ed. Valerie M. Hudson (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1997).

²⁴ For explanations privileging a unique cultural identity as explanation for foreign policy see Peter J. Katzenstein, *Cultural Norms and National Security: Police and Military in Postwar Japan*, Cornell

Both the conceptions which see state actions as expressive of a unique culturally bounded identity which emerges on the level of society and those which see a state's identity transformed through interaction follow the logic of the Westphalian depiction of identity and the dichotomy between identity and difference, with all its normative baggage. Accounts which stress the unique cultural roots of a state's identity stress difference: the state as sharply bounded vessel (expressed in the very concept of "bounded rationality" that is used to explain how identities and interests are culturally specific). They also tend to essentialize culture, depicting it as singular, unique and often enough unchanging, constitutive of a core identity of that state, just as the modernist account of subjectivity prescribes. The privileging of sameness over difference on the other hand becomes very visible in that literature which posits that a state's identity and thus behaviour may be changed through the absorption of international norms such as human rights or democracy.²⁵

These norms are posited as not only intrinsically good, but also as having a universal reach; their absorption (by states which did not ascribe to them before, hence were different and dangerous) makes states not only better, more moral actors; it also makes them more "like us" (the West, or the EU, as the case may be). The result is that these changes are inevitably framed in the dichotomy of identity and difference, with a clear normative preference for identification and sameness. As will be discussed below, the literature on Russian foreign policy and on the interaction between Russia and the EU (often revolving around the question of exclusion and inclusion) provides abundant examples for both these framings of "state identity".

Incidentally, this kind of approach reverses the state-centric logic of the Westphalian narrative, but at the same time reaffirms the normative account of identity/difference and inside/outside it contains. It is not the state, but the "international community" constituted by common values which becomes the realm

Studies in Political Economy (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996). and more recently Xavier Guillaume, "Foreign Policy and the Politics of Alterity: A Dialogical Understanding of International Relations," *Millennium* 31, no. 1 (2002). On levels of analysis see Hollis and Smith, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations*. and Nicholas Onuf, "Levels," *European Journal of International Relations* 1, no. 1 (1995).

²⁵ Finnemore and Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change.", Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), Thomas Risse-Kappen, Steve C. Ropp, and Kathryn Sikkink, *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change, Cambridge Studies in International Relations* ; 66 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999). A similar notion of norms diffusion also underlies constructivist arguments about the formation of an European identity within European nation states, as well as in conceptions of conditionality in research on the effects of prospective membership in the EU and NATO on the identity of Eastern European states.

of sameness, while problematic difference is located within the renegade state which rejects these norms. Its theoretical move is not so much about breaking up a boundary between inside and outside, but of a dissociation of the dynamics of inside/outside with the boundary of the state, without however challenging either the normative content or the overall dynamics of identity/difference. The importance of boundaries and the binary opposition between identity and difference which are such central underlying assumptions of the Westphalian narrative, are not challenged – only their embodiment in the nation-state. The teleological assumption here is to create a new homogenous, universal inside; the inherent logic of this is brought as always to a state-centric conclusion in Alexander Wendt's argument that “a world state is inevitable”.²⁶

Arguably, it is in the context of the literature on the diffusion of norms that the concept of state identity took a strong foothold, being as it was connected to the principle of “state socialization”.²⁷ Given that what was being discussed was agency on the level of the state, and changes in behaviour through changes in identity caused by international processes (even if international norms needed to be “brought into the domestic sphere” before they could cause changes in identity and thus behaviour), these references slipped in easily, without necessarily being theorized, just as the concept of identity itself. Finnemore and Sikkink, for example, argue that “state identity fundamentally shapes state behaviour and (...) state identity is, in turn shaped by the cultural-institutional context within which states act”.²⁸

However, it is in systemic, interactionist accounts of identity formation, which explicitly centre on the interaction between states as a process of identity formation that the concept of state identity really comes into its own. At present, this means above all the work of Alexander Wendt, who has explicitly embraced and theorized “state identity”, from his earlier articles on the agency-structure problem to a full theory of “international state identity formation” in his Social Theory of International Politics.²⁹ In this, he explicitly embraces a philosophical realist

²⁶ Alexander Wendt, “Why a World State Is Inevitable,” *European Journal of International Relations* 9, no. 4 (2003).

²⁷ For an overview see Kai Alderson, “Making Sense of State Socialization,” *Review of International Studies* 27 (2001).

²⁸ Finnemore and Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change.”

²⁹ Wendt, “The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations.”, Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy Is What States Make of It,” *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992), Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*.

position, and arguably reifies and reinforces the basic premises of the Westphalian narrative in an unprecedented manner.

3.2. Wendt and state personhood

Wendt's conceptualization of identity is simple: it is defined as "a property of intentional actors that generates motivational and behavioural dispositions...identity is at base a subjective or unit-level quality, rooted in an actor's self-understandings".³⁰ These self-understandings, in turn, have both an internal, "auto-genetic" source (i.e. domestic politics) and an external one – the perception of the Other. As a corollary, there are actually two different types of identity of a state, a single, unified internal identity (that which normally would be denominated "national identity" and which Wendt calls "corporate" identity) and external identities, which are variable and contingent – depending on interactions with significant "Others", as well as on specific issue areas.³¹ In making this distinction, Wendt assumes that "the domestic and systemic levels of analysis can be separated" when it comes to analysing identity formation.³² This move enables him to treat the state as a unitary actor with regard to the formation of external identities and interests and to bracket domestic or "corporate" aspects of identity. It is a necessary precondition for Wendt's systemic account of identity formation.

Thus, a state's external identities and interests are "in large part" constructed by the shared understandings (common and collective knowledge, collective identities) resulting from their interaction. To be more precise, cooperation between states is bound to lead to the formation of a collective identity in which the need for cooperation has become internalized. If states identify with others to a degree that they perceive a threat to others as a threat to themselves, a state of collective identity is reached that will have transformed the meaning of anarchy from self-help to lasting cooperation.³³

Wendt draws heavily on the social interactionist theory of George Herbert Mead, a move that he legitimizes by positing states as "real actors to which we can legitimately attribute anthropomorphic qualities like desires, beliefs and

³⁰ Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, 224.

³¹ Ibid., 230.

³² Ibid., 13.

³³ Ibid., 227.

intentionality".³⁴ In doing so, Wendt embraces the full psycho-social meaning of personhood, enabling him to argue that theories of social identity formation are applicable to states. However, where Mead sees correspondence and interaction between the social and "pre-social" identity of a person, Wendt, true to the premises of the Westphalian narrative, draws an impenetrable boundary between external and domestic state identity by declaring them two qualitatively distinct spheres.³⁵

Role identities are necessarily relational, because they are not chosen by the actors; they are cast upon them by "significant Others" with whom they interact. In Wendt's definition, a role refers to how the self (i.e. the state) perceives itself as reflected in the other. The role posited by the self has to correspond to a "fitting" "counter-identity" by the Other – in fact it is during the process of interaction that the respective roles are mutually constituted. Friendship and enmity are both role identities, and cooperation, even if initially only instrumental, will eventually lead to a role identity as a "friend". Wendt describes the process of identity formation between "ego" and "alter" as a logic of "reflected appraisals", starting from a "first encounter" in which the actions of the participating states lay the ground for their perceptions of self and other.

In all this, Wendt not only ascribes psychological personhood (and not just corporate agency) to states, but subscribes to the familiar reading of identity as oscillating between the polar opposites of identity and difference, privileging identity over difference – indeed, in identification (and its natural consequence, assimilation) lies the promise of eternal peace. States are friends or enemies; they identify with each other and become friends - or they build their identities around difference, with disastrous consequences.

Wendt's explicit description of states as real persons has invited extensive criticism, much of which has centred on the question of corporate agency, or whether we can talk about state personhood and state agency in more than a purely metaphorical way.³⁶ However, besides the debate about state personhood and

³⁴ Ibid., 197. See also Alexander Wendt, "The State as Person in International Theory" *Review of International Studies* 30, no. 2 (2004).

³⁵ On Mead see Heinz Abels, *Interaktion, Identität, Präsentation*, 2nd ed. (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2001), 31 ff. In fact, in a later article in response to his critics, Wendt was forced to extend this very Westphalian exercise of boundary-drawing between inside and outside back to human beings in order to uphold his parallel. See Wendt, "The State as Person in International Theory": 293.

³⁶ See above all the exchange in "Forum on the State as a Person." The issue of corporate agency is a fundamental debate in social theory and philosophy and far from resolved (indeed unlikely to be resolved, given the differences in epistemological and ontological assumptions among these

corporate agency, what is interesting about Wendt's concept of state identity for the purpose of the present argument is less whether he can legitimize his reification of the state as a person in a meaningful way, than that he chooses to go down this route in the first place, and what this says about the uses of identity in IR.

In fact, Wendt's personification of the state reveals yet another layer of the Westphalian account of subjectivity that highlights the reflexive relationship between concepts of practice and of analysis, this time connected to the concept of sovereignty. As has been pointed out above, the state for Wendt is not only a person, but a very specific modern person, with a core or essence ("corporate identity") that is largely immutable and separate from those aspects of personality that are externalized and change through interaction ("international identity"). This framing of state identity combines the reification of a very Westphalian move (the emphasis on boundaries between inside and outside) with an account of the sovereign subject that pre-dates the Westphalian narrative and is intrinsic to its privileging of sameness and homogeneity over difference.

If we look at how Wendt justifies his move to describe the state as a subject in the first place (rather than his arguments about why personhood is an adequate description of states, and why they can be thought of as a collective/corporate agent), the argument is a fairly simple one, and surprisingly language-based, given his overall lack of interest in language and discourse when it comes to actual processes of identity formation.³⁷ It is because "it is not just academics who anthropomorphize the state, but all of us", and "it is through such talk that the realities of the international system are constituted".³⁸ As we have seen with regard to the Westphalian narrative, this is problematic as an argument about the relationship between concepts of practice and concepts of analysis.

It, is first of all, problematic on a normative level, if one assumes that the task of the analyst should not be to reproduce the implicit assumptions and normalized

standpoints). Interestingly enough, until recently this debate had not reached IR, despite the fact that the state is habitually posited as agent. Arguably, there is a difference between the possibility for corporate agency in an organization which exists for a specific purpose, with specific and clearly delineated aims, and the state, where the exact meaning of this purpose especially in international affairs is often elusive (cf. the issue of "the national interest", problematised by constructivists). Unless, that is, one assumes a quasi-metaphysical consciousness of "the state" which serves to underpin an interpretation of "the national interest" – a move made by Wendt, who is nothing if not consequential in his logic.

³⁷This is a point made by Maja Zehfuss, "Constructivism and Identity: A Dangerous Liaison," *European Journal of International Relations* 7, no. 3 (2001).

³⁸ Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, 196 f.

knowledge that constitute “commonsense knowledge”, but to question them, and the way that they are reproduced in the social sciences critically and reflexively. Indeed, it could be argued that the absence of such a critical awareness of the reflexive relationship between concepts of practice and concepts of analysis almost inevitable leads to their reproduction – especially where these concepts are political and touch on issues of power and legitimacy. In a way, Wendt scientifically objectivises and reifies centuries of accounts of state subjectivity that were legitimizing narratives for state power.

Secondly, on an empirical level, its easy reification of a metaphor ignores that the reality of the state – including representations of the state – is much more varied than just those instances in which the state is spoken of as a person – and this implicates both representations as a concept of practice and as concept of analysis. Wendt gives no reason why these other representations, of the state as machine, set of institutions, government, territorial entity, the instrument of class interests, or any other of the myriad representations available for this (once again) essentially contested concept, should constitute the reality of the state in any lesser sense than that of the state as a person. Nor does he consider that the *totality* of these available representations is what makes the state (or rather, any specific state to which they refer) a reality. Moreover, at the very least a claim to the personhood of the state must take into account the *context* in which the state is spoken of as a person and whether it really is only and meaningfully represented as one.³⁹ Wendt, on the contrary, posits this as an abstracted, universalized concept, true to the scientific credentials to which he wants to adhere.

3.3. The reconstitution of identity as sameness

Wendt’s reference to everyday speech does highlight something important: Positing the state as a subject, with a personality and a mind, is not a new move at all, but one that has historically been part of the meaning of the concept of the state, not only in Western Europe, but also in Russia.⁴⁰ In fact, this metaphor reaches back beyond the modern understanding of the state as an institution dissociated from

³⁹ This critique draws on pluralist accounts in the philosophy of science as well as principles of philosophical hermeneutics and *Begriffsgeschichte* that are explored in Chapter III.

⁴⁰ The genealogy of the concept of the state in Russia will be explored in Chapter IV.

personal power to legitimizations of personal power, and thus to the older conception of sovereignty as embodied in a single individual – the sacred body of the king – the original meaning of the word “the sovereign”.⁴¹ Even as the concept of the state lost its direct association with the personal power of the king and sovereignty became a territorial, abstract concept in the Westphalian narrative, the idea of the body politic, of the state as body persisted and was absorbed into the modern concept of the homogenous nation. It was the *unitary* body of the state or the nation, as opposed to the multitude of individual people, that provided a metaphysical ground for claims to political authority.⁴²

The further development of this connection between state and the sovereign subject in continental Europe led to the fascist image of the state as actualization of the nation, able to claim total obedience via a crude Hegelian reading of the state as the embodiment of absolute truth.⁴³ This development was perhaps not inevitable, but it highlights the problematic association of modern subjectivity with sovereignty and the state. It is a genealogy which is tied up with the meaning of “state identity”. As Mark Neocleous has argued, this may be not a specifically German and fascist, but a Western European genealogy, which can be found within liberal thought as well as nationalism – and, as will be seen in subsequent chapters, the connection of sovereignty and subjectivity is very visible in normative concepts of the state in Russia.⁴⁴

However, this genealogy makes the use of “state identity” as a category of analysis deeply problematic, above and beyond its empirical usefulness. The concept of “state identity”, with its explicitly sociological connotations, cannot fail to take up the problematic account of subjectivity contained in the Westphalian narrative, and thus once again reifies the “problem of difference” and the intrinsic privileging of sameness and homogeneity. Because of this genealogy, the intertwining of the concept of the state with concepts of identity, be they of collective identity or

⁴¹ Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, N.J.,: Princeton University Press, 1957), Mark Neocleous, *Imagining the State* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2003).

⁴² Neocleous, *Imagining the State*, 77.

⁴³ Lutz Niethammer and Axel Dossmann, *Kollektive Identität: heimliche Quellen einer unheimlichen Konjunktur* (Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2000).

⁴⁴ Neocleous, *Imagining the State*, 24 ff. The culmination of this is Carl Schmitt's “political theology”, based on the premise of homogeneity and “the substantial sameness of the people” as precondition for an “identitary democracy”. See Carl Schmitt, *Verfassungslehre*, 8th ed. (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1993).

selfhood, is a highly problematic move, and certainly not one suitable for breaking up implied assumptions inherent in the Westphalian narrative. On the contrary, the uses of identity in IR constructivism forcefully reify these assumptions.

This is both a normative and an empirical problem for IR moderate constructivism. It is normative insofar as the privileging of identity over difference gives a normative hue to constructivist research that opens it to criticisms of being the ideological underpinning of a liberal project that has found its political expression in the doctrine of “regime change” and democratization. At the same time, though not unrelated, it is a problem of empirical research, insofar as the underlying assumptions of the Westphalian narrative preclude certain questions and strategies of research while privileging others. As Charles Taylor described this normalized knowledge and the boundaries it poses with regard to modern subjectivity, “distinctions of locale, like inside and outside, seem to be discovered like facts about ourselves, and not to be relative to the particular way, among other ways, we construe ourselves”⁴⁵

In this sense the positing of the state as self is also a move which is deeply Eurocentric, universalizing what is a particular European historical experience (even when, as has been indicated above, the historical validity of the Westphalian narrative even for Europe must be put into doubt), and not allowing for ways in which state and sovereignty may be understood differently. It will be seen in this thesis to what extent this is true with regard to Russia, and its ambiguous European-ness. The conceptual field of “Russia” contains a strongly subjectivized representation of statehood and posits the state, rather than the nation, as the expression of “Russia” - and yet does not correspond to the image of sharply separated spaces and the centrality of difference and boundaries that is suggested by the Westphalian narrative, despite the presence, endlessly reiterated in Western analyses of Russia as well as in Russian discourse, of the Westernizing/Slavophile debate.

The problem with identity in moderate constructivism may just be that despite its avowed centrality, identity is taken for granted in much moderate constructivist work in IR, as if it were an unproblematic and commonsensical concept (a feature that, interestingly enough, it shares with the concept of the state).

⁴⁵ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: the Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 113.

Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. “Identity” is a notoriously ambiguous and vague analytical concept, so much so that within sociology and anthropology many have called for it to be abandoned.⁴⁶ Much of this vagueness and contradictory meaning can be explained by the fact that the widespread use of ‘identity’ as an analytical concept is a relatively recent phenomenon of social research (from the late 1950s onwards), and has sprung up in different disciplines with different empirical concerns at the same time.⁴⁷ In their sweeping critique, Brubaker and Cooper identify five different usages of identity in the social sciences and humanities, ranging from identity as the basis for social action (identity, and the “logic of appropriateness” vs. rational interests) to identity as group sameness, as foundational attribute of selfhood, or the product of social action.⁴⁸ It is not surprising that Brubaker and Cooper conclude that “these usages are not simply heterogeneous; they point in sharply different directions” and advocate that the term be abolished as a category of analysis. And in IR, this somewhat contradictory breadth of usage has been exacerbated by the fact that approaches to identity in IR constructivism have been borrowed from different sources in different disciplines, sometimes by the same author.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, ultimately the confusion about identity is not just one of plurality of definition or ambiguity – this is nothing exceptional, and is possibly unavoidable for all central concepts in the social sciences, especially insofar as they are also political concepts of practice.⁵⁰ The confusion originates at a deeper level, that of philosophical logic – at its basis is nothing else than the affirmation or rejection of metaphysics and a dispute about the possibility of knowledge. As a philosophical concept, identity has been used in two fundamentally opposed ways. In the mainstream, modern definition, identity is essentially self-sameness, or what makes an object (a person, a group) unique. This categorization of identity also involves assumptions about stability over time – a self or object is assumed to have a stable, unchangeable essence or core. Opposed to this is the post-modern conception

⁴⁶For example Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond "Identity".", Sinisa Malesevic, "Identity: Conceptual, Operational and Historical Critique," in *Making Sense of Collectivity*, ed. Sinisa Malesevic and Mark Haugaard (London: Pluto Press, 2002).

⁴⁷ Malesevic, "Identity: Conceptual, Operational and Historical Critique."

⁴⁸ Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond "Identity", " 6.

⁴⁹ See for example, Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell, 2002).

⁵⁰ This inherent ambiguity of foundational concepts is one of the basic postulates of philosophical hermeneutics and Begriffsgeschichte, as will be seen in the following chapter.

of identity as ‘otherness’ or alterity, a conception that rejects the notion of identity as stable core, but instead perceives it as being constituted through a relational “play of differences”, in constant, changing interaction with multiple Others. Here identity is conceptualized as constantly recreated and transformed, unstable and fluid. And since objects for poststructuralists are not outside of meaning, the relational play of differences also indicates an inherent instability of meaning and therefore the possibility of knowledge. This basic distinction, which intertwines ontology (how things are) and epistemology (how we can know) has been perpetuated in the metatheoretical bent of the Third Debate, and indicates why post-structuralists in particular attacked positivist method as well as Westphalian ontology in their critique of mainstream IR.

As has been seen above, the Westphalian narrative relies on a highly modern conception of identity as stable, clearly delineated self-sameness embodied in the nation-state. This is precisely the kind of reading of identity that is favoured in much moderate constructivist scholarship. It has also largely embraced a positivist epistemology, whose mainstay is the possibility of clearly distinct categories and objects of analysis. Among other things, this is expressed in the way in which moderate constructivism adheres to the normative account of identity inherent in the Westphalian narrative, with its clear privileging of sameness over difference. For some moderate constructivists, in particular Wendt, this means a reification of the state as an unitary actor through an account of subjective “state identity”. However, even where this is not the case, the sharp distinction between an inside and an outside, and its concomitant normative hierarchy of identity over difference remains a mainstay of moderate constructivism.

4. Identity and state in alternative conceptions in IR – narrative and post-structuralist approaches

Of course, moderate constructivist readings are by no means the only account of identity available in IR. As has been hinted at above, other approaches within the “cultural turn” have based themselves on the post-modern account of identities as fragmented, contingent and unstable. In this, they have thoroughly deconstructed the implicit assumptions of the Westphalian narrative and the

modernist reading of identity prevalent in moderate constructivism; as has been seen above, the argument in this chapter draws heavily on insights into the constructed, contingent nature of inside/outside and the normative implications of this distinction. That said, there is a way in which these alternative conceptions remain wedded to the assumptions of the Westphalian narrative, despite – and in some cases, because of – their deconstructive stance.

4.1. States as narrative selves

Some authors, in particular Iver Neumann and Eric Ringmar, retain the concept of “state identity” or the state as self – as Neumann put it, the main problem with Wendt is “not specifically that states are singled out as the collective actors to be studied, but, rather, the more general insistence that human collectives are unequivocally bounded actors”.⁵¹ In contrast to moderate constructivism, these accounts explicitly do not see the state as a stable, reified entity whose identity is an attribute. Instead, Ringmar and Neumann both draw on theories of narrative and metaphor to posit the state as a “narrative self”, and state identity as an explicitly metaphorical concept, albeit one with consequences for state action. As Ringmar puts it,

there is no need to discuss these issues [whether the state really is a person] in terms of ontological commitments: we need not try to determine which kinds of actors ‘really exist’ and which kinds do not (...) An actor is not what a person or group ‘really is’ since actors exist only in the narratives they tell about themselves or that are told about them.⁵²

This move sidesteps the essentialising account of bounded, unitary subjectivity inherent in the Westphalian narrative by positing subjectivity in itself as contingent, fluid and fragmentary. In fact, Neumann, drawing on Todorov, offers an account of identity formation that breaks away from the Westphalian dichotomy between identity and difference that has been so faithfully reproduced in moderate constructivism, and also points out that “the very terms through which identity is

⁵¹ Iver B. Neumann, *Uses of the Other: "The East" In European Identity Formation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 33.

⁵² Erik Ringmar, *Identity, Interest, and Action: A Cultural Explanation of Sweden's Intervention in the Thirty Years War* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 74 f. It should be added that this emphasis on representation does not mean that actors are in any way less real – Ringmar is in danger of slipping into a rather problematic separation of “real” and “represented” here.

articulated reproduce political institutions such as the state" and "this is always an internally contested practice".⁵³

Nevertheless, ultimately this narrative account of state-selves remains problematic – by positing the state as self, even if as a narrative and contingent one, this approach remains entangled in the Westphalian narrative, and with this carries its normative implications. The mere re-definition of state-selves as contingent narratives is not enough, or rather, the power of the metaphor, with all its connotations, is too strong.⁵⁴ The move of declaring states as selves cannot be one that liberates itself from the implications of the Westphalian narrative, given that this equation touches on its core concepts.

Ringmar draws an explicit parallel between the state and the modern subject, drawing, like Wendt, on the fact that this is the way that the state has come to be talked about in political discourse.⁵⁵ His theory of action consequently remains centred around a narrative theory of the self which is ultimately equated with the state. Neumann similarly posits an equation between state and self and in his "Uses of the Other" draws on anthropological, sociological and philosophical literature on the self and collective identity formation to comment on the role of collective identity formation in IR. This, however, attracts the same kind of criticism made above of Wendt – once again it is not clear why *this* of all possible representations of the state should constitute the nature of the state, and why this would make it sensible to apply sociological theories about the formation of selfhood to the interaction between states – something that makes the move from a metaphorical equation between states and selves to their conflation. The acknowledgement of the state as a post-modern, fragmented self reproduced in narratives rather than the stable, unitary self of the classic Westphalian narrative does not really provide an answer to this critique. To reiterate the point made above, "constitutive stories" (Ringmar) about the state never only include representations of the state as self or person. The state at any one time is far more than what its equation with selfhood

⁵³ Neumann, *Uses of the Other: "The East" In European Identity Formation*, 30.

⁵⁴ The move of re-definition is in itself part of the conventional arsenal of political theory, implying the assumption that the concept can be re-defined, and that this new definition invalidates rival definitions. It is precisely this move, which assumes that an unambiguous definition can be reached, that is contested by philosophical hermeneutics, but also the likes of Bakhtin and Connolly – see Chapter III for more detail and William E. Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse*, 2 ed. (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1983).

⁵⁵ Erik Ringmar, "On the Ontological Status of the State," *European Journal of International Relations* 2, no. 4 (1996).

implies, though representations of the state as self (or actor, as the case may be) are likely to be included in this array of representations. Thus, focusing on the representation of state-selves in narratives leads to an implicit reification of states as selves; even if this selfhood is described as contingent, it is not clear what this contingency is supposed to do in the practice of explanations of identity formation as a result of interaction between state-selves.

In fact, both authors point to the importance of recognition and of framing by “significant Others” – and arguably this is an important point in identity formation. However, they both conclude that these significant Others are other states, or at least other international actors, and sidestep the question to whom this recognition is important, and what kind of identity is being affirmed by recognition – is it really a state-self or rather, a narrative of collective identity which may include representations of the state as a particular kind of agent, and that may well be in itself contingent and internally (politically) contested? While Neumann acknowledges this possibility, he does not take it up in an account which otherwise posits Russia as state-self, whose foreign policy may at least in part be explained by a desire for recognition as European Great Power.⁵⁶

The question remains and will be expanded in the following chapter: is it really helpful to talk about narratives for accounts in which states are presented as actors, rather than scripts, building blocks, not necessarily logically coherent representations which exist in various ways and forms and are not necessarily aiming for logical coherence and a linear plot? Is the question of narratives in representations of collective identities still too close to a modernist account of identities, imposing coherence and linearity where this may be noticeably absent – not necessarily because of any theoretical preconception but because this is how representations of the state appear in political discourse?

4.2. Poststructuralist readings of identity in IR and the Westphalian narrative

This insight – that any positing of states as selves, even as narrative and contingent ones, cannot escape the conceptual field of the Westphalian narrative is one that chimes with poststructuralist critics of moderate constructivism in IR. After

⁵⁶ Iver B. Neumann, "Representation and State Action: the Case of Russia's Place in Europe," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 2, no. 3 (1999).

all, poststructuralist approaches have deconstructed the concept of subjectivity to an extent in which the self or subject as a unitary, acting subject, however constituted or described, becomes a fiction that is impossible to uphold.⁵⁷ As has been seen above in the discussion of the concept of identity, this derives from the post-modern break with conceptions of identity as self-sameness and an emphasis on a relational play of differences as constitutive of identity – the play of alterity that constitutes the subject as fragmented and always processual and contingent. Just as in the narrative theories used by Ringmar and Neumann, the constitution of the subject is in itself understood as a linguistic act. Within IR poststructuralism, this has long been elaborated into the parallel between modern subjectivity, the reification of the distinction between domestic and external in the central Westphalian concept of sovereignty and questions of epistemology – a critique of the categorizations and distinctions that characterize mainstream positivist approaches to IR.⁵⁸

This understanding means that “state identity” in the sense of a sociological identity of the state as acting subject is something that has been thoroughly rejected by IR scholars influenced by poststructuralist theories. Maja Zehfuss draws on a post-structuralist reading of identities informed by Derrida to argue that “Wendt’s anthropomorphic concept of the state cannot cope with identities that are unstable in themselves”.⁵⁹ This direct concern with “state identity” is only part of a broadly poststructuralist literature that has set out to challenge the ontology of the Westphalian narrative and its normative implications in the wake of the “cultural turn” that swept IR after the end of the Cold War. Rob Walker and Richard Ashley were at the forefront of those that raised suspicions about the Westphalian narrative, challenging its reification of territorial sovereignty and the inside/outside distinction, and above all exposing it as a contingent construct, an ontological assumption rather than an eternal truth about the world.⁶⁰ In the wake of this critique, the concept of

⁵⁷ Jenny Edkins, Nalini Persram, and Véronique Pin-Fat, *Sovereignty and Subjectivity* (Boulder: L. Rienner, 1999).

⁵⁸ See, for example, Richard Ashley, “Living on Border Lines: Man, Poststructuralism and War,” in *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics*, ed. James Der Deridam and Michael J. Shapiro (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1989).

⁵⁹ Zehfuss, “Constructivism and Identity: A Dangerous Liaison.”

⁶⁰ Ashley, “The Geopolitics of Geopolitical Space: Toward a Critical Social Theory of International Politics.”, Richard K. Ashley, “The Poverty of Neorealism,” *International Organization* 38, no. 2 (1984), Ashley, “Untying the Sovereign State: A Double Reading of the Anarchy Problematique.”, Richard K. Ashley and R. B. J. Walker, “Introduction: Speaking the Language of Exile: Dissident Thought in International Studies,” *International Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (1990), Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory*.

sovereignty in particular has been thoroughly deconstructed in recent years, a move that concentrated on the historical contingency of the present focus on territorial sovereignty in IR theory, and its essential social constructedness.⁶¹

My critique in this chapter owes much to this post-structuralist deconstruction of Westphalia. And yet, this thesis does not embrace a poststructuralist framework. The reason for this is that there are features in the way that post-structuralism has been used in IR which mean that the post-structuralist critical project remains within the narrow bounds of the Westphalian narrative. Its focus is the critique of this narrative, but in this it perpetuates a form of closure that prevents post-structuralist critiques in IR from opening up to empirical processes of state- and identity formation that do not fall within the Westphalian account of sovereignty and subjectivity.

In part this is due to the fact that post-structuralist scholarship tends to take the Westphalian narrative, and its implicit assumptions, as part of the discursive construction and reproduction of the reality of the international – contingent, but in its continuous reproduction at the same time universal.⁶² This is reinforced by assumptions about a decisive break between the pre-modern and the modern world, a world of spatialities and sharp divisions between inside and outside; as Walker describes it, this was the emergence of “a world of autonomies and separations out of the ruins of a world of hierarchies and continuities”.⁶³ Edkins and Pin-Fat provide another example of this rather universalizing claim when they write: “The sovereign state is a bounded unit in the international system. This centrality testifies to its place as the master signifier around which a particular symbolic order is constituted.”⁶⁴

This focus on the Westphalian narrative, even with critical, deconstructive intent, makes it difficult to move beyond it, and thus, rather ironically, runs the danger of reproducing its centrality in IR by the very attempt to deconstruct it. The deconstructive focus makes it difficult to open up to particular understandings of

⁶¹ Bartelson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty*, Thomas J. Bierstecker and Cynthia Weber, eds., *State Sovereignty as Social Construct* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), Edkins, Persram, and Pin-Fat, *Sovereignty and Subjectivity*, Georg Soerensen, “Sovereignty: Change and Continuity in a Fundamental Institution,” *Political Studies* 47 (1999), Benno Teschke, “Theorizing the Westphalian System of States: International Relations from Absolutism to Capitalism,” *European Journal of International Relations* 8, no. 1 (2002), Cynthia Weber, *Simulating Sovereignty. Intervention, the State and Symbolic Exchange* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁶² This point is specifically made about Walker by Justin Rosenberg, *The Follies of Globalization Theory* (London: Verso, 2000).

⁶³ Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory*, 149-50.

⁶⁴ Edkins, Persram, and Pin-Fat, *Sovereignty and Subjectivity*, 6.

identity and the state in the public political discourse of a country like Russia - a country that has been at the margins of the symbolic universe that the Westphalian narrative evokes, participant and outsider at the same time, an experience which has had an impact on Russian representations of core Westphalian concepts.⁶⁵ In this sense, much of post-structuralism in IR has generalized the Western European experience just as much as mainstream IR; it has also shared its tendency towards the abstract, theoretical and universal, rather than the particular and concrete, despite lip-service to the contrary.

This tendency towards abstraction may or may not be a consequence of the strong rejection of realism and concern with issues of epistemology that characterizes much of the fragmented post-structuralist project in IR. The fact is that the challenge posed by post-structuralism in IR led to the meta-theoretical discussion of the Third Debate, rather than a greater openness to empirical research about phenomena that may reveal the contingency of the Westphalian narrative.

This is something that emerges also with regard to post-structuralist accounts of identity in IR. David Campbell, for example, writes that “the constitution of identity is achieved through the inscription of boundaries that serve to demarcate an “inside” from an “outside”, a “self” from an “other”, a “domestic” from a “foreign””, concluding that “the constant articulation of danger through foreign policy is thus not a threat to a state’s identity or existence: it is its condition of possibility”.⁶⁶ This understanding, as Maja Zehfuss has pointed out in her critique of Wendt (but which should perhaps be directed at much of IR poststructuralism), “makes it impossible to acknowledge the complexity of identity and ultimately restricts identity to a question of boundaries.”⁶⁷

Part of the problem lies in the way that difference is treated in poststructuralist IR, and the way that it inevitably gets entangled with one of the dual understandings of difference in the Westphalian narrative. As has been pointed out above, the Westphalian narrative, like the modern narrative of the self, privileges

⁶⁵ On Russia’s experience of marginality see Sergei Medvedev, “A General Theory of Russian Space: A Gay Science and a Rigorous Science,” in *Beyond the Limits: the Concept of Space in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Jeremy Smith (Helsinki: Suomen Historallinen Seura, 1999).

⁶⁶ David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, Rev. ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

⁶⁷ Zehfuss, “Constructivism and Identity: A Dangerous Liaison,” 333. See also Henrikki Heikka, “Beyond Neorealism and Constructivism: Desire, Identity and Russian Foreign Policy,” in *Understandings of Russian Foreign Policy*, ed. Ted Hopf (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).

identity, homogeneity and sameness over difference; at the same time however it contains an exaltation of difference at the level of the state. As an attack on sameness and homogeneity within the nation-state, post-modern accounts of alterity have considerable emancipatory potential – their emphasis on the playful and contingent nature of difference depict it as that which breaks the normative exaltation of sameness, and thus “the universality of mathematicized or objectified life”.⁶⁸ Derrida’s concept of *différance* contains a radical emphasis on spontaneity and in an Deleuzian interpretation, “difference is the element of affirmation and enjoyment, or the Dionysian “innocence of truth”.⁶⁹

This is not taken up by accounts in IR which focus on spatiality, the production of territorial boundaries, and are based on the assumption that they demarcate a point at which identity is produced through difference. In this the avowed focus on the instability and contingencies of identity is overshadowed by a reading of differences as distinctions and separations, modelled on the concepts of practice that can be found in the Westphalian narrative and that become the subject of deconstruction. Thus, it is not that an understanding of identity as alterity is in itself problematic, but what becomes of this emphasis in the context of IR. In the context of a discipline which already suffers from an uneasy relationship with the empirical (and the stylized nature of the Westphalian narrative, all too often taken to be a historical account, is just one symptom of this), this focus on difference runs the risk of privileging certain questions over others, narrowing and essentialising a research agenda in which the Westphalian account of difference as danger becomes the main object of analysis.

This, as will be seen in the next and subsequent chapters, does not capture the real complexities of representations of Russia’s “state identity” and the ambiguities that characterize the conceptual field that constitutes this identity. As I will try to show, the conceptual field of Russian “state identity” cannot be subsumed under a binary opposition of either difference as danger or sameness and assimilation. Likewise, the ambiguous representation of space in official Russian discourse cannot easily be grasped with a post-structuralist theoretical arsenal, and certainly not with the focus on spatial distinctions that has been characteristic of much post-structuralist scholarship in IR.

⁶⁸ Stanley Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 7.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

In all this, the post-structuralist critique of Westphalia, in spite of its critique of modern sovereign subjectivity, also does not break free from the tension between cosmopolitanism and communitarianism that is part of the normative framework of Westphalia. The aim of the deconstruction of the sovereign state, the revelation of its contingency and constructedness, is the emancipation of its citizens into a post-modern world order not restrained by the oppressive differences of the nation-state. Once again, the state can only be thought as the Westphalian nation-state, as sharply bounded and distinct, or not at all.⁷⁰

The post-structuralist project of critical scholarship is thus too restricted, too much welded to the Westphalian narrative, and ultimately unable to overcome its limitations. IR poststructuralism does not break free from the conceptual framework and normative questions that are given by the Westphalian narrative, and is unable to accommodate, or perhaps simply not very interested in, dynamics that may not fall within the binary opposition of identity and difference. It offers a negation of the Westphalian narrative, not an enquiry into alternative conceptions of the state and territoriality. In this sense, the problem of IR poststructuralism, as of IR as a whole, is its unrepentant focus on the European experience and with this a closure, or rather indifference, towards experiences that fall outside its remit.

This, as post-colonial critics of poststructuralism have pointed out, points to a limitation of poststructuralism that becomes especially troublesome in the context of IR – its deeply Eurocentric nature, its preoccupation with the issues thrown up by the European enlightenment and its deep entanglement in these issues.⁷¹ F. Keymann points to this paradox when he observes that “in this sense, deconstructing modernity in such a way that shows its cultural essentialism would not necessarily produce a non-Eurocentric knowledge. Nor would it lead to the reconceptualization of

⁷⁰This is an argument made by Jens Bartelson, *The Critique of the State* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001). For an example of such re-thinking, see contributions in Edkins, Persram, and Pin-Fat, *Sovereignty and Subjectivity*. Note also the emergence of a new strand of post-structuralist scholarship which, on the contrary, takes a communitarian position, once again within the framework of the Westphalian narrative, drawing on the work of Carl Schmitt. See Louiza Odysseos and Fabio Petito, *The International Political Thought of Carl Schmitt: A New Global Nomos?* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2007).

⁷¹Ziauddin Sardar, *Postmodernism and the Other: the New Imperialism of Western Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 1998). See also John M. Hobson, "Is Critical Theory Always for the White West and for Western Imperialism? Beyond Westphalian Towards a Post-Racist Critical IR," *Review of International Studies* 33 (2007). and Kimberly Hutchings, "Happy Anniversary! Time and Critique in International Relations Theory," *Review of International Studies* 33 (2007).

modernity or of international relations from the perspective of the Other.”⁷² The Westphalian narrative is the account of modernity foundational for the discipline of IR. As has been outlined above, it is problematic in the Western European context. It should not automatically be assumed to be a meaningful starting point, either in affirmation, or in critique, for a globalised international relations. The way that Russian concepts of the state, precisely as concepts of political practice, break with this narrative, even though they have been using the language of Westphalia for centuries and have simultaneously been participants and outsiders in the development of the European and later global system of Great Powers, shows just how Eurocentric and narrow this particular understanding of Westphalia really is.

5. The Westphalian narrative in analyses of Russian foreign policy and identity

From what has been said so far, it may appear that a less path-determined reading of identity in IR could be achieved by simply shifting the balance away from the way that IR is “a discipline which speaks partially, but which has assumed and declared universally”, by giving more of a voice to empirical research.⁷³ This is a long-standing demand by area studies practitioners, and indeed the “area studies wars” between “empiricist” students of a world region and the universalizing disciplines of the social sciences has a long history. Within the study of post-Soviet Russia, just such a debate about the usefulness of the “transitology paradigm” and its comparativist credentials emerged in the early 1990s, with a robust defence of an ideographic “thick description” approach to Russia’s state-building.⁷⁴ And arguably the problematic relationship (or better dissociation) between empirical research and theory in IR is more pronounced than most. In fact, it is only the disregard of many IR theorists for empirical, let alone historical, analysis that can explain the

⁷²E. Fuat Keyman, *Globalization, State, Identity/Difference: Toward a Critical Social Theory of International Relations* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1997), 170.

⁷³ Stephen Chan, “Seven Types of Ambiguity in Western International Relations Theory and Painful Steps Towards Right Ethics,” in *The Zen of International Relations - IR Theory from East to West*, ed. Stephen Chan, Peter Mandaville, and Roland Bleicker (New York, London: Palgrave, 2001).

⁷⁴Valerie Bunce, “Should Transitologists Be Grounded?,” *Slavic Review* 54, no. 1 (1995), Terry Lynn Karl and Philippe Schmitter, “The Conceptual Travels of Transitologists and Consolidologists: How Far East Should They Attempt to Go?,” *Slavic Review* 53, no. 1 (1994).

perpetuation of the Westphalian narrative – as has been seen above, some of the most forceful challenges to its assumptions have been made by historians.

There is much truth in this argument. Nevertheless, the call for more emphasis on empirical analysis has its own pitfalls. The kind of objective, empiricist approach that traditionally constitutes the unspoken epistemological basis for specialists of Russia is by no means as objective as it may appear or as unproblematic an empirical corrective to the “theory-ladedness” of IR as some of the positions in the “area studies wars” suggest, and this becomes especially clear when research moves to “cultural factors” such as identity.

Rather surprisingly, the relationship of IR theory with analyses of Russian foreign policy has received comparatively little attention in this regard (above and beyond the post-mortems of Sovietology and its inability to predict the fall of the Soviet Union, which are not of concern here). The few explicit discussions of the relationship have called for a greater application of existing IR theories to the analysis of Russian foreign policy, in an attempt to make the field more “theoretically sophisticated”. If anything, this has been the trend in recent years – either treating Russia as a case study for the application of theories of IR and Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) developed elsewhere, or simply the continuation of an a-theoretical, rather empiricist approach drawing on debates and traditions within the field, with some references to IR literature thrown in.⁷⁵

This is especially problematic as the tradition within which post-Soviet studies of Russian foreign policy move is anything but neutral – the study of the Soviet Union was not only burdened with the Eurocentric bias of the Westphalian narrative, but highly political.⁷⁶ Arguably, this, combined with historical stereotypes

⁷⁵ An explicit call for a greater application of IR theory can be found in Christer Puriainen, *Russian Foreign Policy and International Relations Theory* (Aldershot; Burlington, USA: Ashgate, 2000). A recent example for such an application is Christian Thorun, "The Impact of "Collective Ideas" On Russian Foreign Policy in the Period 1992-2004" (paper presented at the Global International Studies Conference, Istanbul, 2005). See also Klaus Segbers and Stephan De Spiegeleire, *Post-Soviet Puzzles: Mapping the Political Economy of the Former Soviet Union*, vol. 1 (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1995). For an application of theories of IR and FPA to Russia see Ted Hopf, ed., *Understandings of Russian Foreign Policy* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), Neil Malcolm et al., *Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy* (Oxford: OUP, 1996).

⁷⁶ See Alfred G. Meyer, "Politics and Methodology in Soviet Studies," in *Postcommunist Studies and Political Science: Methodology and Empirical Theory in Sovietology*, ed. Frederic J. Fleron and Eric P. Hoffman (Boulder, Co. : Westview Press, 1993).

of Russia as Europe's "Other" that long preceded the existence of the Soviet Union, were the underlying assumptions that framed the study of the Soviet Union.⁷⁷

The social sciences do not exist in isolation of the societies in which they are produced, as the reflexive relationship between concepts of practice and concepts of analysis indicates. In this sense, the politicization of Soviet Studies was perhaps unavoidable in the context of the Cold War, which was always also about a domestic issue, communism as a political force in Western countries. It also derived from the direct entanglement of the field with politics, especially in the US, where policy advice and image making were part of the Sovietology remit.⁷⁸ All this helped to create a dominant academic narrative, in particular in the US, which followed the ups and downs of the Cold War by either depicting the Soviet Union as the threatening, alien, barbaric Other, the very negation of the civilizational values of the West, or finding it more "like us", more pluralist and open than the previous image suggested.⁷⁹

In this context, the study of Soviet foreign policy was open to cultural factors long before the rest of IR followed suit. The debate about ideology and interest, whether or not Soviet foreign policy was influenced by communist ideology, or was conducting a foreign policy based on objective national interests, was one of the fundamental questions of the field.

The normative account of identity in the Westphalian narrative, namely the polarization between identity and difference and the drawing of impenetrable boundaries between inside and outside, were thus exemplified in the analysis of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. They were also visible in the discursive construction of the "West" as a concept of political practice during this period, a normatively defined "imagined space" based on the values of liberalism and

⁷⁷ See Martin E. Malia, *Russia under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum* (Cambridge, MA: The Belnap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), Neumann, *Uses of the Other: "The East" In European Identity Formation*. Also Lars Kleberg, "In Search of Dracula - or, Cultures in Dialogue," in *State Frontiers: Borders and Boundaries in the Middle East*, ed. Inga Brandell (London; New York: I.B.Tauris, 2006).

⁷⁸ See Meyer, "Politics and Methodology in Soviet Studies."

⁷⁹ This is a highly condensed and necessarily distorted account; there were of course other positions that aimed for a more balanced view, and a strong Marxist current, especially in the UK. However, the basic point, that of the politicization of a field in which individual scholars often claimed to work within an objective, positivist framework, remains. Apart from Meyer, see also contributions in Michael Cox, ed., *Rethinking the Soviet Collapse* (London: Pinter, 1998).

democracy and depicted in binary opposition to the Soviet Union.⁸⁰ And like in earlier Eurocentric narratives, the West was superior, its moral superiority directly connected with its economic power – a First world as opposed to the Soviet Union’s Second.

This legacy came to the fore the moment that identity, the dynamics of “nation-building” or a post-Soviet “identity-crisis”, became prevalent explanatory factors for the foreign policy of post-Soviet Russia. In an overview article in 2001, Peter Shearman claimed that there is “an almost universal consensus amongst IR theorists, foreign policy analysts, and area study specialists that identity and ideational factors are key determinants for any understanding of contemporary Russia’s foreign policy”.⁸¹ Yet, as will be argued below, the image that many analysts of the foreign policy of post-Soviet Russia presented of the Russian identity crisis, its “nation- and state-building”, and the connection of identity with foreign policy, was both incomplete, and once again based on a stark binary choice between identity and difference, inclusion and exclusion.⁸² In all this, much of the analysis of post-Soviet Russia was reflexive of a context that remained highly Eurocentric, even more so as Russia seemed to have fallen back into its traditional role as disciple, eternally lagging behind – aspiring to liberalism and democracy, but in a transition process beset with problems. In this, the metaphorical “imagined space” of the West remained firmly in place, its boundaries drawn by seemingly universal values, but, at the same time, a necessarily limited geographical space, differentiated by claims to be the origin and true embodiment of these values.⁸³

⁸⁰ By “imagined space”, I intend representations of space that are symbolically constituted. Their reach is not fixed – for example, I will argue in later chapters that the imagined spaces of Europe and the West to a degree have been internalized into the imagined space of “Russia”. As for the West, it was during the period of the Cold War that it became an “imagined space” distinct from, but overlapping with, Western Europe. This was true also for the Soviet Union itself, where representations of Europe began to be dissociated from those of the West. See Iver B. Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

⁸¹ Shearman, “The Sources of Russian Conduct: Understanding Russian Foreign Policy.” For a recent overview of FPA see articles in Jean A. Garrison, “Foreign Policy Analysis in 20/20: A Symposium,” *International Studies Review* 5 (2003).

⁸² This becomes explicit in discussions of Russia-EU relations, which are often framed as a question of inclusion and exclusion, depending on whether Russia is deemed to identify with European values (becoming more “like us”) or to diverge from them and therefore be dangerous and different – the recent coinage of the “value gap” in Russia-EU relations is a telling phrase. See Margot Light, Stephen White, and Ian Mcallister, “Russia and the West: Is There a Values Gap?,” *International Politics* 42, no. 3 (2005).

⁸³ Jan Ifversen has shown the deep connection between spatial representations of Europe and the concept of civilization in official discourses of the European Union. See Jan Ifversen, “Europe as a Battle Concept” (paper presented at the Discourse, Identity and Politics in Europe conference, UCL London, 2005).

This becomes visible in accounts of Russian identity given by analyses of Russian foreign policy, its relationship with the West and the European Union in particular. In both, there is a trend to depict Russia as oscillating between the embracing of Western values and their rejection. Once again, this is not just a question of academic analysis, but of the policy processes with which this academic analysis stands in a reflexive relationship. In policy initiatives, especially the policy of the EU towards Russia, this is not only a question of what Russia is, but also what is offered to Russia, based on the interactionist assumption that Russia will either have to accept the frames offered to it, thus identifying with the West and absorbing its values, or reject them and become an outsider, in a conflictual hostile relationship with the West. An identification with pre-existing Western norms and values may open the way to a precarious inclusion into “Europe” (if not the EU), though always in a position of marginality, the role of the learner it has traditionally been cast in interactions with Western Europe. The alternative is a role as an outsider, fundamentally different, which is excluded from these spaces.⁸⁴ As Sergei Prozorov has noted, this framing deprives Russia of political subjectivity, depicting Russia as the passive object of policy initiatives, the receiver of principles of conditionality and reactive to policy choices offered to it.⁸⁵ Christopher Browning has argued that the strength of this European narrative is such that it resurfaces even in conscious attempts to break free from its logic, such as the EU’s “northern dimension” or its neighbourhood policy, both policy initiatives influenced by scholars who tried to replace the normatively loaded dichotomy of East-West with a region-building approach which stresses other concepts, such as north-south.⁸⁶

A similar focus on Russia’s relationship with the West, framed in terms of identification with or differentiation from the West and the way this dynamic is reflected in or constructed by Russian foreign policy, underlies the treatment of identity in many more general analyses of Russian foreign policy.⁸⁷ In this sense,

⁸⁴ This argument draws on recent critical investigations of the literature on EU-Russia studies. See in particular Anssi Paasi, “Remarks on Europe’s Transforming Meta-Geography,” *Geopolitics* 10, no. 3 (2005). Christopher S. Browning, “The Region-Building Approach Revisited: The Continued Othering of Russia in Discourses of Region-Building in the European North,” *Geopolitics* 8, no. 1 (2003), Sergei Prozorov, *Understanding Conflict between Russia and the EU: the Limits of Integration, Rethinking Peace and Conflict Studies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

⁸⁵ Prozorov, *Understanding Conflict between Russia and the EU: the Limits of Integration*.

⁸⁶ Browning, “The Region-Building Approach Revisited: The Continued Othering of Russia in Discourses of Region-Building in the European North.”

⁸⁷ Among others see Alla Kassianova, “Russia: Still Open to the West? Evolution of the State Identity in the Foreign Policy and Security Discourse,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 53, no. 6 (2001), Bobo Lo,

empirical analyses of the identity factor in Russian foreign policy are in danger of reproducing, rather than questioning the normative assumptions of the Westphalian narrative and the Eurocentric vision of Russia as either disciple or threatening, Scythian Other.⁸⁸

Accounts of Russian foreign policy and identity also, implicitly or explicitly, reify the Russian state as agent by positing an unproblematic link between identity and foreign policy. In this, they reproduce the separation between domestic and external processes of identity formation that has been discussed earlier in this chapter, by either seeing Russian identity as formed by foreign policy – the interaction with “Significant Others” favoured by Neumann and Williams - or describing foreign policy as the product of a national identity. Thus, Prizel claims that “in order to understand the dynamics of foreign policy formation, it is vital to assess how the identity of a polity has evolved.”, arguing that different political groups within Russia “attempt to use foreign policy as a tool to advance their vision of Russia’s national identity”.⁸⁹ Likewise, Ted Hopf states that “it is possible to infer implied interests from identities and discourse and then see if they in fact are present at the moment of choice”, thus assuming the state as a closed vessel in which identities are formed which then are applied to foreign policy, in the classic assumption of the identity-action link.⁹⁰

A very similar reproduction of the Westphalian framework can be found in a slightly different concern of the link between foreign policy and identity, namely assessments of Russia’s post-Soviet state-building and its impact on Russia’s foreign

Russian Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Reality, Illusion, and Mythmaking (Hounds-mill, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), Iver B. Neumann and Michael C. Williams, “From Alliance to Security Community: NATO, Russia, and the Power of Identity,” *Millennium* 29, no. 2 (2000), Ilya Prizel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy: Nationalism and Leadership in Poland, Russia, and Ukraine* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), James Richter, “Russian Foreign Policy and the Politics of National Identity,” in *The Sources of Russian Foreign Policy after the Cold War*, ed. Celeste A. Wallander (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1996), Astrid S. Tuminez, *Russian Nationalism since 1856 : Ideology and the Making of Foreign Policy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

⁸⁸ An exception which tries to enrich the picture is Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics*., who adds the Soviet “historical Other” to his analysis of Russian identity discourses in 1999 and finds Russian identity discourses much more fragmented than normally assumed. However, while he explicitly rejects a unitary “state identity” constructed in relation only to other states, he too remains wedded to a framework of identification and difference – and reifies the state in linking identity and action.

⁸⁹ Prizel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy: Nationalism and Leadership in Poland, Russia, and Ukraine*, 1,11.

⁹⁰ Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics*, 268.

policy towards the parts of its former empire.⁹¹ After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia was both its successor and in many ways a new state in new borders; here too, the defining question of many Western (and in particular US) analyses concentrated on whether the new Russian state would finally become a “normal” nation-state along Western European lines, or regress into its binary opposite, neo-imperialism (almost invariably coming with the label “aggressive”, implying that such a development would lead to a policy of imperial re-integration, of at least Ukraine if not all the states of the former Soviet Union). The underlying focus on Russia’s identification with a Westphalian nation-state as “normal”, implying any other form of state-building as deviant, and assuming a return to aggressive imperialism if Russia did not become a nation-state, once more reproduces Westphalian assumptions. This is visible especially in more conservative US analyses, for example in Zbigniew Brzezinski’s quip that “Fundamentally, the political struggle within Russia is over whether Russia will be a national and increasingly European state or a distinctly Eurasian and once again imperial state.”⁹² Others were not as charitable as to condone Russia a choice in the matter; as Richard Pipes wrote in 1997, “Russian national identity is indissolubly coupled to the notion of a boundless state (...) to feel truly and proudly Russian, Russians instinctively strive towards expansion and its corollary, militarism.”⁹³

6. Conclusion: the Westphalian narrative and IR’s “fetishism of abstraction”

In a recent critical overview, Morten Vabjørn has argued that there exists a “fetishism of abstractions” in the discipline of IR which engenders an inability to engage with the issue of culture – or rather, really existing differences between

⁹¹ Roger Kanet and Susanne Birgerson, “The Domestic-Foreign Policy Linkage in Russian Politics: Nationalist Influences on Russia’s Foreign Policy,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 30 (1997). John P. Dunlop, “The ‘Party of War’ and Russian Imperial Nationalism,” *Problems of Post-Communism*, no. 2 (1996), John P. Dunlop, “Reintegrating ‘Post-Soviet Space’,” *Journal of Democracy* 11, no. 6 (2000), A. James Gregor, “Fascism and the New Russian Nationalism,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 31 (1998), Uri Ra’anan and Kate Martin, *Russia - a Return to Imperialism?* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996).

⁹² Zbigniew Brzezinski, “A Plan for Europe,” *Foreign Affairs* 74, no. 1 (2000).

⁹³ Richard Pipes, “Is Russia Still an Enemy?,” *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 5 (1997).

cultures. As he argues, this blind spot has only marginally been improved by the recent “cultural turn”, given the propensity of post-structuralist and constructivist theorists alike to engage the mainstream in the metatheoretical “Third Debate”.⁹⁴

In fact, the very existence and perpetuation of the Westphalian narrative in IR bears witness to this fetishism of abstraction – quite apart from its Eurocentric nature, it has never really been a reproduction of historical realities even in Western Europe, which were always more complex and ambiguous than its account of territorial sovereignty and identity allows for. Instead, as has been seen, the account of identity contained in the Westphalian narrative perpetuates assumptions about the nature of the state and identity that imply a strong normative undercurrent. This undercurrent poses the question of identity as one of sameness and homogeneity in binary opposition to otherness and difference – both in its communitarian form embodied in the idea of the nation state, but arguably also in the teleological narrative of a cosmopolitanism which runs the risk of shifting the boundaries of inside and outside away from the nation-state without ultimately abandoning them.

In the discussion of the Westphalian narrative above, and of the post-structuralist critique of this narrative, one thing thus emerges as a common thread - the privileging of the abstract, universal over the concrete and particular, of theory over praxis. De facto, this leads to pathways for empirical research enabling particular questions while excluding others and effectively (in the outcome of research programmes, and in what is being researched) imposing categories and narratives. This means that there is a danger that issues and problems that are researched are determined, not by interaction with the empirical material as such, but by theoretical assumptions (“identity is about boundary-drawing”) and by the ontology of the Westphalian narrative. All this, as will be seen in subsequent chapters, neglects the complexities and ambiguities of individual representations of identity.

All this should not be taken to mean that a focus on the dynamic of identification and difference is intrinsically wrong, on the contrary. After all, this is something which is reproduced in Western representations of the rest of the world, apart from being an important ingredient of group-ness. And as will be seen in

⁹⁴ Morten Valbjørn, "After the Cultural Turn: A Travelogue Beyond the Blind/Blinded Stalemate" (paper presented at the Global International Studies Conference, Bilgi University, Istanbul, Turkey, 24 - 27 August 2005).

greater detail in subsequent chapters, this dichotomy is at the basis of what remains the most prominent debate about identity among Russian intellectuals, that between Westernizers and Slavophiles. Nevertheless, as will be argued in the next chapter and shown in the empirical part of this thesis, its one-sided focus implies a distortion that brushes over important aspects of the identity of the Russian state, and distorts ways in which identity could be researched in IR.

In a word, the uses of identity in IR that result from a focus on identity as difference are not so much wrong, but incomplete, privileging certain aspects over others. In the context of the Westphalian narrative and its implicit normative assumptions, this has its perils, in particular with regard to the equation of states with selves. Such an equation links readings of identity in the “cultural turn” with the problematic history of representations of state sovereignty as subjectivity, which are layers of meaning that are still present in Westphalian notions of sovereignty and the state.

In all this, the Westphalian narrative remains Eurocentric, in its concerns and the questions it produces, something that is easily obscured by the spread of the categories of Westphalia around the world, and the fact that these categories are foundational of what by common definition constitutes the international system. As John Agnew has pointed out, in IR “there is... a danger of confounding the particular with the universal; with moving rapidly from a specific case or context to making a broad generalization covering all times and places.”⁹⁵ This universality is perhaps unavoidable, given the way that “the international” is in itself an abstraction; be that as it may, it is a constitutive feature of the discipline of IR.

All this points to the importance of empirical research, a confrontation with the real, particular Other. And yet, as has been seen above, a simple turn to empirical research is unlikely to provide a way out of the normalized assumptions that guide research on identity in IR. Eurocentrism has long been an issue in the European gaze on Russia, and its reproduction in the focus on identity and difference with regard to the West was perhaps unavoidable, given the context of the Cold War. This has not been aided by the way in which analysts of Russian foreign policy have put themselves in the role of disciples and learners (not unlike the European view of their object of study), absorbing the more sophisticated theoretical insights of IR and

⁹⁵ Agnew, “Open to Surprise?”

accepting the role of providers of raw data for the purpose of theory-building in IR.⁹⁶ As has been indicated above, a reflexive critique of this has begun to emerge in the field of Russia-EU studies, and my argument can be seen as an addition to this as yet fledgling trend.

The underlying assumptions of the Westphalian narrative have been challenged historically; the in-depth analysis of the conceptual field of the state and its representations as “Russia” in post-Soviet Russian discourse in the empirical part of this thesis show that its basic assumptions are doubtful in the case of Russia, mitigated by the ambiguities and multiple contradictions present in actual political discourse – the same “concepts of practice” that moderate constructivists like Wendt rely on to make their point about a Westphalian state identity.

⁹⁶ Anna M. Aghatangelou and L.H.M. Ling, "The House of IR: From Family Power Politics to the Poisies of Worldism," *International Studies Review* 6 (2004).

CHAPTER III

Beyond Westphalia? “State identity” and the Russian state

In the realm of culture, outsideness is a most powerful factor in understanding. It is only in the eyes of *another* culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly (but not maximally fully, because there will be cultures that see and understand even more). A meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning: they engage in a kind of dialogue which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures. We raise new questions for a foreign culture, ones that it did not raise for itself; we seek answers to our own questions in it; and the foreign culture responds to us by revealing to us its new aspects and new semantic depths.

M.M. Bakhtin¹

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have argued that the underlying assumptions of the Westphalian narrative structure even critical attempts to deconstruct it; they also structure the traditions of the highly politicized field of Soviet and Russian studies.

This ultimately remains a problem of the separation of theory and praxis and the “fetishism of abstraction” that still remains prevalent in IR, and so far has not been challenged in a significant way by the “cultural turn”. The kind of deductive theory model that is institutionalized in the division of labour in IR – at the top of the hierarchy are the theorists, at the bottom are students of individual regions that provide objective facts, “raw data” to prove or disprove theories – fixes the Westphalian narrative at the centre of the ontological universe of IR. It is also plainly inadequate when it comes to researching culture and identity in IR, in particular

¹ M.M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 7.

when it comes to research on those on the margins or outside of the European experience.

As I have attempted to show, a simple reversal of this hierarchy – privileging inductive over deductive, the empirical over theory – is unlikely to break this impasse, given that the normative assumptions of the Westphalian narrative are not specific to IR theory, but are the kind of normalized knowledge that informs a Eurocentric world view, supported in everyday political practice as well as in academic analysis. Instead, it is necessary both to acknowledge that an objective observation of facts, free from prior assumptions, is simply not possible in research on culture and identities, and that this requires a critical reflection on the kind of implicit assumptions that the researcher participates in.

In the previous chapter, I attempted such a critical reflection. This chapter sets out the philosophical and methodological background for this critique, as well as providing a conceptual arsenal for the analysis of Russia's "state identity" in the second part of the thesis. My approach is grounded in philosophical hermeneutics, an approach that has had at best a very marginal existence in the vast theoretical field of the "cultural turn", perhaps because of its explicit focus on the process of empirical research.² Starting with some empirical insights about Russia's "state identity", I argue that an account that focuses solely on identity and difference in Russia's relationship with the West is incomplete, and in this, risks the reproduction of a Eurocentric view on Russia. I then discuss the implications of a "hermeneutic turn" for the relationship between theory and empirical research, and the way that a reflexive hermeneutical stance can be a helpful guide for researching real, empirical Others in IR. In the second part, I apply these insights to a reconceptualization of state and collective identity as the basis for empirical research on representations of Russia's post-Soviet "state identity" and finally introduce the methodological basis for the empirical part of the thesis.

² In a recent edited volume on "Meaning and IR", only one contribution drew on Gadamer. See Peter G. Mandaville and Andrew J. Williams, *Meaning and International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2003).

2. Post-Soviet Russian “state identity”

The assessment made in the final section of the last chapter, that the treatment of identity in the study of Russian foreign policy often reproduces Westphalian assumptions, may appear surprising; as students of Russian foreign policy and identity will point out, the theme of Russia’s belonging to Europe and the West is central to a discourse of identity within Russia itself, and has been its basic question for several centuries. The debate between Westernizers, who wanted to see Russia becoming a part of Europe (while acknowledging that it was as yet a disciple, lagging behind), and Slavophiles, who stressed Russia’s cultural uniqueness and independence from Europe, was a central intellectual debate, and in certain ways was mirrored politically in a historical oscillation between opening towards Europe and withdrawal (coupled with expansion to the East).³ Moreover, positions in this debate were quickly revived in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, and a very public debate about Russia’s post-Soviet “identity crisis” and its connection with foreign policy sprang up precisely among the Russian foreign policy establishment itself. As the then influential presidential advisor to Yeltsin, Sergei Stankevich, expressed it, “foreign policy helps Russia to become itself”.⁴ This debate was underpinned by “hard facts”, the undeniable changes that meant that the new Russian state was not simply a continuation of the Soviet Union. The Russian Federation was established against the Soviet centre, there was a clear rupture with the ideological legacy of the Soviet Union, and the fact that Russia was geographically, in ethnic composition, and in institutional structure a “new” state, at least after the final discarding of the Soviet constitution in 1993.

And yet, an exclusive focus on this debate, and the theme of identification with or differentiation from the West, overlooks the complexities of representations of collective identity within Russia; it also overlooks the ambiguities and paradoxes within representations of what could be called the “imagined space of the West” in Russia, and the way that these ambiguities are an inherent part of the debate itself. In fact, with regard to the debate between Westernizers and Slavophiles, it could be

³ See also the section on state and identity in Chapter IV.

⁴ Sergei Stankevich, “Derzhava v Poiskakh Sebya [a Great Power in Search of Itself],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 28.3.1992. The development of the debate is traced in Margot Light, “Foreign Policy Thinking,” in *Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy*, ed. Neil Malcolm, Alex Pravda, and Margot Light (Oxford: OUP, 1996).

argued that it is representative of Russian identity – or a part of Russian identity – only in its totality, not in any of the individual positions that it comprises. In this sense, the debate among the foreign policy elite on Russia's place in the world was only part, if an important part, of the conceptual field constituting identity and the Russian state in Russia.

Furthermore, even though the question of Russia's relation with the West is a central question in representations of Russian identity, there are other post-Soviet representations of "Russia", or parts of a semantic field of Russian identity, that involve the Russian state. These representations overlap, but are by no means identical with, the question of Russia and the West, as will be seen in more detail in Chapter IV and the empirical part of this thesis. One of them is the role of the state as embodiment of Russianness (as advocated by the so-called *gosudarstvenniki*, statists, or even *derzhavniki*, advocates of a Great Power status for Russia).

In this equation of the post-Soviet Russian state with Russia, two concepts are arguably equally central: representations of the Russian state as strong actor, both as a Great Power in international affairs (*derzhava*) and as a strong central state (expressed in the concept of *gosudarstvennost'*), and representations of the Russian state as democracy. As will be seen in Chapter IV, representations of Russia as Great Power and strong state have long been part of a statist discourse of Russian identity and it is around these concepts of state power that official attempts at fuelling a sense of "state patriotism" have focussed in Putin's Russia.⁵ At the same time, in post-Soviet Russia there is another, equally foundational, element to representations of the Russian state as "Russia" – democracy. While its meaning in Russian official discourse has changed considerably since 1991, it was an essential element in the constitution of the new Russian state against the Soviet centre, and has remained an important part of political discourse ever since, a shared representation of the Russian state even at the point of greatest conflict between the nationalists and communists (the "red-brown" coalition) and the democratic camp under Yeltsin in 1992/1993. This already indicates something that will be explored in greater detail in the empirical chapters of this thesis: that an equation of identity representations of Russia as Great Power and strong state with an anti-Western, Slavophile identity discourse and those of Russia as democracy with a Westernizing position is overtly

⁵ Steve Rosenberg, *Russia Launches Patriotism Drive* (BBC News online, 2005 [cited 23 July 2005]); available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4698027.stm>.

simplistic and does not capture the complexities of the semantic field of what could indeed be called a Russian “state identity” (although not, as will be seen below, in the sense put forward by moderate constructivism).

Representations of the Russian state as strong state and Great Power depicted the Russian state as “Russia” in a way that differed from the connection between state and national identity presented in the Westphalian narrative – as a specific kind of agent, rather than the embodiment and representative of a nation. And while it may seem an obvious implication that “Russia” as democracy refers to issues connected with the Westphalian narrative, such as popular sovereignty (in itself a concept drawing on the idea of the nation), this was not entirely true for representations of the Russian state as democracy, especially under Putin. As will be seen, the Russian state could be represented as democracy without this detour, visible above all in the conception of Russia as “sovereign democracy”.

These representations not only had historical links to a semantic field of Russian identity, but they were also prescriptive, rather than descriptive – highly normative in nature, they painted an image of the Russian state as it ought to be, rather than its actual form, especially in 1991/92, but as will be argued, this was the case even under Putin.⁶ They were also highly symbolic, either because they had long been part of the discourse of Russian identity alluded to above, as those of Russia as strong state, or because they underpinned the claims for sovereignty and independence of the new Russian state against the Soviet Union, as in the case of democracy.

All this points to the fact that an exclusive focus on contemporary Russian collective identity as either pro- or anti-Western (or even as exclusively concerned with identifications or differentiations from “significant Others”, be they the West, the Soviet Union or others) leaves out important representations of identity. To neglect these dimensions and concentrate on the dynamics of identity and difference is one more example of the way in which the Westphalian narrative restricts the questions that are asked of an empirical case of identity formation.

A similar cross-cutting of representations of identity and statehood in the Westphalian narrative is true for another image of the Russian state that connects to the semantic field of Russian identity – that of Russia as imagined space. Again, this

⁶ This point is taken up in Chapter IV.

was part of the semantic field of Russian identity more broadly, especially in the *topoi* of Russian vastness and boundlessness. And indeed, contrary to the assumptions about boundedness as the binary opposite of aggressive, expansionist imperialism described in Chapter II, the representation of the new Russian state as space was essentially one of ambiguity and amorphousness. This applies to the territoriality of the Russian state, where the concepts of domestic and external are still somewhat fuzzy, something visible also in the coinage of terms such as “near abroad” for the states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and “inner abroad” for Chechnya. It is also visible in the relation of the imagined space of “Russia” and that of the West, which is by no means only an outside “Other” in post-Soviet Russia. Arguably, the adoption of “Western” economic reforms and of a liberal constitution in 1993 mean that the meaning of the West has been “domesticated” in a way that has not occurred since the reforms of Peter I – it has become part of the multi-layered representations of “Russia”, and as such has acquired a meaning that is only partly covered by the dichotomy of difference and hierarchical sameness inherent in the Slavophile/Westernizer debate.⁷ Once again, this was very visible in 1991/1992, but remained an issue during the Putin period. As will be seen in Chapter IV, traditionally representations of space were a central image in discourses of Russian identity and were closely connected with the image of the state.

This multi-layered and complex representation of space, and the way it intertwines the domestic and the international, is also visible in the way that the foundational concepts of state agency intertwine domestic and external meanings. This is true for the representation of state strength – the central Russian state as Great Power as well as strong state in domestic affairs, in which images of Russia as Great Power underpin representations of the state as strong domestic actor. It is also true for representations of the Russian state as democracy, which was the core representation which brought the imagined space of the West into Russia, but whose meaning in official discourse at the same time had a marked external dimension, both in the early period of “Utopian Westernism” in 1991/92, when Russia’s democratic identity underpinned the Yeltsin administration’s claims for Russia as “normal Great Power” and part of Western civilization, and under Putin, where the democratic

⁷ These issues will be explored in detail in the empirical chapters, especially V and VI.

nature of the Russian state saw a creative re-interpretation in the concept of Russia as “sovereign democracy”.

The neglect of this complexity and ambiguity indicates a partial blindness in many analyses of Russian foreign policy, a blind spot that can be explained by adherence to the Westphalian “frame”, which privileges questions of sameness and difference, and assumptions about state sovereignty as bounded territoriality, while bracketing others. This, incidentally, is something that has been long absorbed by other students of Russian identity; cultural historians in particular, basing themselves on the same “cultural turn” that has led to a narrowing of questions of identity in IR, have in recent years produced work that points to precisely this complexity and contingency of Russian identity discourses.⁸

3. Hermeneutics and the study of Russia’s “state identity”

Moving away from an exclusive focus on identification and differentiation with external Others opens up a whole host of questions about how to conceive of the state and identity in the case of post-Soviet Russia and what this says about the implicit assumptions of the Westphalian narrative. In all this, the issue of empirical research, and the possibility of understanding other cultures without reproducing the Eurocentric assumptions of the Westphalian narrative is a central point. In what follows I argue that the “cultural turn” is also a “hermeneutic turn” and explore what this means both for research on real, empirical Others, and for a possible re-conceptualization of identity in IR.

3.1 The cultural turn and hermeneutics in IR

As has been pointed out in the previous chapter and above, one problem with the uses of identity in IR constructivism is the way in which the underlying assumptions about identity and the state in the Westphalian narrative guide research, by steering the researcher towards specific questions, thus legitimizing specific ways

⁸ For a recent overview see Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis, *National Identity in Russian Culture: An Introduction* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

of framing research while neglecting others. This is not just a question of a positivist epistemology with its emphasis on fixed categories and causal relationships, as post-structuralist critics have claimed. It is ultimately a reflection of prior ontological assumptions about the relation between identity and difference as well as more concrete understandings of the boundedness of the state that are inherent in the Westphalian narrative, as can be seen from the way in which post-structuralist approaches share its Eurocentric assumptions.

Morten Valbjørn pointed to a promising direction when he suggested that the cultural turn in IR could nevertheless bring a possible way out of the Westphalian straitjacket, by opening the discipline to the possibility of cultural difference.⁹ However, the point is not simply to bring IR studies of identity “downwards” to Area Studies because of their alleged expertise in cultural particularism. The issue is not just more empirical research; neither is it simply a question of better categories and theories of identity formation, at least not as long as this is posed as the contrast between empiricism, with its assumption that detailed empirical research somehow gives an unproblematic access to “the truth”, and the attempt to deduce concepts so familiar in IR. Given the way that both IR and Area Studies share the common assumptions of the Westphalian narrative, this would result in exactly the kind of problem indicated above, namely that of reproducing inherent and unreflected assumptions about Russia within a highly politicized and normatively charged context. As Colin Hay put it, a sensible approach to analysing the social world has to be “empirical, not empiricist” – inevitably so, if one subscribes to the view that all our observations of the social world necessarily start from prior conceptualizations.¹⁰

As should have become abundantly clear by now, identity is a concept loaded with contradictory meanings and normative assumptions; some of these assumptions, like the relationship between identity and difference, are ontological choices which precede empirical research.¹¹ Added to this is a whole host of questions when it comes to empirically researching concrete processes of identity formation, some of which will be explored below. The cultural turn in IR raises important issues about how such research could proceed, in particular with its rejection of positivist

⁹ Valbjørn, "After the Cultural Turn: A Travelogue Beyond the Blind/Blinded Stalemate".

¹⁰ Hay, *Political Analysis - a Critical Introduction*, 251.

¹¹ Ibid., 62 f.

assumptions and the empiricism that informs much of the more a-theoretical research on Russian foreign policy and identity,

Nevertheless, Valbjørn's suggestion is a reminder that the "cultural turn" in IR also was a hermeneutic turn, even though an important aspect of the hermeneutic legacy – precisely that of a real interest in the empirical Other - has largely gone missing in the process. As an ideal type, classic, historically informed, Area Studies research has a natural hermeneutic stance, based on the assumption that to understand means to be able to take the position of the Other, to see the world with the Other's eyes – hence the emphasis on linguistic skills, local knowledge etc., all not dissimilar to assumptions prevalent in anthropology.¹²

That said, there are many different ways of doing research within a hermeneutic framework. As a critical debate in Anthropology about the origins and assumptions of the discipline and Said's denunciation of "Orientalism" have shown, an unreflexive hermeneutic stance is in itself in danger of reproducing Eurocentric assumptions.¹³ In this sense, the classic hermeneutic goal of "getting into the Other's mind" is particularly problematic, assuming both that the researcher can somehow abandon her own standpoint and traditions and that individual intentions can be fixed and recovered.

Research, in particular on issues like culture and identity, must be open to difference as well as reflexive about its own assumptions. With regard to researching culture this means an openness to the possibility of diverging meanings, as well as an awareness that empirical research must be reflexive of the standpoints from which it departs, especially if this involves power differentials and implicit assumptions about the Other, as is invariably the case in Western research on the rest of the world. This arguably should be the starting point for any kind of research on "culture" in IR. However, despite the proliferation of cultural theory in IR, these issues, perhaps because they pertain more to methodology and empirical research than to theory, have largely been ignored, with the partial exception of post-colonial scholarship (which still remains very much a minority exercise and in itself is geared towards a

¹² I say ideal type, because as Said pointed out, research in Oriental studies and indeed anthropology is tainted by the same problematic Eurocentrism. See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, . 2003).

¹³ See for example Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

very specific colonial Other).¹⁴ As has been indicated in Chapter II, within the study of Russian foreign policy and especially Russia-EU relations, this kind of critical self-reflexion is beginning, though it remains at the moment a very fledgling trend.¹⁵

The way that research on culture and identity in IR must be open to differences in meaning, and to the possibility that meaning may be contingent, unstable and not directly accessible, is at the core of research on Russian identity and the state. This is precisely because Russia is not an exotic, alien Other, but a place in which the seemingly familiar should not be taken for granted. Its semantic field of state and identity, framed in essentially Westphalian categories, is an illustration of the fact that the meaning of concepts never can be assumed as unproblematic and stable, but travels and is always dependent on context.

The conceptual field of the Russian state is indeed expressed in Westphalian terms, starting with representations of Russia as Great Power and strong state and an emphasis on sovereignty. This is not surprising, given that the Russian empire from the time of Peter I was a core element of the Westphalian order, a full participant in the European Concert of Powers – a marked difference to that other great outsider of Europe, Turkey, or rather the Ottoman empire, which remained consistently Other, and was never acknowledged as a European Great Power.¹⁶ And yet, as will be shown in the empirical chapters which follow, the meaning of these supposedly familiar Westphalian terms in the Russian context not only does not entirely correspond to the Westphalian narrative, but remains in and of itself fluid and ambiguous, shifting considerably in the 15 years from the inception of the Russian state to the present day. Thus, what appears to be evidence for the universal persistence of the Westphalian narrative and the pervasive dichotomy between identity and difference, East and West, may turn out to be something quite different.

¹⁴ The specific agenda of post-colonial scholarship is not entirely suitable for capturing the complex dynamics of interaction between Russia and the West, though this thesis is clearly influenced by their focus on Eurocentrism. On hermeneutics in IR more generally, a good example is a recent edited volume on “meaning in IR”, the authors of which offer an explicit hermeneutical stance, and a welcome departure from the dominance of the post-structuralist agenda in the “cultural turn”, but remain on a theoretical level. See Mandaville and Williams, *Meaning and International Relations*. One reason for this aversion to reflection on empirical research may be that early critical voices in the “cultural turn” denounced research methods as something inherently positivist and therefore to be discarded. See Der Derian and Shapiro, *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics*, xi.

¹⁵ For example Browning, “The Region-Building Approach Revisited: The Continued Othering of Russia in Discourses of Region-Building in the European North.”, Prozorov, *Understanding Conflict between Russia and the EU: the Limits of Integration*.

¹⁶ Malia, *Russia under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum*.

3.2 Ambiguities of meaning, understanding and empirical research

One point which is overlooked in much of IR theory, including the post-structuralist critique, is thus at one level how to approach empirical research on identity and culture. The other is about the kind of implicit assumptions shaping research on the non-Western world (in itself a telling term, defined by difference, what it is not). As I argue in the following section, there is a more adequate way of addressing these issues than has hitherto been the case in IR, and this is a return to a kind of hermeneutics that explicitly focuses on the process of empirical research. However, what is needed is research that avoids the pitfalls of attempting to get into the mind of the Other, and that pays attention to the situatedness of the researcher as well as of what is being researched. This can be found in philosophical hermeneutics, developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer (but close to the concerns of the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin), and the *Begriffsgeschichte* (conceptual history) approach of the German historian, Reinhart Koselleck, which draws on these insights.¹⁷

As should be clear by now, a central issue in research on culture and identity in IR is the way in which meanings are not only inherently ambiguous and unstable (as poststructuralist approaches would concur), but are shaped within contexts that are both linguistic and extra-linguistic. In other words, the meaning of concepts is different in different cultural contexts – incidentally not only between the West and a supposedly alien and incommensurable non-West, but between all cultural and linguistic contexts, not only between nation-states.¹⁸

Concepts such as sovereignty, the state and identity are ambiguous in and of themselves, not only because they are “essentially contested concepts” with many different definitions, but because meaning in language is inherently unstable and ambiguous.¹⁹ This is exacerbated by the fact that meaning is context-dependent, in that different cultural and linguistic contexts bring to the fore different aspects of

¹⁷ Reinhart Koselleck, "Begriffsgeschichte und Sozialgeschichte," in *Vergangene Zukunft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979); English edition Reinhart Koselleck, "Begriffsgeschichte and Social History," in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Times* (London; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985). Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*.

¹⁸ See the discussion of Western European foundational political concepts in Reinhart Koselleck, "Einleitung," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe; Historisches Lexikon zur Politisch-Sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, ed. Reinhard Koselleck, Werner Conze, and Otto Brunner (Stuttgart,; E. Klett, 1972).

¹⁹ The term is borrowed from W.E. Gallie, "Essentially Contested Concepts," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 56 (1956). More about the contestation of political concepts in particular will be said below.

these concepts. As a result, the meaning of concepts is never fixed and stable, but inherently ambiguous and open-ended. Meanings, as well as our understanding of them, will invariably change over time, just as the context within which they are being used will change. This is a basic assumption of philosophical hermeneutics. It also forms a core assumption of this thesis, both with regard to the political concepts of “state identity” in Russian political discourse that will be investigated in the empirical part of this thesis, and with regard to how to understand them.

This view is a natural result of a basic constructivist premise, the social character of language, or the way that language is both constitutive of and constituted by social interactions.²⁰ However, this assumption leaves as yet open how meaning can be established and in what ways (if at all), access to meaning can be gained through language – and what all this could mean for empirical research on culture and identity.²¹

Philosophical hermeneutics proposes an answer to this central problem of understanding, centred on the notion of dialogue. “Dialogism” is not only a Gadamerian invention; within IR, it is more well-known through the work of the Russian literary theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin, and it has been used to re-frame identity formation between states.²² While the concerns of Bakhtin and Gadamer overlap to a large extent (much larger than some critics of the “conservative metaphysics” of Gadamer would allow for), I will mainly rely here on Gadamer, because of his expressed concern with empirical research, and above all because this is the background for the approach of *Begriffsgeschichte* that is the basis for the empirical research in this thesis, and its specific focus on political language and legitimacy.

Both Bakhtin and Gadamer would contend that any access to meaning that we have is through language and that the meaning conveyed through language is inherently unstable and ambiguous.²³ Both would also refute the idea that to

²⁰ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967).

²¹ See also Jan Ifversen, "Text, Discourse, Concept: Approaches to Textual Analysis," *Kontur* 7 (2003).

²² Guillaume, "Foreign Policy and the Politics of Alterity: A Dialogical Understanding of International Relations.", Neumann, *Uses of the Other: "The East" In European Identity Formation*, Ch. 1. Neumann has also suggested a Bakhtinian reading of theory pluralism in IR. See Iver B. Neumann, "International Relations as Emergent Bakhtinian Dialogue," *International Studies Review* 5, no. 1 (2003).

²³ Language, or the understanding of being as fundamentally linguistic, is central to philosophical hermeneutics, but should not be taken to mean discursive determinism. We experience things; but we interpret and give meaning to them – and communicate this meaning – in language.

understand means to get “inside the Other” by experiencing what the Other experiences, or that we can ever fully understand something, or understand in an objective manner. These are all attempts which are bound to fail – we are standing outside of what we are researching, and the very process of research is already an act of linguistically mediated interpretation.

However, this inevitable contingency of interpretation is not necessarily something that makes understanding impossible (as Derridarean poststructuralism would suggest). Instead of an impediment, it could even be perceived as a strength. As Bakhtin stresses in the ephigraph at the beginning of this chapter, “outsideness”, the entanglement of the researcher in prejudices, a personal and cultural context different from what is being studied, is an essential precondition for understanding.²⁴ To quote him again, “a meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning: they engage in a kind of dialogue which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures”.²⁵ This in itself is the act of dialogue called for by both Gadamer and Bakhtin: it is the process of understanding itself, which implies an unavoidable and transformative rupture of one’s own prejudices and an opening to new and different meanings.²⁶

In this, it becomes clear that understanding is a necessarily open, unfinished process. Understanding means understanding something new about what is being researched, as well as about the background assumptions (*Vorurteile*, pre-judgements, or prejudices) the researcher holds. It also means breaking up these assumptions and exposing them for the partial, one-sided visions of the world that they inevitably are.²⁷ However, this is a diachronic process (and, as Bakhtin has indicated, a synchronic one); any understanding will, in time, be superseded by new understandings, or by understandings coming from a different standpoint; there can be no closure, and no final truth. While our understanding can represent a better understanding *for us*, it will always only be better, never best, and never free from

²⁴ This is much closer to feminist standpoint epistemology or the notion of “situated objectivity” than it is to the traditional view of the researcher as an objective, detached figure.

²⁵ Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*.

²⁶ Nicholas Davey, *Unquiet Understanding: Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), 209.

²⁷ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 274 f.

pre-judgement. As Nicholas Davey put it, “any attainment of understanding will only reveal a want of further understanding”.²⁸

This opens up some basic premises for empirical research on Russian identity and the state. First of all, it reminds us that whatever we are researching, our understanding will always be mediated through language, and it is this level of language that we have access to and can understand – with all the implications of ambiguity and open-endedness this carries. This, as will be argued below, is especially important in researching identities in IR, where this is both obviously true and has sometimes been overlooked in favour of an assumption that identities represented in political discourse equal intentions (hence the confidence with which a direct link between identities and actions is established by moderate constructivists). Secondly, it points to the way in which research on a different cultural context needs to be sensitive to differences in meaning and aware of the context-dependency of meaning. In the words of John Agnew, it needs to be “open to surprises”.²⁹ And finally, there needs to be an awareness of the inevitable and inescapable pre-judgements a researcher brings to an argument, something especially pertinent in a politicized and normative field such as IR, and more generally in empirical research on the “non-West”.

Bakhtin has argued that “we raise new questions for a foreign culture, ones that it did not raise for itself”, but also that “we seek answers to our own questions in it.” Arguably, the ability to pose questions is determined by the tradition within which we are situated, and it is through confrontation with the new and unknown that our interpretative horizons change, and with them new questions emerge.³⁰ In this sense, it is through the understanding of subtle differences in meaning in the Russian context of concepts which we are used to understanding in their essentially Westphalian and “Western” form, that the implicit assumptions within the Westphalian narrative can be revealed to be what they are: assumptions, wedded to a particular cultural and historical background, rather than universal realities for the whole globe. The representation of a Russian “state identity” makes full use of Westphalian concepts which were fundamental to the development of Russia’s modern statehood; but their meaning and their uses cannot be taken for granted, and

²⁸ Davey, *Unquiet Understanding: Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 187.

²⁹ Agnew, “Open to Surprise?.”

³⁰ Robert J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 139.

the life they have led in Russian political discourses does not correspond to the picture of “state identity” given in the Westphalian narrative.

3.3. Identity in philosophical hermeneutics: recognition and the case of Russia

Philosophical hermeneutics might just offer a “way out into the real world” for IR research on cultural issues, precisely because of its focus on the process of understanding in empirical research. At the same time, like Bakhtin’s dialogism, it does offer an implicit understanding of identity, one that goes some way in countering the overt normative focus on the binary opposition between difference and sameness that is prevalent in IR.³¹ In philosophical hermeneutics, understanding involves above all a recognition of difference, of a necessary multiplicity of voices which coexist, but can always be understood.³² The aim of understanding is not to find a consensus, or achieve homogeneity, but to be able to validate the Other in its uniqueness which is nevertheless not incommensurable. This point can serve to conceptualize identity formation in interaction with an Other beyond a focus on difference and sameness.

Rather than an emphasis on identity and its binary tension with difference, either as modern homogenous self-sameness, or as difference as constitutive of selfhood in post-structuralist readings, this hermeneutic reading puts the emphasis on recognition of difference in dialogue.³³ This conceptualization of identity first and foremost breaks with the post-structuralist reading that posits difference as absolute, but also with a modernist reading of identity as self-sameness, stable over time. In philosophical hermeneutics, the Other can be grasped, because it is expressed in language; understanding of language, as we have seen, is always a possibility.³⁴ Gadamer talks in this context of a “fusion of horizons”, and points out that “just as the single individual is never just one, because he is always already in a relation of understanding with others, the closed horizon that purportedly encloses a culture is

³¹ Based on Bakhtin, something like this has been attempted by Xavier Guillaume. However, Guillaume chooses to ignore the hermeneutic implications of Bakhtin’s notion of dialogue and effectively ends up with a version of interactionist theory of identity formation, essentialising “national identities” as actors of identity change. See Guillaume, “Foreign Policy and the Politics of Alterity: A Dialogical Understanding of International Relations.”

³² Davey, *Unquiet Understanding: Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics*.

³³ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 309 ff.

³⁴ Davey, *Unquiet Understanding: Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 176.

an abstraction.”³⁵ It needs to be stressed again that this is not because understanding somehow merges self and other, making cultures more alike.³⁶ Neither is this argument based on the uncovering of an underlying unity, the universal features stressed by cosmopolitans, such as common humanity. Instead, Gadamer argues that it is possible to understand other cultures in their particularity, because difference is only relative, never absolute; there are no incommensurable separate worlds. Everything which is in this world already participates in a fluid common horizon – “the same, yet different”, to put it in Hegelian terms. It is in this sense that “understanding is always the process of the fusion of such *allegedly* unique horizons”.³⁷

At the same time, the process of understanding, which on one level is nothing else than experience, being in this world, means constant change, as our understanding transforms us – our identities – as much as our understanding of the Other.³⁸ There can be no fixed narratives of identity, no fixed selfhood, even where such fixity - like in the modern Western tradition and the Westphalian narrative – is explicitly stated as an attribute of identity. Neither can there ever be a full understanding of identities, be they of self or Others. As Nicholas Davey put it, “the inevitable finitude of such narratives – their incompleteness and their capacity to metamorphose in the telling – leave the question of “who am I?” in the open (...) who we are will always remain in part an enigma”.³⁹

The essential openness of identity narratives, both self-referent ones and by third parties, is complemented by a special emphasis on recognition, which derives from the dialogical nature of the “fusion of horizons”. The stress on recognition is not new – it is an essential element of Hegel’s account of selfhood and has been vastly influential, not least on the interactionist theories of identity formation that have been borrowed by moderate constructivists in IR. However, in philosophical hermeneutics it frames the relationship between self and other in a way that does not

³⁵ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*.

³⁶ This is a common criticism made of Gadamer by post-structuralists. It was promoted by Habermas’ reading of Gadamer, who indeed assumes such a process. See Josef Bleicher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy, and Critique* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993), chapter on Habermas.

³⁷ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 311.

³⁸ Davey, *Unquiet Understanding: Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics*. See also Lorraine Code, “Introduction: Why Feminists Do Not Read Gadamer,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lorraine Code (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003).

³⁹ Davey, *Unquiet Understanding: Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 220.

assume either unalienable alterity or the possibility of identification. Instead, recognition first and foremost involves an openness towards the other. This may be recognition of difference; it certainly is recognition of the particularity of the Other, though not its incommensurability.

The added element that philosophical hermeneutics gives to this account is based on the fundamental ambiguity of meaning and understanding – as Gadamer put it, “understanding is always understanding-differently”.⁴⁰ What is crucial here is the process by which the self-understanding (identity) of a given self is dislocated by understanding the Other. This is a reciprocal process that forms the basis of the dialogical situation. It does however, require an essential openness towards the Other as a precondition for understanding – it is not an automatic corollary of all forms of interaction of self and other. Not all third-party representations of a self or collectivity (images of Russia in the West, for example) will be automatically taken over into self-understandings in Russia, or will shake up Western self-understandings. In a Gadamerian reading of identity formation, dialogue and the “fusion of horizons” has little to do with differences of power – indeed, a situation in which differences of power come to the fore, such as the attempt to impose categories (frames) upon others, as suggested in interactionist theories of identity formation, is not a dialogical situation and will not lead to the kind of understanding that can transform self and other. Such imposed categories will get translated and interpreted, and in this will be incorporated into already existing self-understandings, rather than transform them. To quote Davey again, “translating a third-person narrative into first-person terms opens an ineliminable space between how we are seen and how we see ourselves.”⁴¹

This is an important reminder, not least with regard to Russian self-understandings and its relationship with “significant Others” in the West. Recognition by “significant Others” matters, but in the interaction between Russia and the West, which often enough is not a dialogical situation, the issue of translation, of what is being represented as recognition in domestic political discourse, is a crucial factor. As the semantic field of Russia’s “state identity” in 1991/2 and during the Putin period shows, a lack of such recognition will not lead to an abandoning of these self-ascriptions as core categories of the identity of the

⁴⁰ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 302.

⁴¹ Davey, *Unquiet Understanding: Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 221.

Russian state. Rather than this, the ambiguous meaning of these concepts evolved to adapt to the changing international and domestic context within which they were being used. This is despite the fact that the meaning of representations of state strength and democracy both clearly intertwine domestic and external dimensions – obviously so in the case of Russia as Great Power in world affairs and as strong state, but also in the case of Russia as democracy.⁴²

It is also important to stress that recognition is not the same as the dichotomy between inclusion and exclusion presented in the dichotomy of identity and difference. Recognition, as has been pointed out above, is not, or only in part, about identification and differentiation. This is confirmed in the way recognition is sought by Russia with regard to its Western “significant Others”. While inclusion into a Western “imagined space” was being sought by the Yeltsin government in the very early “Utopian Westernizing” period, this was mitigated already in 1992 (leading up to the “pragmatic-nationalist consensus” after 1993/94), and does not appear at all in 1999-2006. In the Russian semantic field of the state, recognition as Great Power was not strongly linked to the question of identification with the West, despite Western attempts in this period to establish a link between Great Power status and Western values in the concept of “international community”. And while the external dimension of the meaning of Russia as democratic state seems to suggest such a link – Russia’s recognition as democracy would ensure its inclusion into the imagined space of the West – this had been complicated by 1999, and under Putin, the concept of “sovereign democracy” made clear that the identity of Russia as democratic state remained central, but the meaning of this was very variable indeed.

This does not mean that the “framing” of Russia by Western states, the choice offered to it between exclusion and hierarchical inclusion, is not keenly felt by the Russian elite. Whatever the rhetoric of NATO about Russia’s inclusion, it is very clear to Russian policy makers that this is not a recognition as equal, and cooperation with the EU draws similar complaints. At the same time, instances of Western inclusion, such as the admission into the G7/G8 are actively sought and represented as confirmation of Great Power status. However, as will be seen in later chapters, the imagined spaces of the West and Europe do not appear unitary and monolithic in

⁴² The meaning of democracy shifted most radically, from a very initial understanding of belonging to Western civilization during the Utopian Westernizer phase of early 1992, to “sovereign democracy” in 2005. However, in both cases, the meaning of democracy clearly has an international dimension. See for more details Chapters V, VII and conclusion.

Russian political discourse (though this does not preclude essentialism and Occidentalism in individual positions). At the same time the representation of the Russian state as Great Power and democracy is something that is not dependent in a linear way on Russia's identification with the West. Thus, as will be seen in subsequent chapters, in the absence of opportunities, external recognition as Great Power by Western "significant Others" is a disposable element in keeping up the identification of Russia as Great Power and democracy. In part this may be because certain basic attributes of Great Power status (or what is represented by the Russian elite as such) are not in need of confirmation by recognition – they provide an institutionalized recognition of Great Power status. This is true first of all for Russia's place in the UN Security Council, but also its status as nuclear power and not least its size – reflected in the popularity of Eurasianist geopolitical reasoning among Russia's foreign policy establishment, and despite the fact that this emphasis on size may no longer be shared internationally as an attribute that automatically conveys power.

However, what may be more important than this is that what matters is the *semblance* of recognition for domestic consumption, rather than instances of real recognition. The direct effect of Western recognition, or non-recognition, of the central categories of Russia's "state identity" is mitigated by translation and the adaptation of ambiguous meanings.⁴³ It is also mitigated by the fact that in all these representations of state identity, it is the legitimacy of the new Russian state in the eyes of its elites that is ultimately at stake. Thus, as far as representations of Russian "state identity" are concerned, it appears that in the context of the post-Soviet Russian state, external recognition is subservient to the domestic legitimization of the new Russian state – and the claims to power of that group of persons that claims to represent the state.

This intertwining of external recognition and domestic self-legitimation may well be the result of the way that the core categories of Russia's "state identity" have both a domestic and an external dimension. Self-presentations as Great Power underscored claims to the exercise of state power domestically, and the same, to a lesser extent, was true for democracy.

⁴³ This may explain why, contrary to what is often assumed, empirical research in this thesis did not find significant differences in the way that concepts of "state identity" were used in front of external and internal "audience". In other words, both Yeltsin in 1992 and Putin did not use concepts of statehood in significantly different ways in front of European or US leaders or to domestic audiences.

This needs to be seen in a context in which the legitimacy of the central state itself was fragile and repeatedly challenged, something that was evident in 1991/92, where the legitimacy of the Russian Federation to embody “Russia” was actively contested by the red-brown coalition and the unity of the state was under threat from centrifugal tendencies in the Russian regions, not least Chechnya. The regional challenge to the central state was a constant and increasing feature throughout the 1990s, but took centre stage again in 1999, when the Russian state was in crisis on a variety of levels.⁴⁴ In the first half of 1999, when the Russian state appeared extremely weak – some said close to collapse – internally and externally, what was being put into doubt was not Russia’s identity as Great Power, but rather whether the present Russian Federation could really lay claim to being “Russia” – a challenge to the legitimacy of the Russian state by a domestic opposition, rather than the abandoning of Great Power-ness as a core category of Russia’s statehood and indeed “Russia”.⁴⁵ In this context, it was important to the self-legitimation of Russia’s rulers, and thus their claim to power, that they could claim these core concepts that linked the semantic fields of the state and of identity for the Russian Federation.⁴⁶

It is important to stress at this point that I do not talk about legitimacy as such (which is difficult to verify in any case, but especially and increasingly in Russia), but about the act of self-legitimation that is invoked any time these concepts are being used in public political discourse. In this, I follow Rodney Barker, who has suggested that the self-legitimation of rulers is an intrinsic part of the exercise of power, and this self-legitimation is all about establishing an identity – for oneself, for the state in whose name one speaks, and above all between oneself and the state.⁴⁷ It is also an activity that is at least as much directed at other members of the state elite as it is to the people at large – as Barker claims, “legitimation is in the first place conducted within groups, and only secondarily between them”.⁴⁸ This is especially appropriate for Putin’s Russia, where legitimacy is supplemented by control – of the media, of elections, of the political sphere itself.

In this, representations of Russia as Great Power and strong state, as well as of Russia as democracy, were key, because these were the core foundational

⁴⁴ See Chapters VI and VII.

⁴⁵ See Chapter VII.

⁴⁶ Rodney S. Barker, *Legitimating Identities: the Self-Presentation of Rulers and Subjects* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

concepts which were acknowledged as grounds for claims to legitimacy by all sides of the political spectrum. At the same time, the meaning of these foundational concepts was heavily contested – making Russia’s “state identity formation” a political process, at least as long as there was a public political space in Russia in which this contestation could take place.

If external recognition, or the semblance of such recognition matters for domestic legitimization, it is clear that the semblance of recognition is easier to achieve than the real thing, as numerous instances during the Putin period have shown. Russia’s “shuttle diplomacy” in the run-up to the Iraq war in 2003 and its representation in the Russian media is one example; another one is the new emphasis on Russia as “energy superpower”. Ultimately, the issues of recognition and legitimization are of course linked. In fact, it could be argued that that recognition does not only occur on the level of states-as-corporate-actors, but among, for example, the Russian political elite, or between the elite and the Russian people - where this recognition of proposed identity categories more commonly goes under the label of “legitimation”.

To sum up, the emphasis on recognition in dialogue suggested by philosophical hermeneutics may well be a way of breaking free of the dichotomy of identity and difference that underlies accounts of identity in IR. It also points towards the fact that not all interactions and categorizations by Others are acts of recognition. To focus on the issue of recognition may be a way to look at Russia’s identity formation as a process that is more complex than an oscillation between identification with the West and its rejection, cooperation or conflict. At the same time, it appears that Russian self-identification cannot totally be changed by third-person narratives that occur in a non-dialogical situation, even though that is not to deny that these narratives will have an impact (but not necessarily in the sense that may have been intended). Power differentials do not change this dynamics; it cannot be assumed that identities and shifts in identities can generally be imposed from outside on a collectivity, because necessary processes of interpretation and translation could well mitigate these frames.

4. “State identity” in post-Soviet Russia

A re-framing of identity at this theoretical level will still tell us very little about concrete processes of collective identity formation in post-Soviet Russia. One such empirical point has been made above, by claiming that the meaning of Russian concepts of “state identity” points towards an intertwining of international recognition (or semblance of recognition) and domestic legitimization. However, a re-conceptualization of identity at this level leaves open a fundamental question: what do we actually research when we research Russia’s “state identity formation”? In the light of what has been said about representations of the Russian state and identity, how can we understand representations of a Russian “state identity”, and what does this tell us about representations of identity in the Westphalian narrative? These questions will be explored in the following sections.

4.1. Collective identity and the state in Russia: a reconceptualization

A hermeneutical approach commits the researcher to what could be called social constructivism in a thick sense – though it should perhaps rather be said that social constructivism is an inherently hermeneutical approach.⁴⁹ Meaning in language is socially (reflexively) constituted and as such is a product of the social/cultural context in which language is being used. As I have argued above, the relationship with a “significant Other” is something that occurs within a context of meaning and will be mediated through it – this is all the more true for a large collectivity, where this interpretative context is not identical with that of the “significant Other” who stands outside it. It is this interpretative field that determines how representations of identity evolve, in response to events and relationships. Given that the central categories of Russia’s “state identity” combine domestic and external elements in their meaning, this means that they may be affected both by domestic and by external events and relations. In this, the linguistic-interpretative context and the extra-linguistic context cannot be detached from each other.

Individuals, including political elites who use this language for their self-legitimization, are socialized into – indeed a product of – this language and the

⁴⁹ This refers to the more generic meaning of social constructivism that is in use in sociology, rather than IR constructivism!

background assumptions which underlie it. This is supported by the assumption that the meaning of language is always more than the intentions a speaker wants to convey. As Davey has pointed out, “whatever our chosen usage of terms, it will always convey or mean more than we imagine or intend. The etymological provenance of words is not under our control”.⁵⁰ This, as has been argued above, underpins the way in which meaning is essentially ambiguous and unstable. As such, the inherent ambiguity of concepts is something that affects not only the researcher who tries to understand concepts of identity, but also the interpretative context in which these concepts are used as categories of practice.

That said, concepts are used in a context, and this is all the more true for political concepts of practice such as those of Russia’s “state identity”. “Context” means concrete, empirical processes, which need to be understood in their particularity. As the sociologist Manuel Castells put it, “it is easy to agree on the fact that, from a sociological perspective, all identities are constructed. The real issue is how, from what, by whom and for what.”⁵¹

This means that, first of all, it is important to clarify what we are talking about when we talk about a Russian state identity, especially as here a major conflation is common in IR as a result of the Westphalian narrative – that between selfhood and collectivity.

The identity of the individual self is at the basis of the concept of “state identity” in IR, perhaps understood as the collective identity of the self (i.e. those parts of an individual’s identity that refer to its belonging to a larger group, such as the nation, a definition prevalent in social psychology). However, in sociology this is commonly only one understanding of collective identity. In sociological research on collective identities, “identity formation” implies two different, though interrelated phenomena – the way that a group is defined and categorized in public discourse (from outside, but at least as much from inside the group, by those claiming to speak in its name), and the identification with these categories by members of the group. It is the latter that is at the basis of the “identity-interest-action” triad and the logic of appropriateness so central to moderate constructivism in IR.⁵² However, an individual’s identification with publicly presented official discourse and symbols of a

⁵⁰ Davey, *Unquiet Understanding: Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 24.

⁵¹ Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (London: Blackwell, 1997), 7.

⁵² Richard Jenkins, “Categorization: Identity, Social Process and Epistemology,” *Current Sociology* 48, no. 3 (2000).

collectivity is not only just another act of interpretation of ambiguous categories; it is also to a degree contingent. Despite the fact that certain groups or individuals will lay claim to legitimate power to speak for the collectivity, such symbolic categories of collective identity do not automatically seep through to the everyday productions of power that constitute the subject.⁵³ Subscribing to official representations of Russia, or indeed any other particular representations, is not what makes someone Russian, quite apart from the fact that the meaning of categories of Russian collective identity, as any linguistic expression, is subject to interpretation.⁵⁴ Thus, the way a collectivity is publicly described – categorized – is empirically and analytically distinct from identifications. As Jenkins put it, “group identification always implies social categorization. The reverse is not always the case. Social categorization, however, at least creates group identification as an imminent possibility.”⁵⁵ There remains a tension between categorization and identification as distinct, and not necessarily interdependent, processes which are not entirely determined by power relationships, precisely because of the ambiguous nature of meaning.

Collectivities can therefore be understood and researched on different levels – in attempts to recover the identifications of individuals that claim to belong to them, and by focussing on the level of representations or categorizations. This thesis, and arguably the overwhelming majority research on identity in IR and Russian FPA, concentrates on the second, namely *representations of the state as a category of collective identity in the discourse of a Russian state elite*, not an assumed state selfhood. Thus, it is doubtful that one can speak of a singular Russian collective “identity”, or even a dominant identity that can be linked to foreign policy action, by researching the level of categorizations or discursive representations of identity (let alone the narrow remit of elite discourse).⁵⁶

⁵³As will have become clear, this gives individuals more autonomy than a Foucauldian view of the subject and power would allow. However, arguably it is also simply a matter of different categories; generalized, abstracted categories of collectivity are not concrete enough to be productive in the power relationships that create subject positions. Cf. Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in *Readings in Contemporary Political Sociology*, ed. Kate Nash (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1999).

⁵⁴Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity* (London: Routledge, 1996), also Craig Calhoun, "Nationalism and Difference: The Politics of Identity Writ Large," in *Critical Social Theory*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Oxford: OUP, 1998). This, incidentally, together with the ambiguity of meaning of concepts of identity, throws doubt on the possibility of a clear linkage between identity and action

⁵⁵Ibid., 89.

⁵⁶This, incidentally, together with the ambiguity of meaning of concepts of identity, throws doubt on the possibility of a clear linkage between identity and specific actions drawing on representations of identity in official discourse which underlies much of IR research on identity.

Categorization is about naming, statements in the form of “Russia is...”. As a category of political practice, it implies differentiation, constituting “Russia” as something that is distinct from something else, whether this distinctness is explained by self-ascriptions (often, but not always in the form of claims to historical continuity), or by relational references to “significant Others”.⁵⁷ To understand collective identities as discursive categories shifts the focus to their linguistic expression, but also opens up the question of who claims the power to propose precisely these categories as authoritative descriptions of “Russia”.

Categorizations from outside (the “framing” of Russia by the West) have been discussed above. Concepts of “Russia” are also proposed by those within Russia who claim the power and authority to speak for it – what could be called a “state elite”. This is by no means to say that discursive representations of Russian identity could not emanate from elsewhere, or that elites’ descriptions were somehow inherently privileged. Categories of identity that described the Russian state as “Russia” were not arbitrary, but were foundational political concepts that delineated a legitimate field of political action; they either had a long historical tradition or constituted an evident claim to legitimacy of the new Russian state (such as “democracy”). In this sense, the Russian state elite themselves were bound into a semantic field that they could try to modify and adapt, but not radically alter.

A focus on the discourse of these elites does, however, reflect the fact that these were people claiming to legitimately represent the state, and at the same time publicly claiming the power to “name” the new state as “Russia”. They were, therefore, in a broad sense a “state elite” (the anthropologist Yael Navaro-Yashin has called them “statespeople”).⁵⁸ “State elite” or “statespeople” in the Russian case refers to all those actively involved in the state building process – in the first instance the presidential administration and government, but also influential non-governmental institutions such as the Council on Foreign and Defence policy, members of the Duma and the Federation Council. In this broad sense, it includes the opposition, assuming no claims to presenting a full narrative of Russia’s post-Soviet

⁵⁷ Craig Calhoun, “Social Theory and the Politics of Identity,” in *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

⁵⁸ Yael Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002). This description is particularly adequate as in post-Soviet Russia, these “state elites” represent a relatively closed social network that in itself could be said to constitute the state as a social group. See Chapter IV for more details.

identity; rather I am interested in the conceptual field of the state as it emanates from the state, “official representations of the official”, to borrow a phrase from Bourdieu.⁵⁹

However, it should not be forgotten that the emphasis is not on authorship, worldviews or intent, but on concepts, the linguistic level, which is the only level that research on Russia commonly has access to (participant observation of the presidential administration being somewhat out of the question). While many of the people I quote are in the top echelons of power, I am not interested in their personal position, but in the semantic fields of state and identity that they refer to. For the aims of this thesis, therefore, it does not matter all that much which individual does the speaking, as long as they are “statespeople” – this state elite should perhaps better be thought of as “carriers” of these representations.

In all cases, categorizations, mediated in language, remain open to different interpretations, given the innate openness and ambiguity of meaning. In post-Soviet Russia, they were also presented in multiple, often highly contradictory ways. It is perhaps a peculiar feature of post-Soviet Russian public political discourse that political contestation of these foundational concepts did not mean that clear ideological battle lines emerged. The way in which concepts of Russia as strong state, Great Power and democracy were deployed in official and political discourse was not (or only rarely) part of a coherent ideological storyline; rather than fully emplotted narratives, these concepts appeared as scripts which were invoked in widely different contexts.⁶⁰ Scripts, as opposed to storylines, are not fully fledged political narratives, no arguments are presented – their main function is to legitimize, rather than to persuade. They can be consciously developed slogans, such as Surkov’s “sovereign democracy” or Chernomyrdin’s “liberal empire” (more on this in Ch. VII). Often enough, they are half-phrases that appear in the most unexpected places, not necessarily in contexts where the speaker explicitly talks about Russia’s statehood. In these cases especially, but even in consciously coined slogans, speakers drew on a semantic field that preceded any individual uses of it, and indeed many scripts pre-dated the existence of the Russian Federation.

⁵⁹ Bourdieu, “Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field.”

⁶⁰ The distinction between storylines and scripts is borrowed from Gearoid O Tuathail, “Theorizing Practical Geopolitical Reasoning: the Case of the United States’ Response to the War in Bosnia,” *Political Geography* 21 (2002). See also J. O’Loughlin, G. Tuathail, and V. Kolossov, “A Risky Westward Turn? Putins 9-11 Script and Ordinary Russians,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 56 (2004).

By positing concepts of the state as categories of a Russian collective identity, the relationship of state and collective identity suddenly appears very different from that presented in the Westphalian narrative. It has been argued above, and will be shown in more detail in Chapter IV and the empirical part of this thesis, that the Russian state can and does appear as a category of identity, that it can be equated with “Russia”. However, this is a different relationship to that of the Westphalian nation-state, in which the state is conceptualized as the embodiment and representative of the nation, with all its concomitant assumptions about homogeneity and boundedness. In Russia, the state appears as one among other possible markers of Russianness, and in this as a representation it is paradoxically both more central and more marginal to representations of Russian-ness than the Westphalian nation-state model suggests.⁶¹

And while the Russian state as Great Power and democracy is represented as an agent and subject in concepts of political practice, the inherent ambiguity of representations of the state as a category of collective identity suggested by philosophical hermeneutics makes it more difficult to assume the state as reified self – in other words, to take the reification of the state as subject in practical political discourse as the actual identity of the state to be investigated in research. Thus, in this thesis I do not only reject the state as Westphalian self, but also as an agent of identity formation, a stance familiar to students of nationalism and the state.⁶² My aim is to avoid any reification of the state as agent, but at the same time I assume the fundamental importance of these foundational concepts of statehood for the process of state-building in Russia. In other words, while rejecting the reification of the state as an agent, I affirm the reality of the state, which cannot be reduced to its independent components.

4.2. The “state effect” in post-Soviet Russia

If not a subject or agent, what are we to make of the state and collective identity in post-Soviet Russia? Representations of the state are a central element in Russian identity discourses, both historically and in post-Soviet Russia. As concepts

⁶¹ See Chapter IV.

⁶² John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), Anthony Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism* (London: Routledge, 1998).

of identity they refer not only to the state as agent, but also to the state as inherently ambiguous space, something that will be seen over the course of the following chapters. At the same time, concepts of the state as Russia as concepts of practice in political discourse are one, but by no means the only, part of what constitutes the reality of the state. This chimes with a point made by Timothy Mitchell in explaining what he calls the “state effect”. As he claims, the state must be examined “not as an actual structure, but as the powerful, apparently metaphysical effect of practices that make such structures appear to exist (...) what we call the state and think of as an intrinsic object existing apart from society [or the international sphere], is the sum of these structural effects.”⁶³

It is this understanding of the state as a symbolic effect of practices (and more precisely of practices to a large part concerned with the exercise of power) that is fundamental to the way that the relation between state and identity is understood in this thesis. The “state effect” includes representational practices, and it is these representations which are the basis for the discussion of statehood and identity in chapters V-VII. Such an understanding of the state breaks with central assumptions in the Westphalian narrative, but this is arguably not just a matter of theoretical choice. Instead, it is a way to approach the particular empirical realities of post-Soviet Russian “state-building”, realities which are part of the context in which the formation of concepts of “state identity” takes place.

The “state effect” breaks with any reification of the state as autonomous agent, but accounts for the way in which the state is nevertheless a social reality, partly because of representations of the state as autonomous agent. Thus, the state can be taken to be the structural effect of practices, including representations of the state as categories of a Russian collective identity. There may, however, be a large gap between these representational practices and other practices that take place in the name of the state. This was true for the state in 1991/92, the subject of Chapter V, which was very much in the process of becoming and was represented as being in a profound “crisis of statehood”, in dire need of the legitimizing power that the normative concepts of state strength and democracy provided. However, in a

⁶³ Timothy Mitchell, "Society, Economy and the State Effect," in *State/Culture: State Formation after the Cultural Turn*, ed. George Steinmetz (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 89 f. This is the revised version of an earlier argument in Timothy Mitchell, "The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics," *The American Political Science Review* 85, no. 1 (1991).

different way, this gap remained valid for the state under Putin. Here, the “state effect” did not so much refer to a state in the process of becoming, with very real ambiguities of territoriality, but to another level of weakness of the central state, a level at which representational practices and other practices by the very same state elite were in some tension with each other. Philip Abrams, along lines similar to Mitchell’s, but based on a more radically Marxist critique of capitalist power, has argued that

the state is not the reality which stands behind the mask of political practice. It is itself the mask which prevents our seeing political practice as it is. It is, one could almost say, the mind of a mindless world, the purpose of purposeless conditions, the opium of the citizen. (...) The state comes into being as a structuration within political practice; it starts its life as an implicit construct; it is then reified – as the *res publica*, the public reification, no less – and acquires an overt symbolic identity progressively divorced from practice as an illusory account of practice.⁶⁴

Abrams was writing from a Marxist perspective on the British state of the 1970s. However, in many ways this is a revealing description of the way that representations of Russian “state identity” have contrasted with actual political practices during much of the 1990s and under Putin. It is precisely this gap that accounts for the importance of the legitimizing power of representations of “state identity”, the identification of the Russian Federation as “Russia”, to its “statespeople”. It could be argued that this legitimizing power obscures the way in which the post-Soviet state has been usurped and privatized in the very process of its construction. It is this development of Russian “state-building” that adds yet another layer to the critique of the Westphalian image of the state and identity in IR – it makes it difficult to perceive the connection between state and identity in Russia as the “basic unquestioned premise of the existence of the state as entity and unity”.⁶⁵

Arguably, the “privatized state” (McFaul), “regime state” (Sakwa) or “clan state” (Wedel), has become a central feature of the Russian political field under conditions of “virtual politics”.⁶⁶ Representations of Russia as strong state, Great

⁶⁴ Philip Abrams, "Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State (1977)," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1, no. 1 (1988): 82.

⁶⁵ Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey*, 56.

⁶⁶ Michael McFaul, "Russia's 'Privatized' State as an Impediment to Democratic Consolidation: Part I," *Security Dialogue* 29, no. 2 (1998), Richard Sakwa, *Russian Politics and Society*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), Janine Wedel, *Clans, Cliques, and Captured States* (United Nations University WIDUR discussion paper 58/2001, 2001 [cited 23 October 2005]); available from www.wider.unu.edu/publications/dps/dp2001-58.pdf. See also Peter Reddaway and Dmitri Glinski, *The Tragedy of Russia's Reforms* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001),

Power and democracy are part of the practices of “regime politics” that produce the effect of the “privatized state” – the way that informal groups and networks have “captured” the Russian state, while at the same time appealing to normative images of the state to legitimize their hold on power. Sakwa defines this state of affairs as follows:

In Russia...not only does the regime undermine the routinization of systemic power, it is also more broadly parasitic on the state itself. Indeed, an ordered state would threaten the very existence of the autonomous regime. Thus, the crisis of the post-communist Russian state, among many other factors, is in part at least due to the emergence of the Yeltsinite regime.⁶⁷

This points to an important addition to the discussion of “state elites” in post-Soviet Russia above, both in the late Yeltsin era and under Putin. While the Russian state may be “captured”, it is not captured by society as a whole. In the absence of strong interest groups or indeed any strong civil society, the regimes that have occupied the Russian state are the same that claim to speak in its name – the state is these networks, and these networks are the state (or at least the top echelon of state power). For many sectors of industry, in particular the energy sector, raw materials, and transport, the distinction between a “state” and a “private” sector is largely irrelevant. Given the strong social cohesion of these networks, the occupied state very nearly becomes a social group in its own right – statespeople, who control both state-owned businesses and those economic sectors close to the state, and the institutions of the state (above all the presidency, but under Putin the Duma as well). In all this, it perhaps is not so much that the state has been taken over by societal forces (an image which assumes that there is a clear separation between state and society in any case), but that the way that the state developed allowed for the development of a network of “statespeople”.

And while the Putin regime has done much to re-establish the sovereignty of the central Russian state over its territories (though failing notably in the North Caucasus and, in particular, in Chechnya, and being less successful in other areas than it appears), this syndrome of “regime state” has arguably not been alleviated. In

Andrew Wilson, *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005).

⁶⁷ Sakwa, *Russian Politics and Society*, 456. It should be added that this state of affairs continued under Putin – what changed were the networks that profited, and a greater effort was put into consolidating the central state against the regions, whose governors had formed their own network during the Yeltsin years.

many ways, images of state strength have been projected much more effectively than during the Yeltsin years, but the reality of the Russian state may have changed less than Putin's very public stance against the oligarchs suggests.⁶⁸ As Andrew Wilson and others have shown, new networks have replaced the old ones (more "statist" perhaps, in that they are drawn from the St. Petersburg city administration and the KGB/FSB), but the Russian state remains deeply entangled in what are ultimately private interests, focussing on access to power and profit.⁶⁹ If anything, it has become clear that the public performance of politics in Russia cannot be taken at face value, but representations of Russian "state identity" have an important function in these performances.⁷⁰

5. Researching Russian "state identity" as foundational political concepts: Conceptual history and foundational concepts of Russian statehood

So far I have suggested a hermeneutic stance as a way to think reflexively about researching empirical Others in IR. Philosophical hermeneutics is not in itself a methodology and it is, in principle, pluralist, open to a variety of analytical approaches. At the same time, it does indicate some basic premises for empirical research on issues of culture and identity, above all an openness to contingency and ambiguity, and a strong caveat about the simple transferability of concepts of analysis into different cultural contexts.

These issues are taken up by *Begriffsgeschichte* or conceptual history, an analytical strategy that was developed by the German historian, Reinhart Koselleck, and which leans on Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.⁷¹ This is visible both in the centrality it accords to language in the constitution of social reality, though *Begriffsgeschichte* focuses more closely on foundational political concepts and the way they constitute both the polity and a space for legitimate action. It also gives

⁶⁸ Andrew Barnes, "Russia's New Business Groups and State Power," *Post Soviet Affairs* 19, no. 2 (2003).

⁶⁹ Olga Kryshchanovskaya and Stephen White, "Inside the Putin Court: A Research Note," *Europe-Asia Studies* 57, no. 7 (2005), Wilson, *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World*.

⁷⁰ Wilson, *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World*, 266.

⁷¹ Apart from Koselleck, "Begriffsgeschichte and Social History.", see Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). and Niels Akerstrom Anderson, *Discursive Analytical Strategies* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2003).

centre stage to the insight that meaning expressed in language remains inherently ambiguous as well as expressive of a semantic horizon that is beyond the control of the individual speaker. Conceptual history develops these premises into a method for understanding the relationship between political language and historical events, and thus the process of changes in meaning of foundational political concepts.

The fundamental premise for the history of concepts is the centrality of foundational political concepts (*Grundbegriffe*), central concepts that constitute a polity and, with this, a space of political action. Not all concepts are equally foundational. The special status of foundational political concepts derives from the fact that they are acknowledged as such across a society, and are, in fact, constitutive of it. As Koselleck claims,

without common concepts there is no society, and above all, no political field of action. Conversely, our concepts are founded in politico-social systems that are far more complex than would be indicated by treating them simply as linguistic communities organized around specific key concepts. A "society" and its "concepts" exist in a relation of tension.⁷²

This quote refers to an important relationship, that between concepts and context. Foundational political concepts do not exist in isolation. First of all, they are always used in a context and both interpret this context and take their meaning from it. This context is constituted by extra-linguistic events (which are nevertheless interpreted in language). It is also constituted by other concepts (foundational and other), with which a foundational concept is associated – the *semantic field*.⁷³ Arguably, the concepts of Russian state identity that are investigated in this thesis are such foundational concepts. As will be seen in subsequent chapters, they were acknowledged as foundational by all parts of the political spectrum, from the inception of the new Russian state – and this is true both for the concepts of state power and those of democracy.

This synchronic relation between concepts and context is supplemented by a diachronic dimension. Foundational political concepts have a history, the way that they have been used in past contexts, and this history matters. Because their meaning changes more slowly than events unfold, concepts "carry" historical references which inextricably frame any new meaning they can acquire. Thus, past uses in past

⁷²Koselleck, "Begriffsgeschichte and Social History," 74.

⁷³Ifversen, "Text, Discourse, Concept: Approaches to Textual Analysis."

contexts constitute “layers of meaning” which are an indelible part of the meaning of a concept. Together with the synchronic dimension this means that foundational concepts are inherently ambiguous, or, as Koselleck puts it, “concepts are always the concentrate of several substantial meanings”.⁷⁴ Thus, their meaning cannot be fixed. It evolves in accordance with the constantly evolving context in which these concepts are being used, while retaining the memory of past uses.

Foundational political concepts are foundational because there exists a consensus that they express the identity of a given polity. This status also means that they carry political power: they convey legitimacy to whomever can claim to refer to them as their own. In the case of the state, this means to whomever can claim the power to speak in the name of the state. A political struggle for power could thus be described as an attempt by political forces in society to “occupy” these concepts, to fix their meaning and to claim them for themselves. This is an attempt that is bound to fail; the multilayered, ambiguous meaning of these concepts means that they will always convey more than the speaker wanted to say. This however, is not for want of trying. These legitimizing concepts are constantly being contested – at least as long as there exists a public political space in which this contestation can take place.⁷⁵ This struggle contributes to and furthers the ambiguity of meaning of these central concepts, as different definitions are put forward in public political discourse in an attempt to claim and “fix” these concepts. A struggle for meaning is especially visible in times of crisis, when the meaning of semantic fields may evolve rapidly in response to a fast-changing context.

It is this legitimizing force that makes foundational concepts constitutive both of the polity and of a legitimate space of political action. The meaning of concepts is not only constituted by their use in diverse contexts – they are also constitutive of this context, as they open an interpretative space that constitutes a social institution – in this case, the new Russian state and the claim that it represents “Russia”.⁷⁶ Whoever claims to speak in the name of the Russian state must do so in terms of the foundational concepts of statehood that constitute its identity. In this, he (or in rare cases, she) will not be able to escape their ambiguous layers of meaning, both in their historical symbolic significance and in the way that they relate to each other in

⁷⁴ Koselleck, “Begriffsgeschichte and Social History,” 84.

⁷⁵ See also Conolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse*, Gallie, “Essentially Contested Concepts.”

⁷⁶ Akerstrom Anderson, *Discursive Analytical Strategies*, 35.

overlapping semantic fields that constitute Russia's statehood and the identity of "Russia". Foundational concepts of statehood in Russia are thus the practices of representation that produce the state, as a specific kind of actor, and as "Russia" – the "state-effect" explored above. In the concrete case of the foundational concepts of "state identity" in Russia, this means Russia's rulers are bound by the meaning of the concepts of statehood that they invoke – they cannot escape the layers of meaning present in these concepts, while the legitimizing power of the concepts delimitates a legitimate space of political action (however broad that is, given the ambiguity of meaning and the way that this meaning is open to interpretation). Interestingly, the "political technologists" of the Putin era apparently feel bound by the concepts, developing ever new variations of the scripts for "democratic Great Power" and "sovereign democracy".

Much of what has been said above resonates with the way that concepts of "state identity" appear in post-Soviet Russia. Apart from the fact that they are consensual, they are also highly ambiguous and were, at least in the early years of the existence of the new Russian state, highly contested. As will be seen in Chapter V, the meaning of "Russia" and the claim that the new Russian state represented Russia were at the core of these semantic battles, which involved the foundational concepts of state strength and democracy. These battles go on – or are visible – as long as there is a public political space in which concepts can be contested. Under Putin, this public space became more and more narrow. Nevertheless, this did not lead to a fixation of these concepts. On the contrary, what became an increasingly hegemonic official discourse at the same time became extraordinarily ambiguous, incorporating a wide variety of often contradictory meanings of the semantic field of "state identity". In this sense, the Putin period can be understood as a prolonged exercise in bolstering the legitimacy of the central Russian state, its claim to legitimately exercise power over territory, and the claim to power of those who "occupied" the state – the Russian state elite.

6. Conclusion

This chapter started with the contention that one of the problems of the dominance of the Westphalian narrative in IR is the way in which it limits the questions that can be asked of the issue of identity and the state in international affairs. Empirical research can offer a way to broaden the focus – but it needs to be reflexively aware of the assumptions of the Westphalian narrative, which are pervasive not only in IR, but also in much work in Area Studies. One way to do this is to take seriously the hermeneutic turn that is implicit in the “cultural turn” in IR. Its basic assumptions, especially about the centrality of language, the ambiguity of meaning and the importance of dialogical understanding in empirical research, make it possible to open up the concepts of state and collective identity formation beyond the normative account of subjectivity inherent in the Westphalian narrative. This opens up the scope for questions that can conceivably be asked about Russian “state identity” – an understanding of the concept that is empirically corroborated, but has little in common with the “state identity” of moderate constructivism in IR.

This opening up has led me to the centrality of representations, and the way these representations of a Russian “state identity” rely on an ambiguous understanding of domestic and external “imagined spaces”. This is visible in the meaning of the foundational concepts of state agency, and the interplay between external recognition and domestic legitimacy. On the basis of this, I have approached Russia’s “state identity” as an issue of legitimization, and have stressed the essential ambiguity of meaning as well as the fact that meanings of concepts travel, are contingent, and are being transformed by context – and that these are things that need to be taken into account when doing empirical research on identities.

Conceptual history offers a method for empirical research that takes up the hermeneutic requirements that have been outlined above. It is sensitive to ambiguities and changes in meaning, and to the way the meaning of a semantic field evolves in response to a changing context. These changes in meaning can be traced empirically, by following the development of concepts in a semantic field – in this case, during the inception of the new Russian state in 1991/92, and from the “crisis year” 1999 to the Putin presidency. This analysis is the basis for my account of the evolution of representations of Russia’s “state identity” in the following chapters.

As I have pointed out above, conceptual history places great emphasis on the presence of historical “layers of meaning”, and the way that these continue to be invoked when foundational concepts are used in new contexts. In the next chapter, therefore, I provide just such a diachronic analysis – or genealogy – of the conceptual fields of the state and democracy in Russian history. I also show how representations of the state have a long tradition as part of the semantic field of Russian identity. While by no means a claim to historical determinism of meaning, this diachronic dimension does reveal interesting continuities, and also points to the basis of some of the ways in which Russian understandings of these semantic fields differ from the Western European experience.

CHAPTER IV

State and identity in Russian history

Russia! – it is an age-long discourse, an endless controversy. Everybody has an opinion, and everybody is right, in a way.

Alexei Remizov¹

1. Introduction: historical determinism and conceptual history

If we are to take the postulate of ambiguous layers of meaning seriously, the historical dimension of language, the intersubjective medium in which this meaning is expressed, cannot be ignored. The terms in which Russian conceptions of statehood are expressed have a past, and this past is fundamental to understanding the meaning that is being created by using these terms in their present context.

This chapter provides the diachronic dimension of the semantic field of the state, a genealogy of concepts of Russian statehood, with a special emphasis on democracy and *Derzhava*, the concepts that have been identified as central to representations of a post-Soviet Russian “state identity”. In this, it aims to trace the concepts of the state and Great Power, as well as the concept of democracy, back over time to their etymological roots. Following Koselleck, I argue that this

¹ Quoted in Elena Hellberg-Hirn, *Soil and Soul: the Symbolic World of Russianness* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998).

genealogy is not only of historical interest. It provides the diachronic “layers of meaning” which are always present when a user invokes these concepts in post-Soviet Russia, underscoring the essential ambiguity of these concepts.

In doing so, I am not laying any claim to the kind of historical determinism that has long riddled some Western analyses of Russian politics and especially foreign policy. This school of thought of Russia’s development, embodied most prominently in the work of the historian Richard Pipes, derives from a deeply engrained belief that Russia’s historical development is determined by specific geographical and cultural factors, with the corollary that its future not only can be explained by its past, but must inevitably resemble it. In a sweeping critique of this kind of determinist analysis, Alfred J. Rieber has identified three foundational myths that have informed Western analyses of Russia. They entwine geography and culture, domestic factors and geostrategy – Russia’s “urge to the sea”, its “Asian despotism” and patrimonial-imperial state, and Russian messianism (“for Russia is the Third Rome and there shall be no fourth”).² An over-reliance on these factors has led to the thesis of the “path-dependency” of Russian political culture, a stance which was common in Sovietology and continues to inform some analyses of current Russian foreign policy.³

However compelling the historical continuities in Russia (though arguably not more or less than in any other state), it is highly reductionist to frame the future development of the Russian state – or even the meaning of its representations – through the lenses of its troubled past.⁴ This chapter should not be read in this vein, even though historical “layers of meaning” of the conceptual field of the state not only persist, but are consciously invoked by the political elite, under Putin more than ever.

² Alfred J. Rieber, "Persistent Factors in Russian Foreign Policy: An Interpretive Essay," in *Imperial Russian Foreign Policy*, ed. Hugh Ragsdale (Cambridge (MA): Woodrow Wilson Centre for Scholars, 1993).

³ See, for example, Laurent Murawiec, "Putin's Precursors," *The National Interest* 60, no. 2 (2000), Pipes, "Is Russia Still an Enemy?," Prizel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy: Nationalism and Leadership in Poland, Russia, and Ukraine*. Work on Soviet and Russian political culture, too, is riddled with deterministic assumptions. For a critical overview see Alexander Dallin, "The Uses and Abuses of Russian History," in *Soviet Society and Culture: Essays in Honour of Vera S. Dunham*, ed. Terry L. Thompson and Richard Sheldon (Boulder: Westview, 1988); and Frederic J. Fleron, "Post-Soviet Political Culture in Russia: An Assessment of Recent Empirical Investigations," *Europe-Asia Studies* 48, no. 2 (1996).

⁴ In this sense, metaphors common in Western analyses equating the present Russian context with Russia’s past development (smutia”, Putin as “Tsar”) invite a misleading historical analogy.

Therefore, while avoiding this kind of “ahistorical historicism” (Rieber), the historical or diachronic dimension remains indispensable to an understanding of the representations of Russian statehood that dominate official discourse. It is true for political concepts, as it is for language in general, that the etymological provenance of words is not under the control of the speaker. As Davey put it, “the weight of a term’s received meaning can sometimes take command of what we intend by it”.⁵ The conceptual field of the state in Russia has a specific historical resonance, and this resonance will delineate, though not determine, the meaning of representations of statehood in current Russian political discourse.

Aside from the unavoidable layers of meaning of foundational concepts of statehood and identity, the issue of continuity and rupture was of fundamental importance when it came to the semantic field of the state in Russia, something that will be explored in greater detail in Chapter V. The historical continuity of the new Russian state – whether or not it could lay claim to Soviet and Tsarist statehood – was a paramount question of its legitimacy in the first few years of its existence, not only of the political elite claiming to represent it, but of the new state itself. Claims to the historical continuity of Russian statehood soon displaced the narrative of rupture, and the Putin presidency evoked continuity through a “patchwork approach” to Russian history, selectively borrowing symbols and memories that back up the greatness and strength of the Russian state from all periods of Russian history.⁶ More generally, memory and historic references have a prominent place in current Russian public discourses, political and otherwise, and are capable of evoking strong public reactions, as the controversies over the choice of hymn, the burial and canonization of Nicholas II and the place of the Great Patriotic War in Russian public life have shown.⁷

This chapter starts with a broad overview of the changing domestic and external context in which the semantic field of the new Russian state developed. It then provides a genealogy of the semantic field of the state, including the concept of

⁵ Davey, *Unquiet Understanding: Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 24.

⁶ The mix of symbols of the Soviet and the Tsarist past introduced by Putin is well known: the red Soviet flag for the army, an updated version of the Tsarist eagle as coat of arms, the updated Soviet hymn, with the new text written by the very same man that wrote the original ode to Stalin. In the 2004 parade for “Russia day”, celebrating Russian sovereignty on 12 June 1990, the army parade included soldiers dressed up in uniforms of various epochs of Tsarist and Soviet history.

⁷ Kathleen E. Smith, *Mythmaking in the New Russia: Politics and Memory During the Yeltsin Era* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002).

Great Power, in Tsarist and Soviet history. It also gives a conceptual history of democracy, a concept that until Soviet times was not associated with the semantic field of the state. The history of the concept of the state and of Russia as Great Power and democracy form the first part of this chapter; in the second part, it will be shown how and in which ways the concept of the state was traditionally part of a conceptual field of Russian identity.

2. **Context and continuation of Russian statehood**

The representations of the Russian state as agent are, in the present context, peculiarly normative in nature. Nevertheless, conceptions of *derzhavnost'* and *gosudarstvennost'* (Great-Power-ness, and strong-state-ness, two terms which do not lend themselves easily to translation into English) do reach back to an empirical reality, both of the Tsarist imperial state and the Soviet state. States very rarely die, however much this spectre is invoked by Realist theory in IR, and continuity over time is one of the defining features of the state.

That said, the case of the Russian state is peculiar in that there is an ambiguous intertwining of continuity and change between the Soviet Union, itself the successor of Tsarist Russia, and the post-soviet Russian state. In many ways, post-Soviet Russia in 1991 was indeed a new state, and not simply a continuation of Soviet and Tsarist Russia. The RSFSR, which is now the Russian Federation (RF), was only one of the 15 constituent republics of the Soviet federal state. When the Soviet Union collapsed at the end of 1991, the RSFSR became its legal successor, but as numerous commentators both within and outside Russia have pointed out, at the same time the new Russian state had never existed in its present territorial form – a drastically reduced territory (though it still left Russia the largest country on earth), new borders, and an ethnic composition which for the first time consisted of more than 80 per cent ethnic Russians (though there remained more than 100 ethnic minorities). Among the new “near abroad” were territories that are intimately linked to a millennial tradition of Russian identity and indeed statehood, namely Ukraine, but also Belarus. On the other hand, the new state had to contend with what could be

called an “inner abroad”, that is, republics and constituent units which rejected the claims to authority of the central state, most evidently in the case of Chechnya.

Furthermore, the origins of the Russian state lay in a declaration of sovereignty against the Soviet centre and the Gorbachev presidency, and in a rejection of Russia’s communist past (easily forgotten, given that Russia’s becoming independent was a drawn-out process, while the period between total rejection of the Soviet past – the forced closure of the Supreme Soviet and the imposition of a new constitution in 1993 – and broad acceptance on behalf of the same Yeltsin presidency was only a few years). In this sense, the continuation of statehood under international law that eventually occurred between the Soviet Union and the new Russian state initially appeared out of sync with official representations of Russian statehood.

Despite this, the Russian Federation has de facto continued the Soviet and Tsarist legacy of statehood. This signifies not only that it became the successor to the Soviet Union in legal terms but also, and more importantly for the present investigation, in terms of its legitimizing narratives and its identifications – that which defines the Russian state as peculiarly *Russian*. This has become clearly visible over the past decade. While in the last years of the Soviet Union Yeltsin legitimized the new Russian state against the Soviet centre and tried to distance Russia from its Soviet past, this changed with the Soviet collapse in 1991. As political tensions between Yeltsin and the “red-brown” opposition grew, more and more references to the Soviet and Tsarist past were made, not only by the opposition but by the presidency itself. This change has been institutionalized in Putin’s endorsement of “state patriotism”, claiming allegiance to the state as an ethnically neutral symbol of Russianness.⁸ This is visible in the official symbols, the Tsarist double headed eagle, the red flag for the army, and the reanimation of the Soviet Hymn, that were finally introduced under Putin (after the Duma had continued to boycott the version proposed by Yeltsin). Official state symbolism, on show each year during the parade on *Den’ Rossii* (day of Russia) and Victory day (9 May) now incorporate elements both of the Tsarist and the Soviet past.⁹ It is also visible in the

⁸Ibid. On Putin Pal Kolsto, “The Russian Debate on National Identity under Putin” (paper presented at the CECOB/ASN Special Convention, Bologna, 2002).

⁹ The development of *Den’ Rossii* (12 June) is telling in itself. It actually celebrates the day that the RSFSR declared sovereignty against the Soviet centre, but was so unpopular in this form that its name was changed into the more generic “Russia day”.

way that certain key events, such the Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War, are being used to legitimize the present Russian state.¹⁰

The kind of historical memories that are being invoked play on a highly stylized narrative of the role that the state has held in Russian society. Whether or not the Tsarist state was truly effective, and whether or not tsarism was quite as autocratic as traditional historiography would have it, this narrative is based on a depiction of the state's role in society during the Russian empire that went far beyond the experience of Western Europe.¹¹ The reasons for this are complex and this is not the place to elaborate on them, but they are connected with the fact that the Russian empire essentially was a pre-modern state at the margins of Europe that could survive the constant threat of European invasions only by keeping up superior powers of military mobilization – the classical function of the state, and one which was fulfilled effectively by the autocratic system. Tsars were able to push through wide-ranging and radical reforms, borrowing freely from European ideas, which enabled Tsarist Russia to keep up with Europe without having to totally adapt to it.¹² In this, the Tsarist state was successful for a very long time, not only remaining an independent state on the brink of an expansionist Europe that colonized the rest of the world, but the only non-European empire to not only survive the European onslaught but to remain a major player in European affairs right to the beginning of the 20th century.

This success, of course, was linked to its vast territory and its comparatively high population numbers. In an age in which territorial expanse and power in international affairs were associated, the Russian empire effectively was a Great Power in terms of its relative size (which at that time translated directly into military power) as much as through its recognition as a Great Power by other European states. This status began to crumble only with the onset of industrialization in Western Europe and the increasing importance of technology in warfare, as was amply

¹⁰ Interestingly, the military parades to commemorate the Soviet victory were abandoned in favour of a less militaristic celebration in the first years after the foundation of the RF, but by 1995 it had become clear that popular sentiment for holding a parade was strong and military parades as well as traditional Soviet symbols were reintroduced. See Smith, *Mythmaking in the New Russia: Politics and Memory During the Yeltsin Era*, 89.

¹¹ O.A. Omelchenko, "The System of State and Law in Eighteenth-Century Russia and the Political Culture of Europe: Some Historical Interactions," *Slavonic and East European Review* 80, no. 2 (2002).

¹² Marshall T. Poe, *The Russian Moment in World History* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003). and David Christian, *Imperial and Soviet Russia - Power, Privilege and the Challenge of Modernity*, 3 ed. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997).

demonstrated by the Crimean and the Russo-Japanese war and, not least, the collapse of the empire during the first world war. All these are factors which did not change radically with the revolution, on the contrary. The Soviet Union considerably expanded the penetration of the state into society. With the onset of the Cold War, it became not only a Great Power, but a superpower, with an impressive array of nuclear weapons at the basis of these claims. Again, in the latter years of the Soviet Union, its real military strength may have not corresponded to its superpower status, but contrary to the Tsarist empire, this was never truly tested in action. Whatever the ultimate reality of state strength in Russian history, the image of the strong state internally and externally was upheld, and upheld largely successfully, in the Tsarist autocracy as well as in the Soviet system.

That said, while a continuity of statehood has been established between the Russian Federation and its predecessors, and the new Russian state elite is using the Tsarist and Soviet past to enhance its own legitimacy, there is not necessarily a deterministic continuity in the meaning of the key political concepts. Many scripts in the semantic field of *gosudarstvennost'* and *derzhavnost'* do indeed reach back to traditions of Imperial Russian statehood. But it would be wrong to deduce from this that the identity of the new Russian state is simply a continuation of a militant, imperialist past. As Koselleck rightly notes, “the continuous use of the same word is as such no sufficient indicator for a continuity in meaning.”¹³ If nothing else, the context in which these “imperial” concepts are being used has changed far too much for a continuity of imperial statehood.

While Russia is still an extremely vast country and still is situated in a marginal position between three cultural traditions – a “conglomeration of peripheries”, as Sergei Medvedev put it – it is no longer an empire.¹⁴ And while Russia still is integrated into the present structures of the international system as a Great Power, institutionalized in its membership of the UN security council and possession of an arsenal of nuclear weapons, its relative strength in international affairs has sharply declined since the time of the Soviet Union, not only in relation to the growing power of the US but also as a regional power with regard to the former Soviet Union (FSU). Here, the position of Russia has been changing rapidly in response to events that were only partially under its control. This was true for the

¹³ Koselleck, “Einleitung.”

¹⁴ Medvedev, “A General Theory of Russian Space: A Gay Science and a Rigorous Science.”

reordering of relations within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); the Russian leadership itself had a marked preference for sub-regional and bilateral arrangements, weakening the cohesion of the CIS as a unified regional space. However, while relations with some CIS countries, notably Belarus and most of the Central Asian states, have remained close, relations with others have become increasingly distant. Russia could do little against countries that were determined to remove themselves from its influence, such as Turkmenistan under Turkmenbashi, Georgia after the “Rose Revolution” and, at least in part, Ukraine after the “Orange Revolution” of 2005 (although the relationship between the two countries is far too complex to be subsumed under the simple heading of distancing, as will be seen in Chapter VI). Russia was also mostly reactive in its shifting relations with a Europe that has extended far into the space formerly under control of the Soviet Union, as the result of the double enlargement of NATO and the EU. The OSCE has not developed into a viable alternative to NATO, despite Russian diplomatic efforts. And while recent rises in world oil prices have led to the advent of Russia as an “energy superpower” in the script of the Kremlin, the effective use of this new-found might is limited by the close intertwining of the state and the energy conglomerates, and has to be understood in the context of the “privatized state”, yet another dimension in which representations of state strength do not entirely correspond to the realities of the Russian Federation.

Apart from the “privatized state” that has been discussed in Chapter III, the central state has been weak in another important respect: throughout the Yeltsin period, it was unable to control its own territory or stop the “flight of sovereignty” of the federal constituent units of the Russian state. The republics in particular, were often run like fiefdoms in their own right, and constituted a miniature version of the “captured state”.¹⁵ Chechnya, in this sense, was just the most extreme case of a continuum of this weakness of the central state. Towards the end of the decade this reached a stage in which the Russian state started to disintegrate as a unitary external actor, as individual republics began to conduct their own foreign policies.¹⁶ While

¹⁵ The Russian Federation is constituted of 21 republics, with special legal status, and the smaller oblasts and krais. For an overview of developments in the regions during the Yeltsin era see Darrell Slider, “Politics in the Regions,” in *Developments in Russian Politics V*, ed. Stephen White, Alex Pravda, and Zvi Gitelman (Hounds-mills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2001).

¹⁶ Stephan De Spiegeleire, “Gulliver’s Threads: Russia’s Regions and the Rest of the World,” in *Regions: A Prism to View the Slavic-Eurasian World*, ed. Kimitaka Matsuzato (Sapporo: Slavic Research Centre, 2000). This was in addition to the way that individual state agencies did not act in

Putin ostensibly brought the regions under the control of the central government, and the widespread problems of the Yeltsin era have disappeared, the continuing war in Chechnya demonstrates that this has been only partially successful.

The “state effect” that is carried by the representations of state strength in official discourse, and their invocation of a glorious past, is thus in constant, more or less latent, tension with the realities of autonomous state power in post-Soviet Russia. The fact that they are still constantly invoked as the reality of “Russia” and the normative ideal of any Russian state reveals their continuing legitimizing power, even though in the absence of an open political space this legitimizing power may amount to little less than the self-legitimization of the ruling elite.

3. The genealogy of Russian statehood: *gosudarstvo, derzhava*

The following section explores the historical layers of meaning that arguably continue to inform the semantic field of the state in post-Soviet Russia and in part constitute the “state effect” of the Russian Federation. In this, it traces the concept of the state in Russia back to its origins and explores the specific context in which it developed. One thing that will be seen is the close intertwining of concepts of statehood with that of the sovereign – in its concrete embodied form, the Tsar. This becomes even more evident when turning to the concept of *derzhava*, which in its origin was nothing else than the physical symbol of the divine power of the Tsar.

3.1. Tsarist Russia

Gosudarstvo

Gosudarstvo is one of the oldest terms of the Russian political vocabulary. In marked contrast to Western European concepts of the state, the actual word has remained unchanged since Muscovite times, though in a medieval and early modern context its more correct translation would have to be “Kingdom”. This, indeed, is its

unison, making Russian foreign policy seem at times – for example during the Kosovo crisis – extremely incoherent. See also Chapter VI.

original meaning, “that which belongs to the *gosudar* (the sovereign, tsar).”¹⁷ It derives from the older *gospodar*, meaning “head of household, land owner”, which in the 15th century had become a title of some princes of Moscow.¹⁸ As Kharkordin points out, throughout the 16th century the term *gosudarstvo* denoted an “(...) exclusive domain, where everything, including the property of the subjects, belonged to the tsar personally”.¹⁹ In its earliest incarnation, the term *gosudarstvo* thus denoted a relationship of personal power as well as the territory in which the *gosudar* ruled. During this time there was no conception in the Russian language of a distinction between the tsar’s rule over his own household, whose members he owned as slaves, and his rule over a territorial domain.²⁰ In fact, the understanding of *gosudarstvo* as effectively the personal household of the sovereign ruler (the tsar as *voichinik* (proprietor) as well as *gosudar samoderchev* (sole sovereign) of the Russian land) persisted at least till the 16th century.²¹ It is only from the mid-17th century onwards that official documents consistently mention a state (*gosudarstvo*) that is separate from the personal property of the Tsar.²²

However, a shift towards understanding the state as an impersonal system of government only occurred under Peter I. During his rule the concept of the state was brought in association with *otechestvo*, fatherland, as something that “belongs” to all subjects of the rule of the tsar. This was a conscious move by Peter, who was fascinated with novel Western ideas about the “common good” of the country as something distinct from the personal interest of the tsar.²³ Interestingly, these intertwined notions of the state and of collective identity were present to a far greater extent than in the Western European tradition – instead of an abstract, impersonal entity, the state here becomes a “(...) community of blood lineage and common

¹⁷ Max Vasmer, *Russisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1953).

¹⁸ Oleg Kharkordin, “What Is the State? the Russian Concept of Gosudarstvo in the European Context,” *History and Theory* 40 (2001).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*: 215.

²⁰ This distinction was already well-developed in 15th century Western Europe. See *Ibid.* and Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime* (New York: Collier Books, 1992).

²¹ Kharkordin and Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime*. Richard Pipes even argues that a patrimonial conception of statehood existed until the middle of the 19th century. The point here is not whether or not the exercise of power in Tsarist Russia was really quite as autocratic as Pipes makes out to be. As Hosking has convincingly argued, autocracy in Tsarist Russia was often symbolic rather than effective. What is of interest here is that the concept retained a strong symbolic power. See Geoffrey Hosking, “Patronage and the Russian State,” *Slavonic and East European Review* 78, no. 2 (2000).

²² Marc Raeff, *Politique et Culture en Russie* (Paris: éditions de l’école des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1996), 129.

²³ Kharkordin, “What Is the State? the Russian Concept of Gosudarstvo in the European Context.”

ancestry” – an understanding of the term that was stressed even more by Catherine II.²⁴ It was only in the 19th century that *otechestvo* was commonly understood as a public space that is separate from the state, and there emerged a clear distinction between society and public opinion as opposed to the governmental apparatus.

This early Petrine emphasis on an intertwining and even synonymous usage of *gosudarstvo* and *otechestvo* is far from being a conception of “nation-state” in the Westphalian sense. As Billington has pointed out, what was taken over from Western political theory was ultimately not so much an understanding of the state serving a common good of the community, but rather a Hobbesian legitimization of absolute monarchy.²⁵ Peter himself was far from consistent in his submission to *otechestvo*, and in 1721 took the title not only of *imperator* but also of “father of the fatherland” – the meaning of *gosudarstvo* as patrimony was altered, but by no means abandoned through his reforms.²⁶

What emerges from these observations is the relatively slow progress of the dissociation, in the concept of *gosudarstvo* but also in political practice, between the personal power of the sovereign ruler and the state as a political institution and a normative political concept in its own right. While the process of conceptual dissociation in itself did take place, in the perception of the nobility and “educated society”, if not necessarily the tsar or the peasantry, the dissociation of statehood and personal rule not only occurred much later, but was also much less complete than in many Western European states – though it should be pointed out that there is another state, also an empire on the margins of Europe, which shares this characteristics: Great Britain.²⁷

The persisting association of *gosudarstvo* and *otechestvo*, or the way in which the state was a synonym of “Russia”, can be seen in the development of the writing of national history in Russia in the 19th century. One significant example is Karamzin’s *History of the Russian state*, the first great national history of Russia, written in 1818 at a time in which the Russian state had just successfully mastered

²⁴Ibid.: 220.

²⁵James H. Billington, *The Icon and the Axe* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1966), 183.

²⁶Kharkhordin, “What Is the State? the Russian Concept of Gosudarstvo in the European Context.” The confusion persisted in official language after Peter’s death.

²⁷The actual implications for the exercise of power were of course entirely different; for Russian czars this was one way to legitimate absolute power, in opposition to the British path of a constitutional monarchy. Robert B. McKean, “The Russian Constitutional Monarchy in Comparative Perspective,” in *Russia and the Wider World in Historical Perspective*, ed. Cathryn Brennan and Murray Frame (Hounds-mills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

one of its biggest crises in history, the Napoleonic invasion. It portrays the state as *pars pro toto* for the whole of Russia.²⁸ He was only the first in a long succession of “statist” historians who dominated academic historical writing in Tsarist Russia.

It is perhaps only with the interest in Hegelian philosophy amongst Russian intellectuals in the second half of the 19th century that the state was discussed at any length as an abstract political concept in its own right. Not incidentally, it was with the advent of Hegelianism in Russia that the concept of “*pravovoe gosudarstvo*” (a state based on the rule of law, a direct translation of the German *Rechtsstaat*) made a tentative entry in the writings of some liberal thinkers like the historian Granovski, and the mayor of Moscow, Chicherin. The concept, though widely discussed, remained purely theoretical. Only 40 years later, in the basic law of 1906, the ideal of a *pravovoe gosudarstvo* was enshrined in an official document, though political practice in the last decade of tsarism before the revolution remained far more ambiguous.²⁹

The meaning of the concept of state outlined above was absorbed into the concept of *gosudarstvennost'*, which was coined as a political concept in its own right only at the turn of the 20th century.³⁰ *Gosudarstvennost'* had a strongly normative meaning, and one that was tied up with political debates about the relationship between state and society and, indeed, about the identity of “Russia” that took place at that time. It was a term that seems to have been invented by the liberal-conservative Stolypin government that had been appointed after the revolution of 1905 and was found in press statements supportive of its policies. As Wcislo has claimed, it was a deliberate play on the word *obshchestvennost'*, or public self-consciousness, which was a recurrent term in the lexicon of Russian liberalism and conveyed the meaning of public autonomy.³¹ *Gosudarstvennost'* in this sense meant much more than the technical attributes of “statehood”. Its correct translation at the time of its coinage, heavily influenced by Hegelian thought, may be “state self-

²⁸Orlando Figes, *Natasha's Dance - a Cultural History of Russia* (London: Penguin, 2002), 134.

²⁹Billington, *The Icon and the Axe*, 325. See also Lothar Schultz, “Constitutional Law in Russia,” in *Russia Enters the 20th Century*, ed. Erwin Oberländer and et al. (London: Temple Smith, 1971).

³⁰This is in keeping with Richard Pipes' observation that “in a surprising number of instances [political terms and concepts] are the product of political polemics of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.” See Richard Pipes, “Narodничество: A Semantic Enquiry,” *Slavic Review* 23, no. 3 (1964).

³¹Francis W. Wcislo, *Reforming Rural Russia: State, Local Society, and National Politics, 1855-1914* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990).

consciousness”, or the idea that the autocratic state was central to the collective idea in Russia.

Derzhava

The concept of *derzhava* has similarly ancient roots to that of *gosudarstvo*, and there is a similar emphasis on personal power in these roots. It is first recorded in Common Slavonic in the 11th century, meaning “power” (that which holds, sustains, from *derzhat'*), which has remained the core meaning of the term until today. It then became the word that designated one of the two symbols of the personal power of the Tsar, the orb. In this, it had strong religious connotations – the orb, in fact, was the symbol of the Tsar's divine right.³² In this, *derzhava* was strongly associated with *samo-derzhavie*, the concept denominating the specific Russian version of monarchical rule, autocracy.

From the 16th century the term *derzhava* was increasingly found to denote an independent state. This stress on independence in international affairs, in the sense not only of territorial sovereignty but above all of power to act independently, was gradually, as the European system of states developed, transformed into the meaning of “Great Power” (most often in conjunction with *velikii*, great). The element of independence, or sovereignty in the conduct of international affairs, is stressed in various etymological sources.³³ It is here that a concept which predated the emergence of a European international system became adapted into a more commonly shared Westphalian language, without, however, losing its specific emphasis on independent and personalized power. In fact, until the end of the Tsarist reign, *derzhava* equally denominated the symbol of the personal power of the tsar (the Sovereign) and the sovereign power of the imperial Russian state in international affairs. After all, *derzhava* in its older meaning denoting the personal, divinely granted power of the tsar, remained a material reality and performative practice until 1917.

³² Personal communication to the author by Mikhail Ilyin, August 2005.

³³ Vasmer, *Russisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*. P.J. Chernii, *Istoriko-Etimologicheskii Slovar Sovremennoe Russkovo Jezika* (Moskva: 1993), Terence Wade, *Russian Etymological Dictionary* (Bristol: 1996). That the association with independence has remained a core meaning of Derzhava will become clear over the following chapters.

Derzhava never came to signify “empire” in the strict sense of the word, which in Russian too is a Latin concept indicating claims to continuity of the (East-) Roman empire. It was empire, rather than *derzhava*, which described the territorial expansion of Tsarist Russia from the mid-15th century onwards. Apart from supreme authority (dominion) and imperial expansion into non-Russian lands, the meaning of empire as a continuation of the Byzantine empire also entailed claims to a specific Christian, orthodox form of rule, and it was this connection, expressed in the person of the Tsar, rather than imperial expansion, that linked empire and *derzhava*.³⁴ The claim to continuity with Byzantium was expressed in the title “tsar” (Caesar) that Ivan III gave himself, which substituted *gosudar* as the title of the Russian ruler.³⁵ However, the formal self-ascription of Russia as *Vserossiiskaia Imperiia* (all-Russian empire) came after the Russian triumph over Sweden in 1721, the date which commonly denotes Russia’s entry into the European Concert of Powers. In a move that was clearly aimed at cementing the legitimacy of Russia as European power, the state was re-named and the title “Tsar” abandoned in favour of *vserossiiskii imperator*. Tellingly, recognition of these new, Europeanized titles was an uphill struggle – only Prussia, the Netherlands and Sweden immediately recognized this new title; the European Great Powers took another 20 years before they recognized Russia as empire (Great Britain and Austria in 1742, France in 1745).³⁶ That said, insofar as the identity of the empire consisted also in its recognition by other participants in the European Concert of Powers as Great Power, the concept of *derzhava* was bound up with conceptions of imperial statehood.

³⁴ Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power - Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). This claim to an orthodox identity is often associated with conceptions of Moscow as “Third Rome”, an expansionist, messianist understanding that is said to be inherent in the Russian idea of autocracy. See for example Peter J.S. Duncan, *Russian Messianism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000). However, the influence of “messianism” on policy was low, and other research indicates that the idea of Russian messianism may be more of a Western myth than a consistent part of Russian official thinking. See Rieber, “Persistent Factors in Russian Foreign Policy: An Interpretive Essay.” and Daniel B. Rowland, “Moscow-the Third Rome or the New Israel?,” *Russian Review* 55, no. 4 (1996).

³⁵ On aspects of continuity with the Byzantine empire see also Michael Cherniavsky, “Khan or Basileus: An Aspect of Russian Mediaeval Political Theory,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 20, no. 4 (1959).

³⁶ Günther Stökl, *Russische Geschichte*, 6th ed. (Stuttgart Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1997).

3.2. The Soviet Union

The Russian Revolution and the inception of the Soviet Union radically changed the semantic field of concepts referring to the state, and there certainly were drastic changes in the concepts that were retained. Certain concepts associated with the state became obsolete and went out of use as the reality of the distribution and legitimization of political power in Soviet society changed radically. This included, of course, *samo-derzhavnost'* and *imperiia* and the religious and cultural connotations that went with these terms. Not only were these concepts put out of use, they were given a deeply negative connotation against which the new Soviet polity was legitimized (note, however, that the same did not happen to the figure of the tsar – the personality cult of Stalin made ample use of comparisons to Ivan the Terrible).

Thus, whatever the political reality of the Soviet Union as an empire and an all-powerful state, the terminology had certainly changed.³⁷ The concepts of *gosudarstvo* and *derzhava* became disconnected for the first time from their association with personalized, divine power and dynastic rule. That said, during the Soviet period the term *gosudarstvo*, on the other hand, curiously loosened its association with executive power in the domestic sphere and thus one of the core meanings of the political concept of the state. For while the *word* for the state and the state as an administrative-bureaucratic organization was retained and, indeed, the reach of the authority of the state in all areas of public life increased massively with the command economy and the bureaucratization of Soviet life, the actual centre of executive power that had been associated with the *concept* of statehood acquired a new name that was to reflect a new political reality: the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).³⁸ This confusion may even be said to have been extended to the international sphere, albeit only during the brief attempt at a revolutionary foreign policy embodied in the Comintern in the early 1920s. The Soviet state quickly returned to the fold of the Westphalian system, a strong advocacy of international sovereignty and a traditional understanding of diplomacy.

Nevertheless, this episode and the proliferation of state (or rather, party) penetration in society, added an ideologically coloured layer of meaning to Soviet

³⁷ See articles by Suny and Martin in Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, eds., *A State of Nations - Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford: OUP, 2001).

³⁸ See Neil Harding, ed., *The State in Socialist Society* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984)., esp. Archie Brown, "Political Power and the Soviet State"

conceptions of statehood, as the centre of decision-making shifted away from state institutions. The state as an autonomous political entity did not exist, according to Marxism-Leninism; it was always the expression of class interests and the leading role of the CPSU derived from the “dictatorship of the proletariat”, the class it represented. This re-conceptualization resolved, to a certain extent, the contradictions inherent in the fact that a bureaucratic state was retained and expanded which, according to Marxist thought, should have been abandoned with the revolution. In fact, after Stalin’s death the concept of the socialist state was re-introduced into official Marxist-Leninist ideology, as is evidenced by the transition from “dictatorship of the proletariat” to the “all-peoples state” under Khrushchev and Brezhnev.³⁹

Derzhava, in contrast, was retained as a characterization of the Soviet state without apparent difficulties. With the abandonment of revolutionary foreign policy in the early 1920s and the attempt to integrate the Soviet Union into the international system, including normal diplomatic relations with capitalist states, the fact that the Soviet Union was a “normal” state was stressed in its international relations. That included Soviet aspirations to Great Power status, and while empire was given a negative connotation, the concept of *derzhava* persisted, as did a desire for international recognition, from the 1930s onward.

The self-identification as Great Power became important during the Second World War, where the Soviet Union was identified as *derzhava* in official language (and this, David Brandenberger has argued, was the basic drive of Stalin’s Great Russian nationalism).⁴⁰ With the onset of the Cold War and the extension of the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union, this representation as *derzhava* became ever more central and was expanded into that of superpower (*sverkhderzhava*). Associated with this concept was military might, but once again above all independence – especially after it became clear in the early 1920’s that the capitalist system of states was more stable than predicted and the predicted chain of communist revolutions had not occurred. Inherent in Stalin’s doctrine of “socialism in one country” was the feeling that the Soviet Union had to be independent to survive in a world in which it was constantly under threat from hostile capitalist powers. This in itself necessitated

³⁹ Roger Kanet, “The Rise and Fall of the All-People’s State,” *Soviet Studies* 20 (1968).

⁴⁰ Brandenberger in Suny and Martin, eds., *A State of Nations - Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*. See also Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

relative strength in international affairs – the Soviet Union had to be a Great Power because it could not count on alliances.

4. **Democracy – *demokratiia, narodovlastie***

The institutional identity of the new Russian state in 1991 was determined by the manner in which it was created: in opposition to the Soviet centre and to the putschists who had tried to reverse the course of Gorbachev's socialist reforms. As will be seen in Chapter V, this was a revolution in the name of democracy, and the new Russian state could not but be a democratic polity.⁴¹ “Democracy”, not the nation, was the founding myth that legitimized the Russian democrats, and above all Boris Yeltsin, in the crucial phase of the re-establishment of the Russian state. And yet, in many ways, the centrality of representations of the new Russian state as democratic was the most radical shift in the meaning of Russia's statehood – while the Soviet Union defined itself as a democratic state, this was not its core identity.

The new Russian Federation is the first Russian state built on liberal democratic principles (at least once the new constitution came into force in October 1993 – before that time, the Russian Federation was still governed by a heavily amended version of the constitution of the RSFSR). The “immutability of [Russia's] democratic foundations” is asserted in the preamble to the constitution in one sentence with Russia's sovereignty and in § 1, where the Russian Federation is characterized as a “democratic federative rule-of-law state (*pravovoe gosudarstvo*) with a republican form of government.” Subsequent articles characterize the concept of democracy further by associating it with the protection of the rights of the individual (§§ 2, 6 and Ch. 2 on “Human Rights and Individual Freedom”), a free market economy (§ 8 and Ch. 2), the separation of powers, the recognition of political pluralism, free elections and the separation of powers.⁴²

And yet, as will be seen in Chapters V and VII, the concept of democracy in post-Soviet Russian political discourse remains curiously vague, the most ambiguous

⁴¹ This focus on democracy as an argument for sovereignty, incidentally, was in notable contrast to many of the other Union republics, where nationalist arguments played a decisive role in legitimizing independence.

⁴² *Constitution of the Russian Federation* ([cited 27 August 2007]); available from <http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-01.htm>.

of all foundational concepts that represent the Russian state. There are, first of all, two terms to denote democracy in Russian: the Western import *demokratiia*, which is used in the majority of cases, and the decidedly more Soviet *narodovlastie* (from *narod*, people, and *vlast'*, power). Some authors have argued that *narodovlastie*, with its socialist past, was the predominant term used by the communist-nationalist “red-brown coalition” in the years of political crisis before the 1993 October events, but this was not consistent usage. Much more telling, as will be seen in Chapter V, was the exceedingly vague meaning ascribed to what in 1991/1992 was predominantly an anti-term – symbolizing everything the Soviet Union was not.

And yet, it was the Soviet state which first associated democracy and statehood, although its history within Russian political thought is much older. As *demokratiia*, it was first brought into the vocabulary of the early Russia socialists of the 1840s via French thinkers. Although the Greek meaning of “rule by all the people” was known, the sense in which it was more commonly understood in Tsarist Russia until the revolution was class-based – “rule by the common people”, i.e. a term of differentiation from the aristocracy and the (admittedly small) bourgeoisie.⁴³ In this meaning, Billington argues, “democracy in Russian social thought was (...) juxtaposed from the beginning to constitutionalism or liberalism as understood in the West.” This distinction persisted to a large degree – liberals, including the famed Decembrists, pursued the rule of law, i.e. “constitutionalism” and later the idea of a *pravovoe gosudarstvo*, rather than democracy on the level of the central state (the *Zemstvo* movement, which called for elected assemblies, was limited to the local level). It has to be noted, however, that the meaning of the concept did shift and it was taken up by the liberal cause during the last decades of the 19th century, as liberals became increasingly concerned with the inclusion of the peasantry into the political process, and liberal demands for a restriction of autocracy became mixed up with demands for an electoral democracy (even though only the socialists understood this to mean the extension of the right to vote to all social classes, this was a state of affairs in line with Western European understandings at the time).

This association was reinforced when persecutions by the state at the beginning of the 20th century threw liberal and socialist movements together into a

⁴³ see the entry „demokratiia“, in pod red. I.E. Andreevskago, *Entsiklopedicheskii Slovar'* (St. Petersburg: F. A. Brokgauz; I. A. Efron, isd. 1890-1904). Also Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution - Language and Symbols of 1917* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 122 ff. and Billington, *The Icon and the Axe*, 378.

defensive alliance. Interestingly, and probably due to the “socialist” connotations of the term, their demands in the 1905 revolution were mainly for a constitutional and parliamentary monarchy with universal suffrage, avoiding calling this state of affairs “democracy”. While the meaning of democracy changed during this politically volatile period, the term nevertheless kept its class connotations right up to the revolution, especially in the population at large. In fact, as Figes and Kolonitskii note, in 1917 “*demokratia* was practically interchangeable with the words “*narod*” (the people) and *trudiashchikhsia* (the toilers) in the language of the street.”⁴⁴ This association was even stronger with the Slavic synonym of *demokratia*, *narodovlastie*, which carried associations of local democracy, village assemblies and the democratic ways in which peasants were purported to regulate their own affairs.

In the Soviet Union, there were important shifts in the meanings of the concept of democracy, although perhaps it represented less of a revolutionary break than could have been assumed. Given that parliamentary democracy was seen as a form of bourgeois class-rule, initially the Soviet political system was not to be identified as democracy. Lenin had advocated the installation of revolutionary Soviets (Councils) as the natural expression of political power in communist society and proclaimed the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ in a transitional period before the withering away of the state envisaged by Marxism. The political form of the state, therefore was Soviet, and the concept of democracy as a form of the state thus negativized and at the same time historicized, as something that did not correspond to Soviet reality. A 1936 Soviet dictionary noted that the term *narodovlastie* was “obsolete”.⁴⁵

However, in the later Khrushchev and especially the Brezhnev era, the concept of “socialist democracy” was floated together with that of the “all-people’s state” that was to replace the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ in the current phase of socialist development. The 1976 *Bol’shia Sovetskaia Entsiklopedia* described socialist democracy as the “only possible form of the socialist state”. What was referred to was not, of course, the liberal conception of political pluralism and a separation of powers, but “democratic centralism” in the form of the leading role of

⁴⁴Figes and Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution - Language and Symbols of 1917*, 122 f. They also note that in the revolutionary Russia of 1917 this social understanding of the concept “was not just dominant but dictatorial: no other construction of the term was allowed to challenge it”

⁴⁵Archie Brown, “Political Power and the Soviet State: Western and Soviet Perspectives,” in *The State in Socialist Society*, ed. Neil Harding (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), footnote 92.

the CPSU.⁴⁶ Thus, the concept of democracy not only retained the strongly class-based meaning it had had in pre-revolutionary Russia, but combined this with a notion of absolute authority of those in power.

When Gorbachev attempted to democratize the socialist system in the more “Western” sense of introducing political pluralism and ensuring the protection of basic human rights, there ensued a bewildering proliferation of meanings of the concept. As Lukin noted, “practically everybody in the USSR during the perestroika period, from Stalinists to members of the radically nationalist *Pamyat'*, declared themselves supporters of different forms of “democracy”. However, not everyone called himself a “democrat””.⁴⁷ In 1989 and 1990 the failure of Gorbachev to fully accept the consequences of his drive for the democratization of the Soviet system became apparent and democracy became more and more identified as that which made the West successful and which the Soviet Union lacked – broadening its meaning to not only a system of government, but also wealth, a certain lifestyle and “Western values”. The meaning of democracy to the opposition did not become clearer or more consensual by this, but it became clear that it consisted in a rejection of the class-based socialist model still propagated by Gorbachev and often, though not always, in a veneration of “Western democracy”, whatever that was taken to be.⁴⁸ At this point the circle which associates democracy and Russian statehood closes. In the case of Russia, as in the other Union republics, demands for sovereignty merged with demands for a radicalization of the democratic reform process. Yeltsin, a prominent face amongst those pushing for more radical democratization, was elected chairman of the Russian Congress of People’s deputies (CPD) in May 1990, and on 12 June 1990 the Russian CPD adopted a democratic reform programme and the Declaration of State Sovereignty of the RSFSR, referring to it as democratic state and declaring sovereignty “the natural and necessary condition for the existence of Russian statehood”.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ “democratic centralism” was enshrined in the 1977 constitution as the organizational principle of the Soviet state, but had its origins under Lenin. Its basic principle was election of all party organs from bottom to top, but decisions made on the top were mandatory, not to be challenged or discussed.

⁴⁷ Alexander Lukin, *Political Culture of the Russian “Democrats”* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), 192.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Ch. 6.

⁴⁹ “RSFSR Declaration of Sovereignty, 12 June 1990,” (www.lexis-nexis.com: BBC Summary of World Broadcasts SU/0792/B/ 1, 16 June 1990).

5. The semantic fields of Russian identity and the state

I have claimed in the previous chapter that representations of the Russian state were a large part of Russian identity discourses more broadly conceived, and have hinted at the fact that this was a representation that differed somewhat from the Westphalian nation-state model, with its assumption that the state somehow emerges from and is representative of the people (which makes it possible to speak about a “state identity” and collective identity together in the first place). Discursive representations of Russian identity are commonly presented under the broad categories of the debate between Slavophiles and Westernizers, based on the question whether Russia was or ought to be part of Europe. Without doubt, this is the fundamental question of Russian identity; it is, however, by no means the only one. Historically, representations of the state as “Russia” were intertwined with the broad questions of the debate, but they also cross-cut it and even remain outside its remit – and this, as the following chapters will show, remains very much the case in post-Soviet Russia. However, first of all it should be clarified in which ways images of the state were part of broader discourses of Russian identity, to what extent the state could be equated with “Russia”, given that it was not via the image of the state as representative of and emerging from the nation.

Some of the reasons for this may have become clear during the discussion of concepts of statehood above. As Geoffrey Hosking has argued, in Russia “the building and maintaining of empire obstructed the formation of a nation”.⁵⁰ This does not mean that the concept of a Russian nation or people – indeed several different concepts of the Russian nation – did not exist in Russian identity discourses; however, these conceptions of nationhood had to be generated partly in opposition to the empire bearing the name of “Russia”, and only a minority of them would actually aim to construct a Russian nation in the Western European sense. In fact, in the past the concept of the nation was, and to a large extent still is, a specialized ethnographic term, applied to the many ethnic minorities living in the Russian empire and the Russian Federation; nationalism in this sense had, and continues to have, a negative connotation, as a particularist force threatening the unity of the central state.⁵¹ In fact,

⁵⁰ Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia - People and Empire* (London: Fontana Press, 1998).

⁵¹ Andreas Kappeler *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2001), Hans Rogger, “Nationalism and the State: A Russian Dilemma,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 4, no. 3 (1962).

the more commonly used term to refer to the Russians was and remains *narod*, the people.

Referring to Russia and the Russians reveals more semantic subtleties. As students of Russian identity regularly point out, the Russian language offers two terms for the word “Russian”: *russkii*, which applies to people, language and culture, and *rossiiskii*, which refers to the state and the multinational empire. This dichotomy becomes even more visible in the two names for Russia, *Rossiia* and *Rus'*. *Rossiia*, the modern state and the empire, a pseudo-classical coinage of the 16th century, was brought into circulation by Peter I (who, as we have seen, latinized and thus consciously Westernized his own title and that of the empire). *Rus'* (etymologically not related to *Rossiia*, but related to *russkii*), on the other hand, was the pre-modern term for a people and later a state whose epicentre was in what today is Ukraine (“Kievan Rus’”). Later, it became an “imagined space”, a symbolic, highly evocative term that has everything to do with rural Russia, the Russian landscape, symbolic places, the religion and culture of the peasants and nothing with the state and the empire. This, in fact, indicates one of the major fault lines in the discursive representation of Russian identity, older, and arguably broader in scope, than the debate between Slavophiles and Westernizers, with which it only partly overlaps: a more or less open opposition between a representation of Russia as located in the (common) people, the soil, nature, but also language and culture (the symbolic importance of Pushkin for Russian identity cannot be over-estimated), and that which puts the state, over and above the people, at the centre of representations of Russian identity. And while the debate between Slavophiles and Westernizers was the defining intellectual debate of the intelligentsia, a relatively small number of intellectuals (though its influence extended beyond this narrow group), images of Russia as *Rus'* or *Rossiia* had a far broader reach, in folk mythology and in discursive representations of the state, and perhaps more importantly, in the self-legitimation of Russia’s autocratic rulers.⁵² Both Slavophiles and Westernizers took up these images and developed them further.

⁵² Robin Milner-Gulland, *The Russians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997). Note also that this sheds light on the trend among some Western analysts to see the increased use of the term *russkii* in Russian official discourse in the second Putin administration as evidence for an emerging Russian ethnic identity and thus for a nation in the Westphalian sense. The broad reach of the term, which is much more than either language or ethnicity, makes this doubtful.

For Hosking, this distinction between Rossiia and Rus' led to the development of “two Russias”, distancing the imperial state from the people, a gap that became wider during the 18th and 19th centuries and was one of the causes for the total collapse of the imperial state in 1917. Arguably, this distinction was not resolved during the Soviet Union, a state which had a difficult and exceedingly ambiguous relationship with the legacy of Russia.⁵³ It persists in many ways in post-Soviet Russia, which so far has not become a Westphalian nation-state in either a civic or an ethnic sense, despite the fact that it is, for the first time in modern times, a state with a vast majority of ethnic Russians.

The way that the state is represented as Russia in official and political discourse in post-Soviet Russia will be traced over the following chapters. As already pointed out, at present this is not an exercise in the elaboration of a fully-fledged and orchestrated “state ideology”, but rather the use of terms which either have a historical resonance in discourses of Russian identity, such as that of Russia as Great Power, and those which more recently have become a core identity of the Russian state, such as democracy. In both cases, their use was aimed at ad-hoc legitimization, rather than an elaborate representation of a coherent image of the Russian state – and this remains true even under Putin, whose administration consciously sought to promote the values of “state patriotism”. Nevertheless, the full resonance of Russian representations of statehood includes their place in various strands of Russian identity discourses.

This, incidentally, underlies the normative force of these concepts and may explain their continuous use in a radically altered context. As has been pointed out above, there is a wide gap between the meaning of the concepts that constitute the domestic and external identities of the new Russian state and the context in which they are employed. Both the image of the Russian state as a democracy and the image of the Russian state as Great Power and strong state are proposed as normative conceptions, which are only partly matched by their present reality (arguably, this is the case even under Putin, and the new presentation of Russia as “energy superpower”). This gap is possible precisely because these conceptions of the Russian state are reflecting a broader identity discourse, in all its contradictions and permutations, that has been a part of Russian intellectual life for centuries.

⁵³ More on this in Chapter V.

Historically, the state was implicated in representations of Russian identity in many different ways; however, what is of interest here, as in the empirical part of the thesis, is not the way in which the state used representations of Russian identity (state nationalism), but the images of the state themselves, as they appear in identity discourses, and the ways they tie into other themes of Russian identity. These concern both the Westernizer/Slavophile debate and other representations of Russian identity.

Some of these images have been hinted at above, in the discussion of the conceptual history of *derzhava* and democracy. There was, for one the image of the good, paternalistic state that was prevalent in Slavophile discourse (but once again, by no means did it entirely overlap with Slavophile positions). Democracy, in this conception, was divisive and furthered only petty self-interest; it was not in line with the Slavophile idea of unity in a specifically Russian community, expressed in the concept of *sobornost'*.⁵⁴ In this, the state was habitually represented as transcendental, expressive of a “Russian idea”; it represented Russia itself, the unity of Russia in the figure of the Tsar.⁵⁵ It is this image of the state that was actively promoted in phases in which the Tsarist regime felt it necessary to legitimate its autocratic rule, such as in the wake of the Decembrist revolt and the Polish uprising of 1830. The formula of “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, *narodnost'*”, developed by Count Sergei Uvarov, Minister of Education under Nicholas I, stressed a primordial unity of state and people in the face of beginning pressures for nationalist and democratic change.⁵⁶ As Hosking points out, this triad was whittled down during the 19th century to the idea of political unity around the person of the Tsar as the embodiment of the state.⁵⁷ It was a state-promoted representation of the state as embodiment of Russia, but it was a spectacularly unsuccessful one; ultimately the promotion of this formula only served to widen “the gulf between the ideology of the Government and that of the people.”⁵⁸

Images of Russia as Great Power, with their emphasis on independence, traditionally could be linked up to ideas about Russia’s cultural uniqueness

⁵⁴ Tim McDaniel, *The Agony of the Russian Idea* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁵⁵ Hellberg-Hirn, *Soil and Soul: the Symbolic World of Russianness*, Ch. 4.

⁵⁶ Vera Tolz, *Inventing the Nation - Russia* (London: Arnold, 2000), 78 f.

⁵⁷ Geoffrey Hosking, “Empire and Nation-Building in Late Imperial Russia,” in *Russian Nationalism, Past and Present*, ed. Geoffrey Hosking and Robert Service (Hounds-mills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998).

⁵⁸ A. Kornilov, *Modern Russian History from the age of Catherine the Great to the end of the 19th Century*, quoted in Tolz, *Inventing the Nation - Russia*, 79.

(*samobytnost'*); they also connected the imagery of divine right, embodied in the *derzhava* as the symbol of the divinely granted, personal power of the tsar, with orthodoxy as a core element of Russian identity. This linked the concept of *derzhava* with the Slavophile idea of Russian messianism, in which Russia as a Great Power occupied a special place as civilization's (read: the Christian West's) bulwark against the infidel – later institutionalized in the metaphor of Moscow as the “Third Rome”.⁵⁹

Read like this, the idea of Russia as Great Power had elements of an identification of Russia with a larger notion of Christian civilization, even though (in a paradoxical twist not untypical for Russian debates about “Russia”), it became part of the arsenal of ideas of the pan-Slavs in the latter half of the 19th century and, in this, both a legitimization of aggressive imperialist expansion, and an expression of Russian uniqueness, its superiority over both the backward “East” (the Ottoman empire) and the overtly rationalist, soulless West. At the same time, however, the doctrine of Moscow as “Third Rome” was taken up by neo-Romantic and idealist philosophers (in themselves borrowing from German romantic nationalism). Here it became representative of “a universalism borne by Russia, but not essentially Russian in nature”, with the neo-Romantic philosopher Vladimir Solov'ev once again developing the idea of Christian universalism.⁶⁰ He saw Russia's mission in the unification of East and West into an organic whole, capable of overcoming all tensions and particularism that separated them.⁶¹

This universalist idea of Russia as mediator and conciliator may sit in uneasy tension with the focus on independence that has likewise been part of the concept of *derzhava*; however, it chimes with another core representation that directly touches the image of the Russian state, that of space, and especially the ambivalent, unlimited nature of Russian space. Space, or “the real and imaginary geography of Russianness”, is a central element in representations of Russian identity. The issue of space reveals yet another ambivalence of Russian identity representations – the ambiguous tension between an enclosed, fenced, protected private space, the closed

⁵⁹ See Marshall T. Poe, “Moscow, the Third Rome: The Origins and Transformations of A “Pivotal Moment”,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 49 (2001).

⁶⁰ Ibid.: 423 f.

⁶¹ Solov'ev here transfers another core representation in Russian identity discourses to the level of the international, that of a uniquely Russian kind of community, *sobornost'* – often depicted as alternative to the divisions and oppositions that characterize Western thought (though normally appearing as part of the “other” Russia, *Rus'*).

community of *sobornost'*, and that of boundlessness and vastness that appears as the defining feature of Russian territoriality and ultimately the Russian imperial state.⁶²

This representation of boundlessness as a defining element of the Russian state was linked during Tsarist times and in Slavophile and pan-Slav discourses to the imperial might of the empire. Boundlessness here was above all the image of limitless expansion at staggering speed, something that did indeed reproduce the experience of Russia's imperial expansion into Siberia in the 16th and 17th centuries. As Sergei Medvedev summed it up,

The Russian Empire was the consequence and a hostage of its geography, but not in the geopolitical sense. The boundless, insuperable and heterogeneous space lent itself not to practical (highly impractical, in fact) but rather to symbolic assimilation. The growth of Russia was not an act of economical, strategic or metaphysical necessity - it was a spatial and symbolic act, a semiotic act.⁶³

This expansion, Russia's continuously shifting boundaries, also introduced an ambivalence of domestic and external space in representations of Russia's imperial statehood. Unlike the British and the French empires, the Russian empire was land-based, which meant that the territorial core of "Russia" was not delimited from those parts which were effectively colonies. This ambiguous territoriality became visible in the way that social stratification, rather than national or territorial differences, determined the distribution of power in the empire. The local aristocracy was easily absorbed into the imperial state elite; the peasantry, both in Russia and the colonial territories, remained wholly separated from the state.⁶⁴ As Medvedev put it, the result was "a culture lacking a spatial sense. This may sound ironic in a nation living under the spell of space, but there is a weakness in Russian culture of a distinct reaction to space, i.e. a relatively vagueness of distance, border and places."⁶⁵

This ambivalence of space reflects back onto the question of Russia's relationship with the "imagined space" of the West, which reproduced a similar kind of ambivalence. Whatever the individual positions in the debate between Slavophiles and Westernizers, the fact that the debate continued and is continuing in post-Soviet Russia without a solution already illustrates the inherent ambiguity of Russia's

⁶² Hellberg-Hirn, *Soil and Soul: the Symbolic World of Russianness*, 231 ff. Emma Widdis, "Russia as Space," in *National Identity in Russian Culture*, ed. Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis (Cambridge: CUP, 2004).

⁶³ Medvedev, "A General Theory of Russian Space: A Gay Science and a Rigorous Science," 25.

⁶⁴ Kappeler *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History*.

⁶⁵ Medvedev, "A General Theory of Russian Space: A Gay Science and a Rigorous Science," 18.

relationship with the West and its representation as part of the conceptual field of Russian identity, a relationship in which there may be periodic phases of oscillation, but no resolution into either total identification or difference.

The connection of space and state, and, in particular, the dependence of Russia's Great Power status on its geographic position between Asia and Europe, found its development in Eurasianist thought, which developed among Russian émigrés in the 1920s, drawing on the then fashionable geopolitical thought of Haushofer and Mackinder. Eurasianism linked back to the idea of Russia as the unifier of cultural and civilizational identities by stressing that Russia's geographic location between Europe and Asia and its cultural location at the margins of these civilizations was a source of strength, not weakness. Ideas about space and ideas about culture merged in this conception with the image of the strong state which is necessary to master this space and to provide a focal point necessary to achieve the unity of a fundamentally heterogeneous and pluralistic space.⁶⁶

Thus, concepts of the state are part of diverse positions in a broader identity discourse, a discourse which reaches back to positions developed in the 19th and early 20th centuries and which makes use of historical memories of empire and the role of the state in Russian society. These are positions which in themselves link up domestic and external conceptions of Russianness, both in the way that the Westernizer/Slavophile debate is intertwined with domestic and external representations of Russian statehood and in the fundamental ambiguity of space that underlay them. While the Soviet Union broke with many of the traditional templates that associated statehood and identity (the monarchy, orthodoxy), it perpetuated the fundamental ambiguity of space. Even more, as will be explored in greater detail in Chapter V, the Soviet Union added a fundamental level of ambiguity to the concept of Russia itself. It both was and was not a continuation of Russia's imperial statehood, creating an even more ambiguous overlap of federalism, nation-state and imperial structure. The RSFSR was, on one level, just one among other federative republics that together made up the Soviet Union. On another level it was much more, the core of the Soviet empire; and on yet another, it was much less, since it did not even possess the same formal attributes of statehood that had been granted to the other Union republics.

⁶⁶ See Dmitry Shlapentokh, "Eurasianism Past and Present," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 30, no. 2 (1997).

6. Conclusion: Russia's post-Soviet "identity crisis" and representations of statehood

The ways in which representations of the state were entangled with other themes and narratives of Russian identity may have been one reason why the break-up of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the Russian Federation was widely perceived to leave the new Russian state with a profound "identity crisis". After all, a continuous 500-year history of imperial statehood had come to an end with the fall of the Soviet Union. As will be explored in greater detail in Chapter V, there was a real question in 1991/1992 whether this new state could actually lay claim to stand for "Russia", and the vitriolic battle between the Yeltsin camp and the nationalist-communist opposition was, among other things, about precisely this question. With symbolic territories, especially Ukraine, now outside the Russian state, the construction of borders – and the very distinction between domestic and international – had a normative as well as a material dimension, a fact expressed in the expression "the near abroad" to refer to the newly independent states of the FSU – states not domestic, but not quite foreign either.

All this means that the conceptual field of the state in post-Soviet Russia is far from neutral or merely descriptive; it is both highly normative and laden with distinctive historical layers of meaning that are invoked every time a concept is used, and certainly when claims to continuity of statehood are made by the political elite. The concepts of Russia as Great Power, strong state and democracy all constitute representations of the Russian state as an actor. The intertwining of representations of ambiguous space and statehood mean that the very territoriality of the Russian state is a question of the identity of "Russia".

It will be seen in subsequent chapters that representations of the Russian state as Russia continue to matter for the self-legitimization of the Russian elite. Its glorious past as an empire is invoked with regard to the script of Russia as Great Power and as strong state, markedly under Putin, but this was a regular occurrence from the inception of the new Russian state. Nevertheless, an appeal to historical continuity does not mean that the post-Soviet Russian state is developing into an empire, not even on the level of conceptual representations. The context of Russian statehood has changed far too much for this to be the case, and as will be seen, the meaning of Russia as Great Power was adapting to this changed context rather than vice versa.

That said, certain aspects of the older, imperial meaning of statehood do reappear – in particular the ambiguous representation of domestic and external space. Historically, in Tsarist Russia with its peculiar form of land-based imperialism, the meaning of “empire” was co-determined by its domestic and external aspects.⁶⁷ Externally, it included being recognized by other states as a Great Power; domestically it signified rule over a multiplicity of peoples and a vast expanse of territory and connotations of a central state strong enough to exert this rule. In both, it implied an image of the state – embodied in the Tsar – as independent actor, detached from the population over which it reigned and moving both in domestic and international space. This indicates a reading of sovereignty (symbolized by the *Derzhava*, the imperial orb) as independent action, rather than the focus on the territorial distinctions so fundamental to the Westphalian narrative. It allowed for a certain ambiguity of territoriality, expressed in the conception of Russia as “boundless space”. As will be seen in the following chapters, this ambiguity of territoriality, of conflation of domestic and external, and the “imagined space of the West”, continue to be part of the representations of the Russian state after the end of empire.

The ambiguity of space, linked to a claim to Russia’s pivotal position as reaching out to both Asia and Europe is also a strong feature of a neo-Eurasianist tradition of thought that has emerged since 1991, propagated by Russian academics like Panarin and Dugin, the latter advocating an expansionism not unlike that of the *Lebensraum* thinkers of 1920’s Germany.⁶⁸ Even if the openly anti-democratic and neo-imperialist tendencies of this particular current of Russia’s identity discourse has not become a mainstream position, and it would be wrong to see the Russian political elite following a fully-fledged Eurasianist ideology, its scripts have found their way into the conceptual field of Russia’s state identity, especially under Putin.

Representations of the Russian state as democracy also link up with this inherent ambiguity of territoriality and, in a much more explicit way, with the question of Russia’s belonging to the West. The legitimizing force of the concept of democracy and the description of the Russian state as democratic arguably relies both on the role that “democracy”, and its association with sovereignty, played

⁶⁷ Dominic Lieven, *Empire* (London: John Murray, 2000).

⁶⁸ Vladimir Kolossov and Rostislav Turovsky, “Russian Geopolitics at the Fin-De-Siecle,” *Geopolitics* 6 (2001), A.P. Tsygankov, “Mastering Space in Eurasia: Russia’s Geopolitical Thinking after the Soviet Break-Up,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 36 (2003).

during the inception of the new Russian state, and on the peculiar association with power that it has acquired after the end of the Soviet Union in the normative hierarchy of international society – linking images of Russia as democracy and as Great Power. Connected to this is the way in which democracy is intertwined with representations of the West – both as imagined space within Russia, and in the world. The legitimizing power it derives from this is directed at least as much at the Russian population as at an international audience – and both may be subsumed to the self-legitimization of the Russian political elite.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, here too, its past use in the Russian context matters, even if its association with the conceptual field of the state was much more recent.

Both the meanings of Russia as democracy and as Great Power were to change considerably between 1991 and the Putin period, as will become clear in subsequent chapters. Nevertheless, the basic intertwining of domestic and external representations remained, and so did the ambiguities of space that were immanent in the conceptual field of the Russian state. The concepts of *gosudarstvennost'/derzhavnost'* and democracy thus constitute a Janus-faced conception of the Russian state in which its domestic and its international identities as an actor are co-constituted.

⁶⁹ Barker, *Legitimating Identities: the Self-Presentation of Rulers and Subjects*.

Chapter V

Space and Power as essentially contested concepts – the emergence of the Russian state in public political discourse, 1991/92

In effect the problem of Russia's relations with the outside world has turned into a question of how Russia sees itself, that is, it has become a subject of internal political struggle.

Konstantin Eggert, *Izvestiia*, 7 August 1992

Efforts have been made to single out separate concepts from Russia's history and to translate into today's reality events that are believed to be able to help us regain our social self-awareness and find our place in the world as a community, a culture and a civilization. All the more pressing in this connection is the need to understand and adopt these very concepts which we hope may help us overcome our past, comprehend our present and see into our future. Concepts that were shaped in the past and events that our ancestors went through are kind of transferred into the present times to be re-understood and lived through once again.

Yuri Afanasiev, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 2 April 1992

1. Introduction

The concepts that delineate the new Russian state as an international and domestic actor, and serve at the same time as markers of "Russia" and thus as categories of identity, were not free-floating in the political discourse of the Russian elite. They were bound up with a larger semantic field outlining the statehood of post-Soviet Russia. In 1991 and 1992, the period traced in this chapter, these foundational concepts were constitutive of a new polity, in the sense of establishing

the Russian Federation quite literally as a distinct political space. This arguably gives special weight to the meaning that was given to them by the various political factions competing for power during and after the dissociation of Russia from the Soviet Union. In fact the semantic field of state identity established at this point may have changed in emphasis and meaning, but its foundational concepts persisted into the Putin era. In 1991/92, this semantic field established the new state as “Russia” and, at the same time, linked up with the broader discourse about Russia’s identity that had sprung up among the country’s political and intellectual elite.

This very initial period, quite literally a protracted “coming-into-being” of the Russian Federation, was dominated by intense political struggle between the presidency and the nationalist and communist opposition in the Duma. In part, this struggle was about visions of what the new Russian state ought to be. At the same time, this early stage of state-building was in a very real sense about situating the new Russia in a world which had changed dramatically after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In this, the constitution of the Russian state through representations of domestic and external agency was tied up with shifting representations of space – not only of the territorial extension of “Russia”, but also about a fluid meaning of “domestic” and “international” as distinct (or not so distinct) spheres, both with relation to borders and the space of the FSU and what can be called the “imagined space” of the West.¹

The concept of “statehood” (*gosudarstvennost’*) in the Russian context refers to both the institutional and territorial setup of a state and, at the same time, it carries the normative meanings of referring to the state as a powerful actor, domestically and internationally. References to “weak” or “fragile” statehood in the first year after the break-up of the Soviet Union reflected on an immediate level the real weakness of the new state as a domestic actor which was underpinned by the weakness of central institutions of the state, including the institution of sovereignty – both with regard to borders which separate domestic and external space and with regard to control over this domestic space. In some ways, however, this was the undercurrent to a more pervasive normative crisis that revolved around the meaning of Russia’s statehood and ultimately the meaning of “Russia” – the way in which representations of the Russian state as an actor situated in space referred to or constituted various levels of

¹ See also the discussion of the conceptual field of Russian identity and the state in Chapter IV.

Russian collective self-representations. Here, the underlying question was whether the new state could really lay claim to representing “Russia”, something that was affirmed by the Yeltsin camp, but heavily contested by the nationalist and communist opposition. It is in this context that conceptions of the state and especially the semantic fields of *derzhava* (Great Power) and democracy have to be situated immediately after the break-up of the Soviet Union.

2. Sovereignty, the disentangling of “Russia” and the territorialisation of the Russian state

The Russian declaration of sovereignty on 12 June 1990 was not the beginning of an independent statehood for the RSFSR, nor was it meant be.² It was all about politics – an instrument in the struggle for power which Yeltsin and the democratic opposition he led waged against Gorbachev and the Soviet centre. From 1990 onwards Yeltsin chose the arena of the RSFSR to push forward a reform agenda that was increasingly being blocked by hard-liners at the Union level.³ Nevertheless, it set in motion a process that gained a momentum all of its own during 1991 which could be called the “territorialization” of the RSFSR and which provided the condition of the possibility of its independent statehood. After all, the RSFSR, unlike all other constituent republics of the Soviet Union did not possess a full set of institutions of power, lacking, most importantly, its own branch of the Communist Party. Instead, the institutions of Soviet power – first and foremost the Kremlin – were situated on its territory. This was one of the ways in which there was a curious overlap of the imagined spaces of the Soviet Union and “Russia”, as will be seen below.

In fact, a result of the political struggle between what were effectively different echelons of the Soviet power structure was the “quiet encroachment” of Soviet institutions by the RSFSR, in which the newly sovereign Russian institutions

²Henry E. Hale, *The Strange Death of the Soviet Union*, Ponars Working Paper 12 (Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 1999).

³For an overview of the time, see Judith Devlin, *The Rise of the Russian Democrats: the Causes and Consequences of the Elite Revolution* (Aldershot; Brookfield: E. Elgar, 1995), John B. Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), Roman Szporluk, *Russia, Ukraine, and the Breakup of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2000).

began to acquire power over the territory of the RSFSR: taking over the prerogatives of the Soviet centre, declaring the primacy of Russian law over Soviet law, “departifying” and thus effectively Russifying institutions. This process of “territorializing” the new state reached its height in highly symbolic acts of taking over Soviet real estate, including the centres of Soviet power in Moscow, after the failed putsch of August 1991. This appropriation of state infrastructure, and thus the means to exercise power, gave the RSFSR the physical, territorial presence as state that it had hitherto lacked. It was a process which culminated on 25th December 1991 in the raising of the new Russian flag over the Kremlin, not only a building but the most significant physical metaphor of Russian statehood, the very embodiment of state power in Russia. With this, “Russia” had emerged as a new political space separate from the Soviet Union, a space which had moved from a metaphorical discursive construction to a physical reality and was embodied in the RSFSR. The aim of the democratic opposition who were the leaders of this new incarnation of Russia (which in 1991 still encompassed most of the forces which in 1992 were to split up into opposing political camps) was both to occupy this space and to obtain enough political agency to push through economic and democratic reforms. In the language of the reformers, the former Soviet centre was represented as a quasi-colonial power, and Russia was no different from other Union republics in its relation to it.⁴

This conscious positioning against the Soviet centre as Russia’s “Other” could well have meant that the Russian state was perceived as essentially “a new state, grafted onto the rump of the old empire”, as Sakwa put it.⁵ At the same time, however, the relationship between the new Russian state and the Soviet Union was deeply ambiguous, counteracted and counterbalanced by the fact that the majority of the Russian democrats, and certainly Yeltsin and his supporters, were not willing to reject the Soviet framework within which they moved. At the same time as the Russian state was constituted as a distinct political and territorial space in 1990 and 1991, there existed a parallel representation of the Russian state as part of a union – disentangled from it, to be sure, but not fully independent. In a television interview a year after his election as president of the RSFSR, Yeltsin recounted that

⁴Roman Solchanyk, *Ukraine and Russia: the Post-Soviet Transition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), Szporluk, *Russia, Ukraine, and the Breakup of the Soviet Union*.

⁵Richard Sakwa, *Russian Politics and Society*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1996).

We were expecting the union to continue to exist. We were only fighting for greater autonomy for ourselves within the framework of the union and trying to hand over fewer functions to the union leadership itself – that was our main task.⁶

After the abortive coup of 1991, the democratic movement actually split over the question of continuity in Russia's statehood and the question of Russian nationalism, a split that was partly to dominate the political scene of the formative years of the new Russian state.⁷ Nevertheless, the reformers around Yeltsin remained ambiguous about the question of independence to the very last, when the refusal of Ukraine to sign a new Union treaty led to the final collapse of the Soviet Union. The confederation that was hastily cobbled together to replace it, tellingly named the "Community of Independent States", was in itself an attempt to preserve some form of union, however heavily amputated, between the states of the former Soviet Union, and especially between Ukraine and Russia.⁸

Underlying this ambiguous representation of the RSFSR and its claim to embody a totally new postcolonial "Russia", was a widely shared perception that Russia was not, after all, such a new state. In this version the "re-birth of Russia" did not refer to an insurgent nation gaining statehood against a colonial centre but the re-emergence of the Russian state liberated from the embrace of the Communist party.⁹ Yeltsin's inauguration speech as President of the RSFSR in July 1991 carried the message of this ambiguity. In the month preceding the presidential election he had often enough portrayed the Soviet centre as imperial power with which Russia had to break decisively. Now, however, at the same time as he confirmed Russia's sovereignty, he also established a clear and uninterrupted continuity between the imperial and the new Russian state:

Esteemed citizens of Russia! Peoples Deputies! Fellow countrymen and respected guests! Words cannot convey the feelings I am experiencing at this minute. For the first time in the thousand-year history of Russia, a president is solemnly swearing in before his fellow citizens. There is no higher honour than that which is bestowed on someone by the people. There is no higher duty that the citizens of a state elect one to.¹⁰

⁶"Interview with Boris Yeltsin," (BBC SWB SU/1406/B/ 1, 11 June 1992).

⁷Lukin, *Political Culture of the Russian "Democrats"*.

⁸Szporluk, *Russia, Ukraine, and the Breakup of the Soviet Union*, Edward W. Walker, *Dissolution - Sovereignty and the Breakup of the Soviet Union* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

⁹Sakwa, *Russian Politics and Society*.

¹⁰"Speech by Yeltsin at his Inauguration as RSFSR President, 10 July 1991," (BBC SWB SU/1121/C2/ 1, 11 July 1991).

Similar sentiments had been expressed by Kozyrev, who earlier had declared,

But let us not forget that we are restoring a statehood which has a history and a culture that span many centuries. An underestimation of this at home or abroad would be a political miscalculation (...) Russia is fated to be a Great Power.¹¹

The ease with which these representations of continuity were uttered by all parts of the democratic and nationalist opposition in 1991 was a reflection of the conflation of "Russia" and "Soviet Union" during the Soviet period, in particular the thoroughly ambiguous definition of the Russian nation as "state-bearing nationality of a centralized state" promoted in the Soviet Union from the 1930s.¹² In fact, while the RSFSR lacked many of the Soviet institutions of power, Russians dominated the higher echelons of the Soviet Union and Russian language and high culture was promoted as a common Soviet cultural identity.¹³ While "Russia" in the form of the RSFSR was therefore denied the kind of autonomy granted to other republics, the top of the Soviet power centre, the party and the state, were effectively russified. The result was a thorough confusion over the respective identities of Russia and the Soviet Union which persisted to the very end. Gorbachev, for one, had been noted to say "Russia" when he was referring to the Soviet Union, even as the RSFSR was increasingly a threat to the Soviet state.¹⁴

The spatial dimension of the RSFSR was equally ambiguous. It was a somewhat artificial creation, consisting of the territories left over after the borders of the non-Russian republics had been drawn, administrative borders that were never demarcated on the ground and within which no independent Russian state had ever existed. Certainly, some of the most resonating "memory places" with which the official narrative of Russian identity was traditionally connected were to be found outside these borders, in Ukraine, which in fact was considered by many an integral and essential part of the Russian state.¹⁵ Other, much more recent, colonial conquests such as the north Caucasus were included in the territory of the RSFSR, although the

¹¹"Russian Foreign Minister at RSFSR Supreme Soviet, 11 Oct 1990," (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts SU/0895/B/ 1, 15 October 1990).

¹² Terry Martin, "An Affirmative Action Empire," in *A State of Nations*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (Oxford: OUP, 2001), Ronald Grigor Suny, "The Empire Strikes out - Imperial Russia, "National" Identity and Theories of Empire," in *A State of Nations*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny (Oxford: OUP, 2001).

¹³Tolz, *Inventing the Nation - Russia*.

¹⁴ Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire*.

¹⁵ Solchanyk, *Ukraine and Russia: the Post-Soviet Transition*. On "memory places" see Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux De Mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984).

symbolic weight they carried was, if anything, a reference to imperial statehood. This, together with the status of the Russians as special state-bearing nation, did much to conflate the Soviet state with “Russia”.¹⁶

This conflation was reflected in ambiguous Soviet conceptions of sovereignty and independence within the Soviet bloc – understandings that were to some extent at the basis of the Russian declaration of sovereignty of 1990. In fact, the declaration could be supported by all shades of the political spectrum, precisely because its meaning was widely open to interpretation.¹⁷ The Soviet Union had what could be called a hyper-Westphalian understanding of its external borders (extended, as much as possible, to the external borders of its “external empire”), constructing them as an impenetrable dividing line between Soviet territory and the hostile West as the very negation of everything the Soviet Union stood for.

At the same time, the meaning of the concept of sovereignty became more fluid within the space of influence of the Soviet empire. This started with the concept of “limited sovereignty” with regard to the Warsaw pact countries (absolute national sovereignty in principle, but the common interest of socialist states meant that they would always act in unison in practice) and ended with the absolute sovereignty and right to secession of the national republics of the Soviet Union itself granted by the constitution, which concealed the reality of a unitary state.¹⁸ This lent a fundamental amorphousness to the concept of sovereignty which was not resolved before the collapse of the Soviet Union and was carried over into Russia’s independent statehood. It was therefore entirely possible to demand sovereignty without seeing this as in any way related to the disentangling and delineation of the imagined spaces of the RSFSR and the Soviet Union. As the political commentator Alexander Tsipko summed it up, “Moscow cannot secede from Moscow”.¹⁹

Given this legacy, the tension between a discourse of rupture and differentiation from the Soviet Union and claims to historical continuity both in statehood and identity were central issues in the political debates about the new state in 1991/92, and always touched on the central underlying issue of whether the

¹⁶ Martin, “An Affirmative Action Empire.”, Vera Tolz, “Conflicting Homeland Myths and Nation-State Building in Post-Communist Russia,” *Slavic Review* 57, no. 2 (1998).

¹⁷ Walker, *Dissolution - Sovereignty and the Breakup of the Soviet Union*.

¹⁸ Robert A. Jones, *The Soviet Concept of Limited Sovereignty from Lenin to Gorbachev* (Hounds-mill, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990).

¹⁹ Quoted in Roman Solchanyk, “Ukraine, the (Former) Center, Russia, and “Russia”,” *Studies in Comparative Communism* 25, no. 1 (1995).

imagined space of “Russia” could really be embodied by the RSFSR and the Russian Federation. This tension existed between groups which differed deeply on whether to preserve the Union, but also within the camp of the new state builders.²⁰ In fact, it can be said that the RSFSR as the basis of a new Russian state had few supporters when the Soviet Union collapsed in the last months of 1991, both amongst those who wanted to preserve some form of union and amongst those who saw the Russian state as fundamentally new. The split in the Democratic Russia movement in November 1991 reflected this: it was over the question of whether to have a united Russia with special rights over the substantial number of Russians who would now officially live abroad, or whether to advocate a “united but divisible Russia”, thus giving freedom of secession to the autonomous republics within Russia, in line with Yeltsin’s quip “take as much sovereignty as you can swallow”. The alternative that eventually came to be – a Russian state within the borders of the RSFSR – was curiously absent in this debate.²¹

3. “Statehood in crisis” and overlapping domestic and external spaces

Given these preconditions, it is not surprising that the representations of the new Russian state as actor in the concepts of Great Power and democracy were intertwined with ambiguous representations of imagined space. This was true first and foremost with regard to the construction of the domestic and the international as distinct, or indeed not so distinct, spheres. After all, images of the Russian state as an active agent were being formulated in a context where the statehood of this agent was entirely amorphous, in a process of becoming, and where the international space in which it was supposed to move was being re-constituted after the fall of the Soviet Union. Concepts of the state as specific kind of subject or actor were thus bound up with and overshadowed by this ambiguous take on the fundamental question of “Russia as space”.²²

²⁰ The latter, very idealist, strand was represented by the prominent democrat Yury Afanasiev, amongst others.

²¹ Lukin, *Political Culture of the Russian "Democrats"*.

²² Widdis, “Russia as Space.”

In that context, the spatial extent of the new Russian state, as well as the issue of whether or not Russia was identical with the Soviet state, were subject to heated contestation within the emerging political elite. In fact, the question of whether or not to accept the break-up of the Soviet Union and see the borders of the RSFSR as the basis for a new Russian state was one of the main axes along which central politics had become polarized at the beginning of Russia's independent statehood. A rejection of the break-up of the Soviet Union and opposition to Yeltsin's attempted identification of "Russia" with the territory of the RSFSR was the one thing which united the disparate groups that emerged in opposition to Yeltsin.²³ Given that there was a very broad spectrum of "rejectionists" (those who rejected the break-up of the Soviet Union), ranging from ethnic Russian nationalists to imperial-minded neo-Stalinists, it is not surprising that there was a host of alternative conceptions of what the boundaries of the Russian state should look like, including a minority view which aimed at making Russia an ethnically homogenous nation state.²⁴ However, the dominant approach of "rejectionists" in the first half of 1992 tended to be simply to hope that the Soviet Union could be recreated in some form, be it as Russian imperial statehood or as socialist union. All this crystallized into a representation of "Russia's statehood in crisis" in the discourse of the political elite, a phrase which openly connected representations of domestic and external space.

3.1. Ambiguities of domestic and external space

From the start, there was thus a strong element of identity thinking, the definition of "Russia" in terms of memory and historical space, underlying perceptions of ambiguity of domestic and external space in post-Soviet Russia. This illustrates what has been argued in Chapter III, that the spatial dimension of the Russian state has to be understood not only in terms of sovereignty and territory, but also in terms of symbolic "imagined spaces" and their importance for Russia's statehood. As has been outlined in Chapter IV, the result of the break-up of all these categories was a profound uncertainty, perceived as an "identity crisis", as traditional symbolic representations of "Russia" clashed with the reality of the new Russian

²³Tolz, "Conflicting Homeland Myths and Nation-State Building in Post-Communist Russia."

²⁴Astrid S. Tuminez, "Russian Nationalism and the National Interest in Russian Foreign Policy," in *The Sources of Russian Foreign Policy after the Cold War*, ed. Celeste A. (ed.) Wallander (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996).

state. This is true for the symbolism of “vastness” as greatness, which was preserved in those traditionalist representations that associated Russia as a Great Power with images of a great country (*agromnaiia strana*). This representation problematised the retraction of borders that had taken place – not necessarily because of the importance of those specific borders as dividing lines, but because it was a retraction and not an expansion. On the other hand, the spatial dimension of the “identity crisis” derived from the symbolic significance of specific territories, especially parts of Ukraine, for Russian statehood. As Tsipko put it, “strictly speaking, without today’s Ukraine there is not, and cannot be a Russia in the true sense of the word”.²⁵ As a result, there was a feeling that the new Russian state was a non-entity, not worthy of “Russia”. Aleksandr Rutskoi, Yeltsin’s Vice-President and opponent as one of the leaders of the nationalist opposition, expressed the connection between these sentiments when he wrote early in 1992:

But there are questions that no person living on Russian soil can escape, no matter who he is. Why is a once great and powerful country that the whole world took into consideration turning into something vague before our eyes, with no clear borders, statehood or even name?²⁶

The question of Russia as imagined space also touched on representations of the West, of course, or, as the Yeltsin camp habitually put it, the “civilized world”, at the same time constituted by concrete relations with countries of the Western world and the imaginary space of the West. As will be seen, this was a central issue in representations of Russia as “democratic Great Power”. For many within the democratic movement, the new Russian state had become, or at least had finally acquired the right to aspire to, full inclusion into Europe and the West.²⁷ This was helped by the way in which domestic reforms were proceeding along Western lines – it will be seen below how the label “democratic” came to be associated with “liberal” and, above all, referred to economic reforms. However, this was also the point at which other themes familiar from the debates between Slavophiles and Westernizers were resurrected and seeped back into the framing of Russia’s “identity crisis” in the discourse of the political elite. This occurred predominantly under the influence of

²⁵ Alexander Tsipko, *Komsomolskaiia Pravda* 14 Jan 1992.

²⁶ Aleksandr Rutskoi, “Silnaia vlast’ - dla demokratii [Democracy Needs Strong Authority],” *Nezavisimaiia gazeta* 13 February 1992.

²⁷ This, as Iver Neumann has argued, indicated a shift from the Soviet dichotomy between a “true Europe” and a false, degenerate one. See Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe*. In fact, this dichotomy was resurrected under Putin, where Russia was identified as the new “true Europe” – see Chapter VI.

Eurasian ideas, which now seeped into the discursive representations of “Russia” by the opposition – and, lest there should be too much of a clear-cut opposition here, by some in the Yeltsin camp as well.²⁸ Here, the stress was on Russia’s uniqueness, the way it should be recognized as at least equal, but always separate by Europe and the West. As will be seen below, here too representations of Russia as Great Power were central, but the meaning given to these representations differed significantly from that of the “normal Great Power” proposed by Kozyrev.

In all this, context mattered – the representation of “statehood in crisis” and issues of “symbolic space” cannot be understood separately from the very real uncertainties affecting the Russian state in 1992. To a large extent, representations of the Russian state, its place in the world and its territorial and institutional shape, reflected the fact that it simply did not exist as a unitary actor at the time of independence, and made little progress towards this goal during the first year of its existence. Given the fragmentation of the new Russian Federation, both at the institutional and the territorial level, there were real questionmarks over the existence of Russia as a unified political space.

The idea of Russia as a unitary actor was challenged by the persistent institutional weakness of the new state. The year 1992 was characterized by deadlock in a constitutional debate which continued seamlessly from the RSFSR. This was not surprising, given that the institutional structure of the new Russian state was still determined by the 1979 RSFSR constitution, so heavily amended that by 1992 it had become contradictory and nearly unworkable. The new constitution, in the making since 1990, became an instrument in the power struggle between presidency and Duma and was blocked both at the 6th and 7th Congress of People’s Deputies (CPD) in April and December 1992. The institutional uncertainty that resulted from this was one reason why the Russian state remained somewhat shapeless in the first year of its independent existence. All these factors directly contravened the idea of the state as a strong, unitary actor that was handed down in traditional understandings of *gosudarstvennost’* and *derzhavnost’*.

That said, territoriality, and with it ambiguities of conceptions of “domestic” and “external” space, remained the most prominent indicator of Russia’s “statehood in crisis”. The meaning of sovereignty retained the multi-levelled ambiguity that had

²⁸ Ibid., 181. See also Kolossov and Turovsky, “Russian Geopolitics at the Fin-De-Siecle.”, Tsygankov, “Mastering Space in Eurasia: Russia’s Geopolitical Thinking after the Soviet Break-Up.”

characterized it during Soviet times, both with regard to domestic sovereignty, and with regard to the distinction between domestic and external sovereignty and borders between Russia and the new states of the FSU. After Yeltsin's infamous call to "take as much sovereignty as you can swallow", some of the constituent republics of the RSFSR had proceeded to do exactly that, declaring their own sovereignty against the RSFSR. Although Yeltsin achieved the signing of a new Federal Treaty by all constituent units except Tartarstan and Chechnya on 31 March 1992, the federal form of the new Russian state remained unresolved in the absence of a new constitution.²⁹ De facto, the "flight to sovereignty" continued even after that, with regional laws contradicting the old constitution and some regions going as far as establishing their own foreign relations. As John Löwenhardt described the situation, "By the summer of 1993, Russia seemed to have become a collection of widely divergent regions, all more or less going their own way. The lands that had been "gathered" by the tsars of Russia were drifting apart."³⁰ This was to remain an issue, and a major source of weakness for the central state, throughout the 1990s and into the Putin era, compounded not least by two Chechen wars.

The same uncertainty about the territorial meaning of "Russia" and its sovereignty prevailed with regard to Russia's immediate regional dimension, its relationship with the states of the former Soviet Union, with what was soon and very tellingly called the "near abroad". While the official agreement of the CIS used the language of international treaties and guaranteed "mutual recognition of and respect for state sovereignty (...) territorial integrity and the inviolability of existing borders"³¹, the borders thus guaranteed were effectively undemarcated and practically open – something that remained virtually unchanged throughout 1992 and had still not been entirely resolved by 2007. The openness of borders with the countries of the CIS, the lack of demarcation of borders even with the Baltic states (hostile to Russia and not part of the CIS), and the fact that little was done to rectify this, is a significant contravention of Westphalian ideas of territoriality. This was

²⁹ In fact, one of the main reasons for the failure to agree on a constitutional draft at the 6th CPD in April 1992 was precisely a dispute over the form that Russia's federal organization was to take.

³⁰ John Löwenhardt, *The Reincarnation of Russia* (Burnt Mill, Harlow: Longman, 1995).

³¹ "Provisional Agreement on the Council of Heads of State and the Council of Heads of Government of the CIS, 31 Dec 1991," (BBC SWB SU/1267/C1/ 1, 1 Jan 1992).

particularly surprising in the context of what is commonly called “state-building”, where it is often assumed that these issues obtain special symbolic significance.³²

The issue of the open borders was not the only way the collapse of the Soviet Union revealed ambiguities of the domestic/external distinction with regard to the states of the FSU which, at the point of independence, were part of a highly integrated economic and political structure. One of the most telling examples was the former Soviet army, which disintegrated from January 1992 onwards, despite agreements to preserve them as CIS “joint strategic forces”. One of the corollaries of the disintegration was the question of the Black Sea fleet and the territorial status of Sevastopol, which again was not only an issue of strategic importance but one which mixed issues of territorial identity with a curious overlap of representations of domestic and external space.³³ Finally, there was the issue of the 25 million Russian speakers in the former Soviet Union, which for the Kremlin arguably was more about the relation between domestic and international space than it was a classic issue of ethnic diaspora. The self-ascrption of ethnic Russians as “Russian” in 1992 was a very fluid concept (as were indeed other ethnic categories within the Russian Federation, for example the self-identification as Russian or Tartar in Tartarstan).³⁴ And while there were parts of the political spectrum in Russia which did define Russian-speakers abroad as an ethnic category, this was not to become the line of the Russian government which, furthermore, gave very inconclusive support to Russian-speakers abroad, depending more on their usefulness as pawns in larger political power games than their status as “Russians” (for example in Russia’s relations with Estonia, where Russia also refused to demarcate disputed border sections). In fact, while the Russian government was never entirely coherent on this matter, the preferred term remained “Russian-speakers” rather than “Russians” (to change only under Putin, where *sootechestvenniki* or “compatriots” became the preferred term, without however much more in terms of concrete support for these groups).³⁵

³² Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras, *New States, New Politics: Building the Post-Soviet Nations* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), Pal Kolsto, *Political Construction Sites: Nation-Building in Russia and the Post-Soviet States* (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 2000).

³³ Kevin Covert, “Overlapping Imagined Communities: the Black Sea Fleet Negotiations between Russia and Ukraine, 1992-1996,” *Canadian review of studies in nationalism* XXIV (1997), Serhii Plokhy, “The City of Glory: Sevastopol in Russian Historical Mythology,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 35, no. 3 (2000).

³⁴ Neil Melvin, *Russians Beyond Russia: the Politics of National Identity* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995).

³⁵ I. A. Zevelèev, *Russia and Its New Diasporas* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2001).

However, the treatment of the diaspora issue showed yet another ambiguity of domestic and external space. While most diaspora issues were dealt with by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, they also became part of the responsibility of the State Committee on [domestic Russian] nationalities under Sergei Shakrai.³⁶

3.2. “Statehood in crisis” and essentially contested concepts 1992

There was, therefore, a real ambiguity about Russia’s statehood in 1992, a question mark that provides the context for the way that the Russian state was represented as an actor in the discourses of the political elite. Given the context outlined above, it is not surprising to find a pervasive feeling of “incompleteness” of statehood in Russian political discourse. To reduce this feeling to a neo-imperialist desire to restore Russia to its former boundaries would be too simplistic – this desire did exist amongst those who rejected the breakdown of the Soviet Union, but it was by no means an all-encompassing phenomenon, not even among the “rejectionists”³⁷

The feeling of incompleteness, of a “statehood in crisis”, on the other hand, could be found across the political spectrum, although the “rejectionists” were more likely to dwell on the themes of a quasi-metaphysical connection of territory and identity, the loss of “symbolic territory”, and the general loss of the essence of Russian statehood as a result of the shrinking of the Russian state. More than anything, however, references to Russia’s incomplete statehood or “statehood in crisis” referred to the very real points of external or domestic uncertainty that have been described above.

Nevertheless, Russia was represented as agent and subject in public political discourse. Yeltsin’s political advisor (and advocate of Eurasianist ideas), Sergei Stankevich, represented “Russia” as self-conscious subject when he wrote in a critical assessment of Russia’s foreign policy in March 1993 that this was a time “when she had not yet become aware of herself as a state”. He then went on to depict this ambiguity as something inherently Russian, part of its specific identity at that

³⁶ Melvin, *Russians Beyond Russia: the Politics of National Identity*.

³⁷ One also needs to differentiate between those who regretted the passing of the Soviet Union, and those who proposed the re-establishment, by force or peaceful means, of at least part of the Soviet Union (a Slavic Union, for example). The latter was one of the defining features of members of the “red-brown” coalition, e.g. the Russian National Assembly, the Russian Christian Democratic Movement (led by V. Aksyukis), the Russian Popular Union (Baburin and Pavlov), and not least Zhirinovskii and Zyuganov.

point in time, and posited identity as something that would be found in outward orientation, in interaction with the world:

With us, foreign policy does not emerge from the attitudes and priorities of mature statehood. On the contrary, her foreign policy practice, quite often based on searching, analogies and intuitions, helps Russia to become Russia. Dialogue with the world around helps to form Russian statehood, helps Russia to recognize its interests.³⁸

Two months earlier, Rutskoi had expressed this sentiment in much starker terms, when he stated in one of a series of articles expounding his political credo that “Today, the country is not simply in a state of crisis - it is in a state of political and, most importantly, economic and social deadlock”, and concluded that “What is now happening to us and to Russia is nothing less than the tragic history of a great country. (...) We, our generation, please God, must not turn the last page at this juncture, but must help our children to continue the history of the Russian state.”³⁹

Stankevich and Rutskoi give a good illustration of the different normative emphasis given to representations of Russia’s statehood in early 1992 – as a new future to be achieved or with regard to a past that needed to be re-created. This was a division that was political rather than ideological – Stankevich was not a Westernizer, but a *gosudarstvennik* inspired by Eurasian ideas, and, in this sense, closer to many of the “rejectionists”, including Rutskoi, than to the radical liberal reformists in the Yeltsin camp. Nevertheless, he did not advocate re-integration, even as, together with Rutskoi, he began to support the cause of ethnic Russians in Transdnistria and South Ossetia when conflicts erupted there a few months later.

Both for Stankevich and for Rutskoi, the relationship of domestic and external space was represented as an interconnection or a continuation, though the focus was quite different. For Stankevich, “it is its interaction with the outside world that helps to form Russian statehood, helps Russia to recognize its interests.”⁴⁰ This interaction, he made clear, had to take place in a global context in which Russia, because of its unique geographical location and domestic make-up, could play a special role as supporter of a “multilateral dialogue of cultures, civilizations and states”, a “merciful, patient and open Great Power”. In this, Stankevich mirrored and

³⁸ Stankevich, “Derzhava v Poiskakh Sebya [a Great Power in Search of Itself].”

³⁹ Aleksandr Rutskoi, “V Zashchitii Rossii [in Defence of Russia],” *Pravda*, 30 Jan 1992.

⁴⁰ Stankevich, “Derzhava v Poiskakh Sebya [a Great Power in Search of Itself].”

reversed the connection between Russia's domestic development and its international environment habitually made by Yeltsin, Kozyrev and other reformers.

For the liberal reformers, the theme was Russia's democratic development that needed to be supported and extended by a full integration into the democratic community of the West. This was underpinned by a convergence of national interest between Russia and the West that derived from the fact that Russia now, by virtue of having chosen Western liberal and democratic principles for its reforms, belonged to this community. Instead of the unique values that Russia could bring to the world that Stankevich had stressed, the emphasis here was on Russia's adaptation to the world's values. References to the connection between Russia's domestic democratic development and its membership in a "club of democratic states" abounded in the first half of 1992, the period of a "Utopian Westernism" in Russia's official foreign policy.⁴¹ During these first few months, and in this unmitigated way at this point only, the discursive representations of Russia's relationship with the imagined space of the West corresponded to the binary dichotomy of identity and difference, inclusion and exclusion inherent in the Westphalian narrative. As will be seen below, this simple dichotomy disintegrated quite rapidly as the period of "utopian Westernism" came to an end.

In fact, the seeds of this disintegration were already there in the differences between the positions of Stankevich and Rutskoi. Both Stankevich and the liberal reformers located the international space with which Russia's domestic development was so inextricably connected in a global sphere or the "imagined space" of the West. Rutskoi's article, on the other hand, looked firmly to the space of the former Soviet Union. It is one example of the way that the centrifugal tendencies within Russia were directly associated with the breakdown of the Union – something emphatically denied by the reformer's camp around Yeltsin.⁴² As Rutskoi put it, "One would need to be totally naive to think that the destruction of the Soviet Union will not trigger an appropriate chain reaction within the framework of Russia itself

⁴¹Light, "Foreign Policy Thinking." For examples see Andrei Kozyrev, "Speech at Conference "Transformed Russia in a New World"," *International Affairs (Moscow)* April-May (1992). Boris Yeltsin, "Letter to UN Secretary General," (www.lexis-nexis.com: BBC SWB SU/1293/A1/ 1, 01 February 1992).

⁴² See, for example, Kozyrev, who claimed: "And finally, another factor of political reality is that Russia is establishing its integrity and statehood. The allegations that the creation of the CIS is a sign of Russia's own disintegration are absolutely groundless." "Speech by Kozyrev to Russian Congress of People's Deputies," (www.lexis-nexis.com: Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast, 20 April 1992).

and, indeed, several of the other sovereign republics which have become members of the CIS.”⁴³

On the side of the “rejectionists”, this connection between Russia’s domestic crisis of sovereignty and the development of the CIS was made regularly in early 1992, when initial hopes for a re-integration on the basis of CIS institutions proved to be unfounded. This is forcefully expressed in the reaction to the impending disintegration of the Soviet army in January 1992 by Ruslan Khasbulatov, Speaker of the Congress of People’s Deputies:

Today Ukraine demands this [the swearing of an oath of allegiance of troops stationed on its soil], tomorrow this happens somewhere else, and there will be no end to it. This will be the beginning of a total and complete disintegration and collapse of our state. (...) Now they are seeking to destroy the last element of our statehood - the Armed Forces. This is totally impermissible.⁴⁴

At this early point, both Rutskoi and Khasbulatov associated the territory of the Russian state with more than the “12th century borders” (Rutskoi) of the Russian Federation. Both soon modified their stance and thus distanced themselves from the more extremist national-patriots at least for the remainder of the year.⁴⁵ A more or less explicit identification of Russia’s statehood with the Soviet Union or at least a union of Slavic states – and its corollary, the neo-imperialist argument that Russia would achieve “full statehood” only through changing its borders – persisted in 1992 only among the more radical members of the “red-brown coalition”, although it was to become the mainstay of an increasingly radicalized opposition during the political crisis of 1993. As such, it was often connected to calls for active re-integration. The radical nationalist politician, Sergei Baburin, leader of the National Salvation Front, claimed in January 1993 that

The main factor which is going to dominate the domestic problems of Russia, and all the foreign policy approaches of the Russian leadership, no matter who is among these leaders, is the priority of Russia's

⁴³Rutskoi, "V Zashchitii Rossii [in Defence of Russia]."

⁴⁴"Interview with Khasbulatov," (www.lexis-nexis.com: Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast, 8 Jan 1992).

⁴⁵ By December, Khasbulatov had clearly modified his position and come round to seeing Russia’s “weak statehood” as a purely domestic problem: “We have to realize that we are only feeling our way towards an independent, classic independent state, with all the attributes, with all the institutions, and of course with legislation” "Speech by Khasbulatov at the 7th Congress of People's Deputies," (www.lexis-nexis.com: BBC SWB, SU/1554/C1/ 1, 01 December 1992).

statehood, the efforts to halt and to turn back the centrifugal tendencies in the relations between the republics of the former Union.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, the space of the former Soviet Union remained ambiguous in the discourse of even the most moderate “reformers”. The telling phrase of the “near abroad” (*blizhnee zarubezhie*) for all states of the FSU was used by Kozyrev immediately after the end of the Soviet Union.⁴⁷ Yeltsin, in a similar vein, spoke of the necessity of “transparent borders” with the CIS, and in fact, the demarcation of borders with CIS countries was not pushed ahead.⁴⁸

These ambiguous perceptions of space came to the fore as events in the CIS disrupted the early exclusive concentration in official policy on relations with the West and triggered a public debate about Russia’s relationship with the CIS. In 1993/94, this issue was to take centre stage in an increasingly polarized conflict between presidency and parliament. In 1992, the debate on the CIS was still comparatively low-key, but nevertheless, it clearly shows the ambiguous representations of space mentioned above. It developed especially in reactions to the split-up of the Soviet army, in itself an important marker of statehood, and to the conflicts that erupted in Transdnistria, South Ossetia and Tajikistan.⁴⁹ And a particularly contentious issue, the question of Sevastopol and the Black Sea Fleet, caused reactions that showed just how much this particular part of Ukrainian territory, if not all of Ukraine, was perceived as “not-quite-foreign”.⁵⁰ All of these issues involved fluid representations of territory and borders, and thus created an

⁴⁶ "Speech by Sergei Baburin, People's Deputy and Leader of the National Salvation Front 28 January," (www.lexis-nexis.com: Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, 28 January 1993). See also Zhirinovsky, who already in June 1992 claimed that "The supertask of our foreign policy would be to get the international community to support the restoration of a single state under a single national flag on the territory of the formally abolished Soviet Union" "Press Conference by Vladimir Zhirinovsky," (www.lexis-nexis.com: Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast, 22 June 1992).

⁴⁷ Kozyrev, "Speech at Conference "Transformed Russia in a New World"." In statements throughout Spring 1992 he called for the strengthening of the CIS as "the only possible form of a renewed Union", while stressing the non-imperial nature of Russia's new statehood. See e.g. "Speech by Kozyrev to Russian Congress of People's Deputies."

⁴⁸ Sevastopol was not so much a case of borders, but of control over territory and the Black Sea fleet, which included control over its home base, Sevastopol – and of course a host of issues relating to identity. See Plokhy, "The City of Glory: Sevastopol in Russian Historical Mythology."

⁴⁹ Nicole J. Jackson, *Russian Foreign Policy and the CIS : Theories, Debates and Actions* (New York: Routledge, 2003), Bruce D. Porter and Carol R. Saivetz, "The Once and Future Empire: Russia and the "Near Abroad", " *The Washington Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (1994).

⁵⁰ Covert, "Overlapping Imagined Communities: the Black Sea Fleet Negotiations between Russia and Ukraine, 1992-1996." See also Rutskoi's attack on the independence of Ukraine, Aleksander Rutskoi, "Slepota [Blindness]," *Rossiiskaia gazeta* 20 May 1992.

image of ambiguous territoriality for the new Russian state, at this point still very much in the context of representations of “statehood in crisis”.⁵¹

4. Democracy and *Derzhava* as essentially contested concepts in 1992

The ambiguities of space that were some of the most prominent features of representations of Russia’s “statehood in crisis” had a visible impact on the way that the semantic fields of state strength and democracy were constituted. These semantic fields were the dominant representation of the new Russian state as an actor and, as will be seen below, the intertwining of domestic and external representations of the new Russian state was captured in the way in which they referred both to domestic and to international state agency. They also were heavily contested, though this contestation did not emerge into clear ideological battle lines, with Yeltsin regularly taking up the same scripts as the conservative opposition around Rutschko and Khasbulatov.

4.1. Democracy and Great Power as foundational concepts of the state in public discourse of the political elite

The question of borders, territory and sovereignty was the most obvious, but not the only aspect in which representations of the domestic and the international were blurred in conceptions of the new Russian state. The overlapping of domestic and international space was perpetuated in the meaning of the foundational political concepts that described the Russian state as a specific kind of actor in those spaces. From the inception of the independent Russian state, these were centred on the foundational concepts of democracy and Great Power – the main representations of state agency in a domestic and international context.⁵² These concepts were bound up with references to different kinds of international spaces in which the Russian state as an actor was situated – from the global, to the imagined space of “the West”, to the not-quite-international space of the CIS.

Both these representations touched once again upon the question of how far the new Russian state was a continuation of the Soviet Union, and indeed, the empire

⁵¹ It will be seen in Chapter VI how this ambiguity became normalized under Putin.

⁵² For reasons explained below, the concept of the “strong state”, though alluded to, did not take the place in these conceptual clusters that it was to acquire in later years.

– both as a state and as a category of collective identity. Just as with the question of space described above, this made these concepts highly controversial and essentially contested. However, at the same time both democracy and “Great Power” were used in the political discourse of both sides of the basic political divide that developed in 1992 – proof that they were, in fact, foundational concepts and, as such, constitutive of the legitimacy of the new Russian state. In fact, they formed the basis for a consensus on the nature of the new Russian state for all but the extreme fringes of the fragmented political field of 1992.

Kozyrev, for one, mentioned the concept of Great Power in his very first statement as candidate for the post of Russian Foreign Minister to the RSFSR Supreme Soviet in October 1990 and continued to do so regularly both at home and abroad throughout 1991 and 1992, including his early phase of “utopian Westernism”.⁵³ So did Yeltsin and other officials and political figures identified as reformers and “Westernizers”. Very few democrats openly acknowledged that Russia was not or should not be a Great Power, and those who did had been completely sidelined by the beginning of 1992 and did not form part of the Yeltsin government.⁵⁴

The same picture was true in reverse for “democracy” and the identification of Russia as a democratic state. Not only the reformers around Yeltsin, but the vast majority of the opposition identified the new Russian state as a democracy. Of course, the leaders of the opposition to Yeltsin, Vice President Rutskoi and Chairman of the Supreme Soviet Khasbulatov, had both in one way or another belonged to the broad ideological camp of the democratic opposition in the last stage of the Soviet Union, as had the majority of members of the Supreme Soviet and Congress of People’s deputies in office in 1992. Nevertheless, their rejection of the liberal reforms and the break-up of the Soviet Union did not lead them to a rejection of

⁵³ “Text of Recording of Proceedings of RSFSR Supreme Soviet, Session of 11th October 1992,” (www.lexis-nexis.com: BBC SWB SU/0895/B/ 1, 11 Oct 1992). There is no marked change in the frequency with which Kozyrev employed the term (regularly, in almost every major speech) between the first and the latter half of 1992. This may seem surprising, given that his early phase of Utopian Westernism is normally characterized by a “rejection of Great Power thinking”, a position from which he supposedly changed only in 1993. See Sergei Medvedev, “Power, Space, and Russian Foreign Policy,” in *Understandings of Russian Foreign Policy*, ed. Ted Hopf (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), Shearman, “The Sources of Russian Conduct: Understanding Russian Foreign Policy.”, Vladimir Shlapentokh, “Is the 'Greatness Syndrome' Eroding?” *The Washington Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (2001). However, as will be seen below, it would be wrong to conclude from this that he has been misinterpreted and was less of a Utopian Westernizer than previously thought.

⁵⁴This included Yelena Bonner and other radical democrats.

democracy as the basis for the new Russian state. Rutskoi, for example, embraced both democracy and, at the same time, a strong state in a newspaper article in February 1992 entitled "Democracy needs a strong authority" in which he argued that "I would propose a plan for making the transition to democracy through a period of strong authority under the control of democratically elected institutions."⁵⁵ A commitment to democracy in principle if not immediate practice can be found in many of the more extremist conservative nationalist positions as well, including those of Zhirinovsky and Zyuganov, however much other parts of their ideological programme contradicted their declared allegiance to democratic principles.⁵⁶ This broad acceptance of democracy as a basic concept of Russia's statehood (though not of its execution in practice by the Yeltsin camp) persisted throughout 1992 and into 1993 in the majority of opposition groups in the parliament, including the "rejectionists" who refused to identify the new Russian state as "Russia".⁵⁷

There existed therefore a common vocabulary to speak about the state, with a common base of historical meaning of the terms that was grasped by all sides of the political divide. In fact, as will be seen below, this was underpinned by a shared imagery that related above all to associations of greatness with images of space – pointing once again to the centrality of the territorial dimension of representations of the Russian state.

The one normative concept of state agency that was not universally used in this way in 1992 was the concept of the strong *domestic* state. While allusions to a strong state were made by all camps and the label *gosudarstvennik* for a supporter of a strong state was thrown around far and wide,⁵⁸ there was, nevertheless, an ideological and partisan dimension to the concept of the strong state that was missing from the two other concepts. There was an important faction in the Yeltsin camp –

⁵⁵ Rutskoi, "Silnaia vlast' - dlja demokratii [Democracy Needs Strong Authority]." See also "Khasbulatov and Rutskoy Meet Political Parties and Public Movements, Russia TV, Moscow 1900 gmt 18 Aug 93," (www.lexis-nexis.com: BBC Summary of World Broadcasts SU/1773/B, 21 August 1993).

⁵⁶ Geoffrey Hosking and Robert Service, eds., *Russian Nationalism, Past and Present* (Hounds-mills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998).

⁵⁷ See, for example, "Press Conference by Liberal-Democratic Party Leader, Vladimir Zhirinovsky (Suvorovsky Boulevard, 8) 25 February," (www.lexis-nexis.com: Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast, 25 February 1993), "Press Conference by The "Russian Unity" Parliamentary Bloc - 2 December," (www.lexis-nexis.com: Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast, 2 December 1992), "Speeches by the Participants of the Parliamentary Coalition Russian Unity on the Results of the 8th Extraordinary Congress of People's Deputies (Bely Dom)," (www.lexis-nexis.com: Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast, 18 March 1992).

⁵⁸ For example "Speech by Travkin, 2 Sept 1991," (www.lexis-nexis.com: BBC Summary of World Broadcasts SU/1168/C1/ 1, 4 September 1991).

the young reformers around Gaidar – who adhered to neo-liberal principles of Western origin and wanted as little state as possible and therefore simply did not use the strong state rhetoric.⁵⁹ During 1992, *gosudarstvennik* and support for “strong-state-ness” (*gosudarstvennost'*) became a more clearly delineated label for a conservative stance, although as with the other concepts, the precise positions it entailed remained rather diverse and the meaning of the term accordingly ambiguous. Most of all, patriots had to battle with the somewhat ironic fact that the meaning of “strong state” traditionally had referred to a strong, centralized and indeed personalized executive, while the majority of those who identified themselves as *gosudarstvenniki* in 1992 were located in the legislature, and very soon were battling to reduce the strength of the executive and the personal power of Yeltsin. This, to an extent, may explain why the issue of the strong state was somehow sidelined in the discourse of the Russian political elite during 1992, despite the fact that the division of power and the relationship between the executive and the legislature was a major focus of the debate on constitutional reform. As the clash between the executive and the legislature reached crisis dimensions in 1993, this changed – in a programmatic article in April, Yeltsin made the same connection between democracy and a strong state that Khasbulatov had made a year earlier.⁶⁰

Nevertheless, a broad acceptance and usage of the concepts of democracy and Great Power did not mean a unified vision of the nature of the new Russian state. On the contrary, the concepts rapidly became connected with very different semantic fields and became “battle concepts”, politicized and essentially contested, in the polarization between presidency and parliament that began to form in 1992. In an international and domestic context which remained extremely fluid, and in which the state as institutional and territorial entity remained ambiguous, the meaning of normative concepts of state agency was necessarily changing and was widely open to contestation and re-definitions.

Thus, it is possible to discern two broad conceptual fields presenting two different versions of what it meant to speak about Russia as a Great Power and a democracy – alternative normative visions – both of which remained present in public discourse throughout 1992. They can roughly be labelled as “traditionalist” and the “liberal alternative” – the latter amounted to a veritable attempt to re-occupy

⁵⁹ Reddaway and Glinski, *The Tragedy of Russia's Reforms*.

⁶⁰ Boris Yeltsin, *Rossiiskie Vesti* 21 April 1993.

the meaning of Russia as Great Power and to provide a clear alternative to the imperial associations of Russian statehood that were upheld by the “traditionalist” version.⁶¹

These representations of the Russian state were what I identified as scripts in Chapter III. As such, they were not fully-fledged ideological or even philosophical positions about Russian foreign or domestic policy in themselves, although they did underlie the various schools of thought that have been identified in this period.⁶² At best, they were reflections of such positions – be it the neo-liberal theories colouring the conceptions of the state of the radical reformers, the continuation of Gorbachev’s New Political Thinking, the resurgence of Eurasianist or indeed classic Slavophile thought. In the public discourses of politicians in 1992, these influences were not necessarily mutually exclusive, and nor did they have to be, given the level of formulaic generality at which they were normally invoked.⁶³ Despite the fact that a large number of politicians were claiming elaborate conceptual frameworks for their political positions, the nature of the state and its representation as domestic and international agent was asserted rather than explained in such texts.

As will be seen below, not only the question of sovereignty and territoriality, but also concepts of the Russian state as strong actor and democracy were thus exceedingly ambiguous and appeared as abstract projections of a future or indeed past Russian statehood with a variety of meanings.⁶⁴ Because of this, different representations of the state in 1992 should be understood as “conceptual clusters” across different texts by various authors, rather than as clear positions of individual authors, or even political camps

⁶¹ As Koselleck points out, “occupation” is important (and felt to be important by the actors themselves), because managing to “occupy” a concept conveys legitimacy to a political actor (see chapter III)

⁶² For example Jeremy Lester, *Modern Tsars and Princes: the Struggle for Hegemony in Russia* (London ; New York: Verso, 1995), Light, "Foreign Policy Thinking."

⁶³ For example "Interview with Sergei Stankevich," *Izvestiia* 20 April 1992.

⁶⁴ The point did not pass unobserved among the actors themselves. Khasbulatov at one point accused the government of breaking with democratic principles and proposed to “hold parliamentary hearings with a view to clarifying how deputies and leading members of the government perceive the concept of “democracy”. “Khasbulatov Accuses Government of “Onslaught on Democracy”, 12 March,” (www.lexis-nexis.com: BBC Summary of World Broadcasts SU/1329/C2/ 1, 13 March 1992).

4.2. “Traditionalist” concepts of Russia as Great Power

Traditionalist representations of Russia as a Great Power in 1992 revolved initially around the issue of the continuity of Russian statehood, and assumptions about whether or not the new Russian state was, or could ever be, a successor to the imperial state. This meant that they were very much bound up with the issues of space and military might outlined above, the imperial associations of *derzhavnost'* that had persisted throughout the Soviet Union. In fact, the connection of greatness with space was so pervasive that in 1992 this conception often served to de-legitimize the new Russian state as representation of “Russia”. Given the great loss of territory, the Russian Federation could not be a Great Power, but was a weak and deplorable entity whose existence was necessarily transitory. The greatness of Russia lay in its past, and it could be re-created only by returning to this past, and this meant revising the borders of the Russian Federation. In fact, references to history (Soviet or Tsarist, according to the political orientation of the author) abounded in traditionalist representations of Russia’s *derzhavnost'* or Great Power-ness. Sergei Baburin, leader of the Russian Popular Union and exponent of a “national-patriotic” tendency, exemplified this in a speech given to foreign journalists early in 1993:

The history of any country has its inner logic. To understand our current relations with the Baltic republics, with Ukraine, Kazakhstan, the Transcaucasian republics, one must know that the Russian state emerged 1,000 years ago on the banks of the Dnieper river and Kiev is by rights the "mother of Russian cities". (...) We also have to realize that the representatives of Georgia and Armenia as far back as 300 years ago requested the rulers of Russia to receive them under their Christian protection. We have an age-old experience of cohabitation, the experience of a united Russian state.⁶⁵

A result of this rejectionist bias was that little specific was said from this standpoint about what kind of Great Power the new Russian state should become. Instead, it was almost exclusively defined by what it was not – a Great Power, defined by size and military might, and, at the same time, a fully-fledged state, let alone a strong one. What did emerge was the loss of status, a sense that the recognition as global player that had formerly been granted was now lost. Rutskoi’s lament that “Russia” was dissolving before his very eyes has been cited above; in

⁶⁵ “Speech by Sergei Baburin, People’s Deputy and Leader of the National Salvation Front 28 January.”

February 1992 he described Russia as a “Great Power [that] has collapsed and been reduced to poverty, to begging for humanitarian aid” at a rally against Yeltsin. In an article a week earlier, he ominously cited the words of the Orthodox philosopher, G.B. Fedotov, “There was a Great Russia. There will be again.”⁶⁶

What was, however, made visible in “traditionalist” representations of Russia as a Great Power was the way in which this concept was part of the semantic field of Russian identity. To cite Sergei Baburin again,

The main factor which is going to dominate the domestic problems of Russia, and all the foreign policy approaches of the Russian leadership, no matter who is among these leaders, is the priority of Russia's statehood, the efforts to halt and to turn back the centrifugal tendencies in the relations between the republics of the former Union. Today an interest in the Russian idea is being reborn. And the Russian idea, after all, is not an ethnic idea. It's an idea of statehood, first and foremost.⁶⁷

The way in which Russia's Great Power status expressed the “Russian Idea”, the connection between representations of the state and Russian identity, hinges on the role of space in representations of Russian identity. Traditionalist representations of Russia as Great Power were often associated with the broader discourse about “Russia” and its place between the “imagined spaces” of (Eur)Asia and the West. It was this question, as well as the significance of the imperial space of the former Soviet Union, that pitted “rejectionists” against reformers. This connection is exemplified in a press conference given by the nationalist “Russian Unity” bloc, which talked about a “confrontation of the two antagonist groupings of society, of the two conceptual views of Russia's future as a great power and a strong Eurasian state, or a raw material appendage to the West and a dumping ground for its waste.”⁶⁸

That said, it would be wrong to assume that there was a direct connection between “traditionalist” representations and positions in the debates about Russia's foreign policy and national interest that started in 1992, such as stances on the revision of borders or on how to treat the problem of the “Russian-speakers” in the “near abroad”. While many advocates of a more assertive Russian stance in the FSU

⁶⁶ “Russian Vice President Calls for Economic State of Emergency,” (www.lexis-nexis.com: The Associated Press, 8 February 1992). Rutskoi, “V Zashchitii Rossii [in Defence of Russia].”

⁶⁷ “Speech by Sergei Baburin, People's Deputy and Leader of the National Salvation Front 28 January.”

⁶⁸ “Press Conference by the Bloc of Parties “Rossiiskoe Edinstvo” (“Russian Unity”) - 12 November,” (www.lexis-nexis.com: Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast, 12 November 1992).

or of border revisions held the “traditionalist” view of Russia’s Great Power status, this was by no means a necessary connection.

There was another element of the semantic field of Russian identity that cropped up regularly in traditionalist representations of *derzhavnost'*: the theme of Russia’s uniqueness and *dukhovnost'* (unique spirituality), which was mostly cited in connection with history and geography as the basis of Russia’s Great Power status – the faint remnant of the Orthodox associations of *derzhavnost'* mentioned in chapter IV.⁶⁹ Appeals to this unique spirituality as underlying not only Russia’s special status in the world, but its statehood more generally can be found in many of the “rejectionists” declarations made in 1992, though again this identity was denied to the new Russian state – they often took the form of complaints about how Russia had lost this specific spirituality or calls for regaining it in future.⁷⁰

That said and perhaps surprisingly, references to Russia’s unique spirituality were also present in the public discourse of the reformers – in fact, they were the prime example of how the Yeltsin camp used “traditionalist” representations of Russia as Great Power. Stankevich’s presentation of Russia as the “unifier of civilizations” relied on this. While he was, of course, an avowed Eurasianist, references to Russia’s spirituality also turned up throughout the year in speeches by Yeltsin and even the arch-Westernizer Kozyrev. It has been seen above how Yeltsin claimed a continuity between Russia’s imperial statehood and the new Russian state by reference to historical continuity. In fact, it was the reference to unique cultural traditions that he mainly used in 1992. As he claimed in a speech to the Supreme Soviet in October 1992, “Russia is valuable first of all thanks to its history, traditions, its unprecedented view of the world, unique culture and religion, intellectual potential. Without them we cannot exist, the great state, which Russia has

⁶⁹The reference to Russia’s spirituality also indicated the reception of Eurasianist writing into the public discourse of the state elite. The connection between spirituality, orthodoxy and Great Power status was a strong feature of the émigré Eurasianists. See Boris Ishboldin, “The Eurasian Movement,” *Russian Review* 5, no. 2 (1946), Dmitry Shlapentokh, “Eurasianism Past and Present,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 30, no. 2 (1997).

⁷⁰ “Press Conference by the Parliamentary Bloc “Rossiiskoe Edinstvo” (“Russian Unity”) - 14 January,” (www.lexis-nexis.com: Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast, 14 January 1993), “Press Conference by the Parliamentary Group “Russian Union”,” (www.lexis-nexis.com: Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast, 17 September 1999). See also Zyuganov, who was in 1992 was already using heavily Eurasianist language. Gennadii Zyuganov, “Gennady Zyuganov’s Views on Russia’s Future,” in *Pravda* (www.lexis-nexis.com: TASS, 24 December 1992).

been and still is, cannot exist.”⁷¹ Kozyrev likewise used this argument when he insisted that “We ceaselessly say we are worse than America - where on earth did we get this notion from? We are in many respects a much richer country; a spiritual one – the spiritual culture and history are much richer in our country, and it simply must be recalled.”⁷²

4.3. The liberal alternative – Russia as democratic Great Power

Against this traditionalist representation of Russia as Great Power, which exposed the weakness of the new Russian state, or even made it vulnerable to accusations that it did not really represent “Russia”, the democratic camp actively tried to re-define the meaning of *derzhavnost'* for a post-imperial age, by associating it with a civilized world society of democracies. It was in this context that the concept of *Derzhava* was first associated with the semantic field of democracy, and thus connected not only the domestic set-up of the Russian state, but its Great Power status, with its relationship to the West. More concretely, the reformers started to intertwine the meaning of “Great Power” with the idea of Russia’s domestic development towards democracy and a free market. Indeed, in 1992 the majority of the frequent references to Russia’s Great Power status on behalf of the Yeltsin camp fell under this category.

The first notable aspect of this re-definition was quite simply the fact that the new Russian Federation was regularly described as a Great Power, not in the past, but in the context of 1992. In the face of the “rejectionist” representations of Russia as a former Great Power in ruins, this was a clear claim that the Russian Federation was a legitimate embodiment of “Russia”. In the political context of 1992, this in itself was a highly politicized and controversial interpretation of the concept and was repeatedly attacked by the opposition. In September 1992, as parliamentary criticism of the domestic reform process and attacks on Kozyrev’s pro-Western orientation became louder, Kozyrev made clear this view in a TV interview:

We must not now let ourselves develop an inferiority complex and of course the opposition would dearly like to drive us into this besieged

⁷¹ "Address by RF President Boris Yeltsin to the Supreme Soviet - October 6," (www.lexis-nexis.com: Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast, 6 October 1992).

⁷² Andrei Kozyrev, "Vstrecha S Predstaviteleyami Subektov federatsii [Meeting with the Heads of the Federal Subjects]," *Diplomaticeskii vestnik* 21-22 (1992).

fortress as it were and give us an inferiority complex and make us feel that we're poor and we're not what we used to be and we're neither one thing nor the other and we don't participate in anything or do anything and so on. In fact, we are participating everywhere and will continue to do so and we are received everywhere as a Great Power.⁷³

Often enough though, claims to the Great Power status of the new Russian state were presented as indisputable facts without the need for any further qualification. Thus, Kozyrev claimed in an interview in April 1992 that "Russia is quite simply destined to be a state, and a Great Power at that. That is an objective fact, if you like; there is no question of whether we want it or not", while in October 1992 Yeltsin affirmed that "Russia is a great power, which is simply having temporary difficulties."⁷⁴

If the details of these claims were specified, Russia's nuclear status, geopolitical status, natural resources and membership in the UN Security Council were mentioned. Most commonly though, references were to the domestic set-up of Russia, to the spiritual and material potential of its people, its economic potential and, most frequently, to the path of reforms and democracy that Russia had taken – the latter a clear sign that the reformers tried to "occupy" the concept of Great Power by associating it with their own political programme. This connection was first made by Kozyrev in early 1992, when he spoke of Russia as the "democratic pole of the Northern hemisphere", in a characteristic reference that situated Russia in a global space.⁷⁵ In an interview in July 1992, under increasing pressure from the conservative opposition, he claimed that

The might of the Russian state will grow only from successes in democratic and economic reforms, and not from building up military muscle. Russia is destined to be a great power because of its economic, scientific, technical and cultural potential. The only path to that is the democratic path.⁷⁶

⁷³ "Interview with Andrei Kozyrev on Russia TV, Moscow 1920 gmt 11 Sep 92," (www.lexis-nexis.com: BBC Summary of World Broadcasts SU/1485/A1/ 1, 14 September 1992).

⁷⁴ "Interview with Andrei Kozyrev on Russia TV, Moscow 1645 gmt 2 Aug 92," (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts SU/1450/B/ 1, 4 August 1992), "Yeltsin, Citing 'Terrible Danger,' Bans Nationalist Opposition Front," *Washington Post* (28 October 1998).

⁷⁵ Kozyrev, "Speech at Conference 'Transformed Russia in a New World'."

⁷⁶ "Interview with Andrei Kozyrev on Ekho Moskvy Radio Station, 14 July 1992," (www.lexis-nexis.com: BBC Summary of World Broadcasts SU/1435/A1/ 1, 17 July 1992).

Numerous similar quotes can be found in statements by Yeltsin and other members of the government.⁷⁷ In early 1992, before the presidency and the opposition drifted apart, these associations were also made by Khasbulatov and Rutskoi, once again showing that both Russia's Great Power status and its representation as democracy were indeed consensual foundational concepts.⁷⁸

This connection between the concepts of democracy and Great Power was the core of the "liberal alternative". It established a new layer of meaning that broke with the imperial understanding of statehood preserved in the traditional conception. In this, it was an alternative way in which the conceptual separation between domestic and external space was transcended, based on the overlap between Russia's new liberal statehood and the "imagined space" of the West. Though Russia's "rich history" was often mentioned as a factor of its Great Power status, there was also an explicit break with "imperial traditions" and Russia's Soviet past – again, in stark contrast to the traditional concept of Great Power.⁷⁹

That said, some of the imagery and vocabulary used in these representations constituted less of a radical break with the Soviet legacy than a continuation of themes of Gorbachev's New Political Thinking, not least in its explicit connection of domestic and external developments, but also in the way that "democracy", used as a highly abstracted catch-all phrase by the reformers, was connected with a notion of universal "all-human values".⁸⁰

The orientation towards the West, the identification of democracy and civilization, and the attempted re-definition of the concept of Great Power through association with these concepts were evident over and over again in statements by reformers in 1992.⁸¹ Here, the semantic field of Russia's statehood once again overlapped with representations of Russia's identity between East and West.

⁷⁷ See, for example, "Yeltsin Addresses Assembly of Citizens of Russia, 5 April 1992," (www.lexis-nexis.com: BBC Summary of World Broadcasts SU/1349/B/ 1, 7 April 1992).

⁷⁸ Ruslan Khasbulatov, "Speech at Conference "Transformed Russia in a New World"," *International Affairs (Moscow)* April-May (1992).

⁷⁹ Cf. Andrei Kozyrev, *Krasnaya Zvezda* (20 December 1991), "New Year Message by President Boris Yeltsin," (www.lexis-nexis.com: Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast, 30 December 1992), "Russian Foreign Minister Lashes out at Russian Hawks," (www.lexis-nexis.com: United Press International, 30 June 1992), "Speech by Boris Yeltsin to Congress of People's Deputies," (www.lexis-nexis.com: Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast, 21 April 1992).

⁸⁰ Robert English, *Russia and the Idea of the West: Gorbachev, Intellectuals, and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

⁸¹ "Interview with Andrei Kozyrev," *Trud* 30 October 1993, Andrei Kozyrev and Viktor Mikhailov, "Kak Razrushit' Iadernoe Oruzhie [How to Destroy Nuclear Weapons]," *Kransaia Zvezda* 10 December 1992, "Press Briefing by RF Foreign Ministry Spokesman Sergei Yastrzhembski "

As has been seen in Chapter IV, representations of the West as “civilized” and of Russia as aspiring towards this civilization had been part of the Westernizing discourse for centuries. What was new in 1992 was that the new Russian state was, in the view of the reformers, now genuinely part of – or at least close to being part of – the West, by virtue of its choice of liberal principles as the basis for the reorganization of the state and the economy. This was expressed most commonly in connection with the concept of “civilization”, a concept that for liberal reformers clearly referred to the West. In fact, representations of Russia as a democracy were often practically synonymous with representations of Russia as part of “world civilization”. As Yeltsin put it in a round-up of Russian foreign policy in a speech to the 6th CPD, Russia’s aim was “to establish stable relations and partnership with the world’s democratic states, which guarantees that the Russian Federation shall be included as a fully paid-up member of the civilized world community.”⁸² Kozyrev expressed as much in his television interview in March 1992: “I think that the gist of our policy is that we are beginning to share, we have set a course towards genuinely sharing, the values of the civilized world and to live according to these values. That is the essence of our policy. I think that in that sense we shall be fully equal partners.” He then went on to argue why Russia could easily be part of what was truly an imagined space of the West:

By the way, the states of the so-called West which pursue these civilized principles of democracy and human rights include Australia, for instance. That is also the West from this point of view. And there is also New Zealand. They have not lost their national or geographical identity. The same applies to us. We shall develop our own specific and particular national identity as we follow this road. However, totalitarianism negated it, and we all know it. Russia itself did not exist at all on the political map and there was the ideologized concept of the Soviet Union.⁸³

This aspiration to being part of “world civilization” also transpired in what was one of the most common qualifiers of the concept of Great Power in the discourse of the reformers – that of Russia as a “normal Great Power”. “Normal”

(www.lexis-nexis.com: Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast, 20 November 1992), “Speech by Yeltsin to Russian Congress of People's Deputies,” (www.lexis-nexis.com: BBC Summary of World Broadcasts SU/1561/C1/ 1, 11 December 1992).

⁸² “Speech by Yeltsin to Russian Congress of People's Deputies, 7 Apr 1992,” (www.lexis-nexis.com: BBC Summary of World Broadcasts SU/1351/C1/ 1, 9 April 1992).

⁸³ “Kozyrev Interviewed on the General Direction of Russia's Foreign Policy, Russian Television 1855 gmt 3 Mar 92,” (www.lexis-nexis.com: BBC Summary of World Broadcasts SU/1321/A1/ 1, 5 March 1992).

referred to de-ideologized, abandoning the missionary rhetoric of the Soviet Union and integrating fully with the norms which constituted international society. However, it also connected to “civilized”, as in this expression by the then Deputy Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov: “[we are] embarking on a normal, civilized debate with the whole world and arranging our affairs in line with international law.”⁸⁴

Finally, the association of *derzhavnost'* and democracy was also expressed in the formulation of Russia as an “equal partner” with regard to the West. This was an assertion of Russia’s Great Power status through recognition by this “civilized community”, a recognition that simply had to be granted, given Russia’s domestic development. Kozyrev commented after Yeltsin’s second visit to the US in June 1992 that “if only we ourselves behave with dignity and do not swerve from the path of reform, they’ll talk to us - and they are already talking to us - in a way that they never talked to the Soviet Union.”⁸⁵ Similarly, the newly appointed Deputy Prime Minister, Vladimir Shumeiko, certainly not the most liberal member of the Yeltsin government, declared in an interview in October 1992 that “We must show that we enter the community of democratic nations as equal partners with those whom we used to call developed countries of the West, that we stand firm on the way of democracy and market economy.”⁸⁶

In this early phase of Russian state formation, the “liberal alternative” amounted to a partial re-definition of the meaning of Great Power – away from geopolitical conceptions of power and space towards a definition of greatness as belonging to the imaginary space of the West. The reach of Russia as a Great Power was global, not dependent on the concrete space of the FSU, and it was conferred Great Power status by virtue of its domestic reforms. It thus constituted a real break with the traditional meaning of Great Power, and this representation persisted in the discourse of reformers even after Russian foreign policy had ended its early “Utopian Westernizing” phase.

⁸⁴ “Interview with Sergei Lavrov, Red Square Programme, Channel 1 TV, Moscow 1215 gmt 25 Apr 92,” (www.lexis-nexis.com: BBC Summary of World Broadcasts SU/1367/A1/ 1, 29 April 1992). The qualification of Russia as “normal Great Power” was especially frequent in statements by Kozyrev and officials from the MFA. See especially Kozyrev’s discussion of the term in “Andrei Kozyrev: The Union Left Russia a Bad Foreign Policy Legacy,” (www.lexis-nexis.com: Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast, 1 April 1992).

⁸⁵ “Kozyrev: Russia Remains a Great Power Which Can Say “No” as Well as “Yes”, Russia TV, Moscow 0815 gmt 4 Jul 92,” (www.lexis-nexis.com: BBC Summary of World Broadcasts SU/1425/A1/ 1, 6 July 1992).

⁸⁶ “We Won’t Dance to Anyone’s Tune” (Interview with Vladimir Shumeiko),” (www.lexis-nexis.com: Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast, 1 October 1992).

The connection of “democracy” with Great Power status is significant not only because this was an unprecedented layer of meaning added to the concept of Russia as Great Power. It was also remarkable because the most concrete meaning given in the public discourse of the reformers to the “democratic” statehood of Russia seemed to be precisely this external dimension, the presentation of the Russian state as a democratic, “civilized” Great Power.⁸⁷

This emphasis on the outward orientation of the Russian state as a democratic actor was in part a result of the relative side-lining of the state as a domestic actor in the discourse of the reformers. Despite the fact that the drawn-out process of negotiating a new Russian constitution was continuing under the nominal leadership of Yeltsin in 1992, in reality both Yeltsin and the liberal “young reformers” were neglecting the creation of a clear blueprint for a new democratic Russian state in favour of economic “shock therapy”, the neo-liberal programme of economic reforms carried through in late 1991 and early 1992. Yeltsin himself had little time for constitutional reform until the end of 1992, when his power to rule by decree in the economic sphere ceased and the power struggle with parliament forced his attention onto constitutional issues. The “young reformers” around Gaidar were heavily influenced by Western neo-liberal theories which sidelined the importance of the state.⁸⁸ The concept of a strong state was used from the start by more “centrist” members of Yeltsin’s government, such as Stankevich and Primakov, and from mid-1992, Chernomyrdin, but they remained in a minority until Yeltsin took up the concept of a strong state and equated it both with his economic reform programme and a strong executive against the parliament, thus once again merging “traditionalist” and “liberal” semantic fields in one sweeping script and setting the stage for the political clashes of 1993.⁸⁹

It has been argued above that describing “traditionalist” and “liberal” conceptions of Russia as a Great Power as ideological positions of political camps or figures runs the risk of oversimplifying a complex discourse, in which certain concepts and themes could appear on both sides of the political divide. Yeltsin’s indiscriminate use of whichever concepts seemed most likely to appeal is only one

⁸⁷ Lukin, *Political Culture of the Russian "Democrats"*. See also Chapter IV on the ambiguity of the meaning of the concept among Democrats in the late 1980s.

⁸⁸ Reddaway and Glinski, *The Tragedy of Russia's Reforms*.

⁸⁹ Boris Yeltsin, “Address by RF President Boris Yeltsin to the Supreme Soviet - October 6,” (www.lexis-nexis.com: Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, 6 October 1992).

example. Nevertheless, the association of democracy with *derzhavnost'* marked the one fundamental cleavage between liberals and the opposition. The emphasis on the external dimension of Russia's democratic statehood and the emphasis on "membership" of the West could be found exclusively in the discourse of the Yeltsin camp. This did not mean that references to Russia's democratic statehood were not present in statements of the opposition – on the contrary, often the very same generic formulations were being used that were also common among liberals. At the same time, during 1992 the opposition was much more concrete than the Yeltsin camp about the nature of Russia's democratic statehood, using arguments about balance of power, and about the parliament as the seat of democratic legitimacy, in the power struggle with the presidency. This exceeded anything that was to be heard from the liberals, who still associated "democratic reforms" predominantly with the economic free market reform programme.⁹⁰ However, the traditionalist representation of Russia as Great Power coexisted in the texts of the opposition with references to domestic democracy without linking the two concepts. Thus, in 1992 traditional representations of *derzhavnost'* that centred on "Russia" as a vast, expanding territorial space were pitted against the linkage of liberal democracy and *derzhavnost'*, an internalization of the imagined space of the West, which was represented as an inevitable inclusion in its sphere.

It was to be a fleeting moment of unadulterated identification, to be eroded already in early 1993, as the increasing political confrontation with the nationalist opposition prompted a shift in rhetoric by the Yeltsin camp. The linkage of democracy and Great Power-ness that had been established did not vanish – it reappeared under Putin, although with very different associations indeed. However, even while identification was a theme here, it was already curiously internalized and translated. More than anything, this association was justified in the eyes of the reformers by the internal transformations of Russia and, more precisely, the economic reforms. In this, there was little reflection on values, the main feature of the imagined space of the West for Western and European states themselves. The meaning of Russia as democratic state in the discursive representations of the Yeltsin

⁹⁰ Reddaway and Glinski, *The Tragedy of Russia's Reforms*. See also "Khasbulatov Accuses Government of "Onslaught on Democracy", 12 March.", "Khasbulatov and Rutskoy Meet Political Parties and Public Movements, Russia TV, Moscow 1900 gmt 18 Aug 93.", Ruslan Khasbulatov, "Krisis gosudarstva i puti vkhoda iz nego [the Crisis of the State and Ways to Get out of It]," *Rossiiskaia gazeta* 15 May 1993, Rutskoi, "Silnaia vlast' - dla demokratii [Democracy Needs Strong Authority]."

camp remained habitually ambiguous, and indeed, a year later Yeltsin had few qualms in using violence against a democratically elected parliament in the name of democracy.

It could be speculated that one reason for this identification was not so much the question of the real, external West, but the way in which the opposition challenged the very right of the new Russian state to represent “Russia”. In this, the new Russian state needed to be legitimated in the face of what the opposition saw as the obvious ways in which the Russian Federation did not correspond to “Russia”. The association of Russia’s new statehood with democracy was the one feature that was consensual among all of the Russian political or state elite, although the opposition started to attack the Yeltsin camp on this front as well. In the absence of a new constitution and a genuinely democratic statehood for the new Russia, democracy needed to be associated with power, the second consensual representation of the Russian state. One way of achieving this was by stressing how what was new – economic, “democratic” reforms – would lead to recognition as an equal by the West.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with a period that was in many ways extraordinary. The emergence of the Russian state as an independent actor, domestically and internationally, took place during a prolonged period in which this emerging state was barely functional and becoming less so, something that was to culminate in the constitutional crisis of 1993 and Yeltsin’s coup. At the same time, it was a period of exceptional fluidity and ambiguity in which the territoriality of the Russian Federation, as well as its nature as an international (and to a lesser extent, domestic) agent was openly contested in domestic political discourse.

Nevertheless, this was the formative moment of Russia’s statehood, and it shaped the semantic field of Russia’s state identity in a way that was still visible under Putin. It also presented a veritable “battle for meaning” of the semantic field of the state among the elite which showed real cleavages about representations of the new state as “Russia” – something that was to evaporate in the heated exchanges of

1993 and that never really returned in this form, despite the kind of antagonistic politics that was to characterize the Yeltsin years.

As has been seen in this chapter, not only representations of Russian territoriality and sovereignty themselves, but the overarching conceptions of the Russian state as Great Power/strong state and as democracy blurred the divide between domestic and external space. Whereas Russia's identification as a Great Power was linked *a priori* to the symbolism of vastness and "boundless Russia", its identification as democracy in this early period was equally linked to a symbolic space, on a much more global level – the imagined community of the West, which was identical with "the civilized world". The democrats who attempted to associate liberal democracy and Great Power thus tried to replace one set of spatial references with another. The opposition which resisted this equally aimed to situate Russia in a symbolic space, between East and West, and looked to geopolitics to assure Russia's Great Power status after the loss of empire. It was at this point that both conceptions of Russia as Great Power and as democratic state – normative references to agency in international relations – fed into a wider discourse about Russia's foreign policy aims and interests.⁹¹

What is perhaps most striking from the point of view of the classic Westphalian narrative in IR is the differentiated and manifold meanings of the domestic, the international, and various spaces in between, as well as the ambiguous attitude to borders and sovereignty that was evident in statements both by Yeltsin and by the parliamentary opposition. None of this is surprising to students of empire or indeed of Russian discourses on identity, in which space remained at the same time a central concept (both to state-centric and popular narratives of identity) and a concept whose centrality is determined by its very ambiguity.

The year 1992 did not bring a clear-cut answer to this ambiguous conception of space, either on a normative or on an empirical level. As will be seen in the next chapter, by 1999 a rather more complex representation of the West, Europe and Russia as imagined spaces had taken the place of the liberal attempt to associate Russia's Great Power status with belonging to the West. However, a fundamental

⁹¹On the debate about foreign policy in early post-Soviet Russia see Light, "Foreign Policy Thinking.", Alex Pravda and Neil Malcolm, "Democratization and Russian Foreign Policy," *International Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1996).

ambiguity of space remained, and so did the way that concepts of “state identity” intertwined representations of domestic and international agency.

CHAPTER VI

Ambiguities of space - the West, Europe and Russian territoriality

“It would be good to flee to Europe but they will not receive us there, Russia is a European civilization [sic]. It is a badly illuminated remote area of Europe but not Europe yet. In this regard, we are inseparably tied with Europe and must be friends with it. They are not enemies. They are simply competitors. So, it is more insulting that we are not enemies. An enemy situation is when one can be killed in a war as a hero if there is conflict. There is something heroic and beautiful in it. And to lose in a competitive struggle means to be a loser. And this is doubly insulting, I think. It is better to be enemies and not ambiguous friends as is the case now! That is somehow what we want.”

Vladislav Surkov, “secret speech” to Delovaia Rossiia Business forum, 17.05.2005¹

1. Introduction

This chapter explores representations of space and territoriality in the conceptual field of the Russian state, starting with the “crisis year” of 1999, which saw a return to uncertainties over the legitimacy of the new Russian state not seen since the early 1990s, even though the underlying reasons were somewhat different. It then traces these representations through the Putin period, from Putin’s initial declaration of Russia as a European power to the entanglement of imagined spaces in Russian representations of Georgia and Ukraine.

As has been seen in Chapter V, the issue of space, and in particular the ambiguity of space, was a central element in the construction of a post-Soviet “state identity” for the new Russian state in 1991/92. This concerned the separation into

¹Vladislav Surkov, "Stenogramma Vystupleniia V. Surkov na Gensovete "Delovoi Rossii", 17 Maia 2005 " (www.integrum.ru: Nasledie Otechestvo, 13 July 2005).

domestic and external space, i.e. the territorial nature of sovereignty, an ambiguity that is not accounted for in the Westphalian narrative. It also concerned Russia's relation to an "imagined space" of the West, a space that was as much metaphorical as it was geographical, and which in 1991 had become "domesticated", part of the discursive representation of the identity of "Russia" in its new, liberal and democratic incarnation. This chapter aims to show how a decade after the inception of the new Russian state, domestic and external, and indeed the imagined space of the West, continued to overlap and intertwine in the discourses of the Russian political elite.

As this chapter shows, in contrast to the extreme fluidity of representations of space in 1991/92, there was a hesitant trend towards a greater delimitation of space during this period. This might be interpreted by some as a development towards the Westphalian model of statehood. In fact, the issue of borders and the distinction between Russia and its neighbouring states had already been raised by 1993, in arguments very familiar from Soviet times – that Russia was economically exploited by its neighbours and needed to disentangle the economic and infrastructural interdependence that was characteristic of the energy sector in particular.² This preoccupation underpinned the Russian refusal to cooperate in many of the initiatives for regional integration in the framework of the CIS, preferring bilateral or multilateral relations between states instead. During the Putin years, and especially during the second term of his administration, this trend gathered pace and gained a new dimension, fuelled by representations of the imagined space of the West and the way these began to encroach on the ambiguous space of the "near abroad" in the wake of the "colour revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine, connected not least with the fact that an exclusionary, normative "West" moved threateningly close to Russia. It included not only a greater push for border demarcations, but also the revocation of visa privileges for CIS citizens, attempted curbs on migration from the CIS, and, most symbolically perhaps, attempts to get CIS members to pay world market prices for their energy, which clearly had a political dimension. Nevertheless, this was, in this sense, reactive, rather than pro-active – reacting to dynamics which were not

² Khasbulatov argued in May 1993 that "The catastrophic position of the economy has placed the existence of Russia's state sovereignty under threat. (...) Russia's border is indeed "transparent". But its transparency is one-sided. Thus, a considerable mass of raw material is exported from Russia without any authorization from the relevant bodies (...)." Khasbulatov, "Krisis gosudarstva i puti vykhoda iz nego [the Crisis of the State and Ways to Get out of It]."

driven by the Russian state itself, indeed were resisted by it. At the same time, this is once again a question of disclosing the full picture. Parts of this trend had already been present in the entanglement of “Russia” with the Soviet Union; in any case, as will be seen below, the clearer delineation of borders did not supplant representations of ambiguity of space, which very much persisted in official discourse.

The script of the protection of the space of “Russia”, which picks up classic Westphalian, European notions of statehood through a Russian prism, does not point towards a simple replacement of earlier ambiguities of space with sharply delineated Westphalian boundaries. It co-exists with other discursive constructions which keep an ambiguity of space alive. As before, these conceptual clusters or scripts are to some extent mutually contradictory, since all are present contemporaneously in the political discourse of the Russian elite.

This is true also for the representation of the “imagined space of the West”. There are undeniable oscillations in Russia’s relationship with the West during this period, both at the high point of Putin’s joining of the “war on terror” after 9/11 and the decline in the aftermath of the Ukrainian and Georgian “colour revolutions”. However, as will be seen in this chapter, this did not resolve the fundamental ambiguity of representations of the West – and with this Russia’s Western and European identity – in Russian political discourse. This was true in particular in connection with representations of Russia as a European power – representations which persist in official discourse despite the climate of greater confrontation that dominated policies towards the end of this period.

2. The ambiguity of imagined spaces: the West and Europe

What did the imagined space of the West mean in post-Soviet Russia, a decade after its inception? A succinct summary was given by Sergei Markov who described the dominant pole of the international system in 2003. “The pole is not actually the United States. The States are at the centre of the pole. But the pole itself is the coalition of Western powers which can be described as the G-7 or as NATO or as the countries that hold the controlling stake in the main economic organizations

such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization.”³

This description, and the fact that institutions such as the EU, OSCE and the Council of Europe were not included, already indicated that representations of the West, and its various concrete embodiments, had become more complex during the 1990s. Firstly, to a certain extent they had become fragmented, as more distinction was made between the West on the one hand, and Europe on the other, giving rise to different and competing scripts. At the same time the emphasis on this difference was in flux, given that the EU was sometimes included into the imagined space of the West, perhaps increasingly so after EU support for the “Orange Revolution”.⁴ Secondly, and crucially, these were not representations of spaces which were wholly external to Russia. Much of the dynamics of representations of “the West” in Russia rested on the multiple ways that the West was not a space apart, but a fundamental part of the make-up of domestic political space in Russia, and not only since the political and economic choices of 1991.

In other words, Russia may not have become part of the West, but an imagined West had long been part of Russia. The West truly was an imagined space in the Russian context, a metaphor that stood for fundamental choices about the path of development that Russian society should take. As such, it was the constitutive core of Russian identity discourses and, at the same time, a deeply political question, never more so than during the period of antagonistic politics in the 1990s. As public space became de-politicized during the Putin era, representations of the West became less of a political fault-line. Nevertheless, the West, and in particular Europe, remained not only an external space, but also a socio-economic choice for Russia’s domestic development, and as such its representation was filtered through the prism of domestic needs and questions. This domestic focus was the background to which representations of Europe in Russian political discourse referred. The fact that this contradicted representations of the West as a space from which Russia was fundamentally excluded does not change the centrality of its representations for the domestic development of Russia.

³“Press Conference with Sergei Markov,” (www.integrum.ru: Federal News Service, 6 Feb 2003).

⁴ Viatcheslav Morozov, “Resisting Entropy, Discarding Human Rights: Romantic Realism and Securitization of Identity in Russia,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 37, no. 4 (2002). See also Viatcheslav Morozov, “Inside/Outside: Europe and the Boundaries of Russian Political Community,” *PONARS working paper* 23 (2004).

This is not to say that external relations with Western countries did not have an impact on these representations. Relations with the West had come a long way from the initial rose-tinted days of “Utopian Westernism”, and a decade of interactions with the West had left the political elite wary of the gap between rhetoric and actions, be it with regard to the very slow process to a full inclusion of Russia into the G8 (first promised to Yeltsin in 1992, finally achieved under Putin), be it with regard to Russia’s cooperation with NATO. There was, therefore, a perception of the West as a fundamentally exclusionary space which quite sharply distinguished between who belonged and who did not, something that had been underpinned by the experience of countless interactions. Sergei Rogov, Director of the Institute for USA and Canada Studies, expressed this when he commented shortly before the first summit between Bush and Putin in Ljubljana in July 2001 that

The US and the EU are, despite their differences, loyal members of the Western community. (...) [any dispute between them] is, so to speak, an internal dispute, an internal dialogue. (...) If the strategy is such that Russia remains on the outside of the Western community, Russia remains a potential opponent of the US and the Western community (...).⁵

He went on to summarize widespread feelings on NATO enlargement when he said that in this process, “Russia had a very low priority, all nice words about “strategic partnership” notwithstanding. The strategic partnership was only declaratory.”

Representations of the West and Europe developed considerably in the period from 1999 onwards. Both the impact of the Kosovo crisis and 9/11 and the seismic shifts in Russia’s domestic political landscape played a role in these changes. However, the ground had been prepared during the 1990s and went back to the shift away from the “utopian Westernism” of early 1992 during the developing political crisis of 1992 and 1993. The establishment of more sceptical representations of the West (if not, at that point, of Europe) as a dominant script in political discourse stems from that period.

By 1999, the narrative of the West as an imagined space within which Russia should be fully integrated (“Russia as normal Great Power”, “part of Western civilization”) had not vanished from political discourse, but it had become marginalized. At the other end of the political spectrum, among nationalists of left

⁵“Press Conference with the Director of the Institute of USA and Canada Studies Sergei Rogov,” (www.integrum.ru: Federal News Service, 15 July 2001). See also Prozorov, *Understanding Conflict between Russia and the EU: the Limits of Integration*.

and right persuasion, representations of the West as Russia's essential antagonistic Other persisted, but took on a new ideological tinge. The public statements of Zyuganov and Zhirinovsky especially were underpinned by neo-Eurasianist writings, but this was a more general trend. In fact, there was a proliferation of geopolitical and especially Eurasian scripts across the political spectrum during the second half of the 1990s.⁶ This ideological stance, which postulated not only the essential civilizational difference between Russia and the West, but also Russia's manifest destiny as the leading power on the Eurasian landmass, was never officially endorsed but resonated in official discourse, for example in Primakov's doctrine of multipolarity and references to Russian civilization and spirituality.⁷

The vision of a multipolar world order was developed by Evgeny Primakov during his time as Foreign and Prime Minister. A multipolar world order, in Primakov's vision, was above all one not dominated by the single superpower, the USA, or by a bloc of Western powers, but constituted by a balance of power between multiple "poles" of equal strength, balancing each other and based on respect for the foundational norms of the Westphalian system, sovereignty and territorial integrity.⁸ In this, Russia was a pivotal "pole", not least because it participated as regional power in three world regions, Europe, Asia and the Muslim world. As reactions to the Kosovo crisis as well as the election campaign of 1999 showed, by 1999 multipolarity had become a concept that was widely shared among the political elite as a desirable way of ordering the international system.

Already during the 1990s, the hegemonic representation of the West had become one of a bounded space to which Russia did not belong. Nevertheless, the binary dualism between integration and exclusion, pro-and anti-Westernism did not exhaust available representations of the imagined space of the West in Russian political discourse. Above all, it did not capture the fact that scripts belonging to both sides of the dichotomy continued to be used in close proximity to each other,

⁶ Graham Smith, "The Masks of Proteus: Russia, Geopolitical Shift and the New Eurasianism," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 24, no. 4 (1999).

⁷ E. M. Primakov, *Russian Crossroads: Toward the New Millennium* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

⁸ Thomas Ambrosio, "Russia's Quest for Multipolarity: A Response to US Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era," *European Security* 10, no. 1 (2001), Light, "Foreign Policy Thinking.", A. Melville and Tatiana Shakleina, *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition : Concepts and Realities*, 1st ed. (New York: CEU Press, 2005), E. M. Primakov, *Russian Crossroads : Toward the New Millennium* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). See also earlier statements by Primakov on Russia's relationship with the West, "Interview with Yevgeni Primakov," *Rossiskaya Gazeta*, 10 January 1997.

especially so in official discourse, statements emanating from the presidency and the government. Equally importantly, the narrative of Russia's exclusion from Western space came in a variety of scripts and did not in itself imply anti-Westernism.⁹ In this sense, the concept of "The West", during Soviet times depicted in exclusively negative terms as the "absolute different" of the Soviet Union, had already been differentiated into diverse forms of (self-)exclusion, not all of which posited the West as Russia's negation or enemy.¹⁰

3. Russian scripts: the West, Inclusion, Exclusion

Two events highlighted different dynamics in the general process of developing representations of the West in Russia from 1999 onwards. NATO's "Operation Allied Force" in March 1999 was a crisis point in Russian relations with the West, and activated images of an exclusionary or hostile West across the political spectrum.¹¹ September 11th, a little more than two years later, elicited almost the opposite reaction (though not as pervasively), since the US "war on terror" gave a new normative dimension to the imagined space of the West, one that seemed to allow for a partial Russian inclusion in this space. In fact, representations in Russia of the West and its relation to Russia had not come so close to identification since 1992, with one journalist even exclaiming that "our country's place is in the West".¹²

3.1. Kosovo: hostile West and sovereignty

Operation "Allied Force", the bombardment of Serbia launched on the 23rd March 1999, was described as "NATO aggression" by liberals and nationalist alike,

⁹John O'Loughlin and Vladimir Kolossov, "Still Not Worth the Bones of a Single Pomeranian Grenadier: the Geopolitics of the Kosovo War 1999," *Political Geography* 21, no. 4 (2002). Prozorov, *Understanding Conflict between Russia and the EU: the Limits of Integration*.

¹⁰ This observation contradicts the argument presented by Ted Hopf. See Ch. V in Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics*.

¹¹ Michael E. Aleprete jr., "Democratic Politics and Russian Foreign Policy: Russia's Domestic Debate and the Conflict in Kosovo," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 3, no. 4 (2000), Vladimir Brovkin, "Discourse on NATO in Russia During the Kosovo War," *Demokratizatsiya* 7, no. 4 (1999).

¹² Cited in Viatcheslav Morozov, "Auf der Suche nach Europa," *Osteuropa* 53, no. 9-10 (2003).

reminiscent of the characterization of NATO as an “aggressive bloc” during Soviet times.¹³ Initial reactions to the Kosovo crisis also depicted the West as monolithic bloc that not only excluded Russia, but was antagonistic or even hostile. In a statement issued on the 24th March, for example, the Duma Foreign Affairs committee described the NATO actions as evidence that “the leadership of the states in the West treads on the political commitments fixed in the OSCE documents and in the Russia-NATO Founding Act and does not intend to take the Russian interests into consideration any longer and has thus taken a hostile position with regard to the Russian Federation.”¹⁴ Similar passages could be found in several of the resolutions (all unanimous) which were passed by the Duma on the Kosovo crisis.¹⁵ This construction of the West as separate and potentially threatening space occurred on all sides of the political spectrum; differences only emerged over concrete responses to the bombing and the degree of antagonism towards Russia that was expressed in Western actions.¹⁶

The following summary of Russia’s relations with the West, made by Alexei Arbatov, leading foreign policy expert of “Yabloko” and deputy head of the Duma Defence Committee, days after the beginning of the Kosovo bombing campaign illustrates the way that the West was represented as a space that permitted only hierarchical inclusion on its own terms and depicted a competitive image of Russia’s relationship with the West that had gained prominence during Primakov’s time as Foreign and Prime Minister:

[Attempts by Russia to develop its own national consciousness] did not meet with understanding in the West because, first, the balance of forces in the world changed dramatically in favour of the West at the expense of Russia. And second, from the experience of the first half of the 1990s, the West got used to a Russia that does not have a foreign policy and that the entire foreign policy is determined by ideas of

¹³ See for examples “Statement by Duma Foreign Affairs Committee,” (www.integrum.ru: ITAR-TASS, 24 March 1999), “Vneocherednoe Zasedanie [Debate and Resolution of the Russian Duma],” (www.integrum.ru: plenarnie zasedania gosudarstvennoi dumy RF, 27 March 1999).

¹⁴ “Statement by Duma Foreign Affairs Committee.” 24 March 1999

¹⁵ “Duma Resolution,” (Eastview: Gosudarstvennaia Duma. Postanovleniia, 11 May 1999), “Duma Resolution,” (Eastview: Gosudarstvennaia Duma. Postanovleniia, 17 March 1999), “Duma Resolution,” (Eastview: Gosudarstvennaia Duma. Postanovleniia, 10 June 1999).

¹⁶ Of course, integrationists still existed; Kozyrev, for example, published several newspaper articles advocating integration and an extremely pro-Western line. However, he arguably did this precisely because he was no longer an active politician and not bound by the conceptual space within which those competing for power and legitimacy within Russia moved. Others were marginalized; Duma deputy and leader of the small economic freedom party, Konstantin Borodoi, went on a week-long hunger strike to protest against biased Russian media coverage of the bombings, without noticeable results.

integration with the West, partnership and, as it was said then, even an alliance in the future. (...) [A]ny efforts of Russia to formulate its own interests which did not entirely coincide with those of the West, which was quite natural (...) were perceived in the West as relapses into Cold War thinking, as relapses into imperial consciousness, or concessions to the pressure of the left-wing and nationalist opposition, which was by no means always the case.¹⁷

In this potted history of post-Soviet Russia's relation with the West, the theme was not only hierarchical inclusion, but also self-exclusion – a “legitimate divergence of interests”, with a West that was unable or unwilling to acknowledge this. Arbatov, of course, was a liberal, though well known as a “pragmatic nationalist”, and, in general, liberal representations of the West focused on the way that the West had excluded Russia by going ahead with the air strikes, but also on more long-term policies, especially NATO enlargement, without heeding Russian objections. At that point, liberals still wanted to reverse that exclusion. The liberal leaders, Gaidar and Chubais, for example, who embarked on an independent rescue mission to resolve the crisis, did this in part to avoid Russia's isolation.¹⁸

Nationalists of both left and right, on the other hand, embraced exclusion and the image of the hostile West as the natural destiny of Russia. The narrative of self-exclusion was a mainstay of statements by Zyuganov and Zhirinovsky throughout the bombing campaign. The People's Patriotic Union of Russia, a loose assembly of nationalist parties and movements headed by Zyuganov, described the bombings as an opportunity for Russia to realize that the essential civilizational difference of Russia meant it should follow its own path of development and turn away from the West.¹⁹ This argument, typical for the nationalist camp, shows the almost paradoxical contrast between representations of the West as an outside and alien space and the heavily politicized and very domestic nature of such anti-Western arguments – as usual, this was as much an attack on Yeltsin (who was under impeachment investigations by the opposition in the Duma at the time, partly for his role in the destruction of the Soviet Union), as it was a statement on the West. Behind the calls of the CPRF and the LDPR for a break with the West and Russian

¹⁷ "Press Conference with Alexei Arbatov," (www.lexisnexis.com: Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast, 26 March 1999).

¹⁸ See, for example, "Interview with Gaidar and Chubais, Itogi News Programme, NTV" (www.integrum.ru: Federal News Service, 30 March 1999).

¹⁹ Cf. *Declaration of the Chairman of the People's Patriotic Union Gennadii Zyuganov* (<http://www.kprf.ru/archiv/ofmesg/990324os.htm>, 24 March 1993 [cited 24 April 2006]).

military intervention on the side of Serbia was an attempt to weaken the presidency and to reverse the course of liberal reforms in Russia. Indeed, although they were most likely to position Russia as a civilizational space that was totally separate from the West, members of the nationalist opposition were also most likely to intertwine representations of the West with domestic Russian politics, implicitly acknowledging the way that the West had already penetrated Russia and relegating their narrative of Russia as a separate civilization to the status of an utopian vision.

Across the political spectrum, however, there emerged an overarching image of the West that was repeated again and again during the crisis – a space which, by virtue of the self-declared “universal” values which constituted it, infringed the constitutive norms of international society, and above all the norm of sovereignty and territorial integrity. On the side of the government, this led to a rhetoric of unconditional support for Serbia, short of military action (the reality of the actions taken by the Russian state was much more accommodating to Western demands than the language, with a few exceptions such as the Prishtina incident).²⁰ In his speech to the Duma on 27th March, Igor Ivanov talked about “NATO’s aggression against sovereign Yugoslavia – an aggression in particular against all canons of international law (...)” and went on to stress that “while defending today Yugoslavia’s right to sovereignty, we are also defending the future of the world and of Europe against the most recent form of colonialism – the so-called NATO colonialism”.²¹

This had very little to do with a romanticized notion of a “Slavic Brotherhood” (although this – yet another example of ambiguous and overlapping representations of space – was exploited by the red-brown camp, Zhirinovsky in particular).²² The violation of sovereignty was a central point not only because it undermined an international order that underpinned Russian claims to Great Power status, but also because a link, direct or indirect, was being made to Russia’s fragile and ambiguous territoriality. This was not only a question of fears over the ambiguous space of the “near abroad”, where NATO’s enlargement and its new commitment to out-of-area missions might mean an erosion of Russian influence,

²⁰ The Prishtina incident refers to the temporary occupation of the airport in Prishtina by Russian troops, shortly before NATO troops took over the city in June 1999. There followed a stand-off between NATO and Russia, but the issue was eventually resolved and Russian troops integrated into a NATO-led peacekeeping force.

²¹ “Vneocherednoe Zasedanie [Debate and Resolution of the Russian Duma].” 27/3/1999

²² See e.g. “Press Conference by Vladimir Zhirinovsky,” (www.lexis-nexis.com: Official Kremlin Int’l News Broadcast, 14 April 1999).

although this was, indeed, part of the problem.²³ The connection that was made, via the stress on Yugoslavia's sovereignty, was with the territorial unity of the Russian state itself.

In early 1999, there was an overwhelming sense that the domestic sovereignty of the central Russian state was extremely fragile, so much so that a break-up of Russia was perceived as a distinct possibility. This sense of crisis was underpinned by the fact that the state was becoming dysfunctional under the combined onslaught of anarchic centre-regional relations, loss of sovereign control over Chechnya, and the "privatization of the state", the corruption of the Yeltsin "family" which was dragged into the public domain by General Prosecutor Skuratov. The bombing campaign and its disregard for sovereign territoriality thus constituted a diffuse threat not only to Russia's Great Power status or its claims to influence in the "near abroad", but to the Russian state itself.

Thus, the disintegration of Yugoslavia, and the direct threat to the territorial integrity of a sovereign state resulted from the NATO campaign struck a deep chord, although the precise nature of the threat was interpreted very differently depending on the standpoint of the speaker. A direct linkage between Kosovo and the situation in Chechnya was drawn by the nationalist and communist forces; Zyuganov stated in a press conference in February 1999 that "Kosovo is a big Chechnya", and he went on to stress the importance of preserving Serbian territorial integrity and then claimed that "our biggest threat today is that to the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation".²⁴ However, this was not only the position held by the nationalist opposition. The linkage, although more veiled, was also visible in the official language used to describe the conflict: on the one hand, Serbia, always endowed with the attribute "sovereign state", whose right to territorial integrity was violated by both the demands of the Kosovo Albanians and NATO air strikes, and, on the other hand, the KLA, invariably referred to as "separatists and terrorists", the same terms

²³ This commitment was enshrined in a revised strategic concept that was unveiled at the Washington summit in April 1999, at the same time as the enlargement took place. See *Fact Sheet: Nato's New Strategic Concept* (24 April 1999 [cited 25 February 2007]); available from <http://www.fas.org/man/nato/natodocs/99042450.htm>.

²⁴ *Press Conference with Gennadii Zyuganov 03 February 1999* ([cited 02 May 2006]); available from www.kprf.ru. Similar comments were made by Rogozin, later chairman of Rodina, but at the time high-ranking member of Otechestvo. See "Interview with Dmitri Rogozin, 9 April 1999," (www.lexis-nexis.com: Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast, 9 April 1999).

that were used for Chechen rebels.²⁵ The liberal version of these fears reversed the argument but arrived at a similar conclusion by accusing the red-brown coalition of exploiting the Kosovo crisis to drive a wedge between the West and Russia, in this way endangering the very existence of the Russian state. As Yavlinsky put it in an interview days after the start of the air strikes, “Russia is now in such a situation that if the irresponsible statements by the Communists and other forces draw Russia into a military conflict, this will end with the collapse of our country. We cannot allow this to happen.”²⁶

3.2 9/11: the West as inclusive space

Although the Kosovo crisis had reinforced a narrative of the West as a separate and potentially antagonistic space, this was not the only narrative that remained available. The early positive connotations of “the West” that had dominated liberal political discourse in 1992 were still present at the end of the decade, although they had become marginalized. However, positive scripts that counteracted the narrative of exclusion that had dominated in 1999 appeared not only on the side of the liberal opposition, but also in official discourse. One instance in which this came to the fore was related to Russia’s full participation in the G8 and thus in an exclusive (in both senses of the word) Western space. In 2002, a process which had started in 1998 culminated into an invitation to host the 2006 summit, something that was taken by Moscow to signify full acceptance as an equal member.²⁷ As Alexander Livshits, at the time the official responsible for liaison with the G8, put it in early 2001: “I do not consider it offensive that some people call Russia a poor relation, because poverty is a temporary state. The main thing is that the members of the G8 consider Russia their relation.”²⁸

²⁵ See, for example, "Press Conference by Igor Ivanov, 25 March 1999," (www.lexis-nexis.com: Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast, 29 March 1999).

²⁶"Yabloko Leader Warns against Being Sucked into War over Kosovo, 24 March 1999," (www.lexis-nexis.com: BBC Summary of World Broadcasts SU/D3493/B, 26 March 1999). Chubais and Gaidar made similar comments in an interview with Itogi news on 30 March, "Interview with Gaidar and Chubais, Itogi News Programme, NTV".

²⁷ Putin press conference after Kananaskis summit, "Russia's Putin Sums up Results of G8 Summit, Complains of Jet Lag," (www.lexis-nexis.com: BBC Monitoring International Reports, 28 June 2002).

²⁸Bo Peterson, *National Self-Images and Regional Identities in Russia* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001). On the symbolic significance of the G8, see also "Interview with Vladimir Lukin, Ekho Moskvy Radio," (www.integrum.ru: Federal News Service, 23 July 2001).

The importance given to inclusion in the G8 persisted through the turmoil of 1999, and into the Putin presidency, despite Western criticism of Russia's actions in Chechnya and the ups and downs of relations during Putin's presidency. Inclusion remained important in the official Russian script: however, it needs to be stressed that this was no longer the inclusion based on Western terms that had been sought by the Utopian Westernizers in the early 1990s. Nor was it a question of identification with the values that constituted the symbolic boundaries of the West. The kind of inclusion sought with regard to the G8 was pragmatic; as Putin put it, "we need to be integrated into all structures where work is done to resolve issues which concern Russia".²⁹ However, this was, above all, a question of the identity script of Russia as Great Power – the importance of obtaining recognition of equal status as one of the "leading industrial powers", as the often-repeated formula went. This was a self-Other relationship that was not expressed in the choice between identification and difference held up by the West, but referred to recognition by what was regarded as the "dominant pole" of the international system.

The decisive event in bringing out a different representation of the West, as an imagined space formed by values which potentially could include Russia, was the aftermath of 9/11, when Russia joined the global "war on terror". As in the case of the G8, this was not a simple return to aspirations to be a "normal Great Power" and acceptance of Western values that had dominated in 1992. What allowed for representations of Russia as part of a common project with the West was based on a shift in meaning of the concept "West", and the values which constituted it. To some extent this may have just been a rhetorical strategy, but it also went back once again to self-images related to Russia's ambiguous territoriality, and especially its "inner abroad", Chechnya.

In the intervening two years, Russia had undergone profound changes, as the presidential administration, together with the newly-founded Unity (*Edinstvo*) Party (which became United Russia in April 2001) had achieved a hegemonic position within a rapidly shrinking public political space. However, the issue of the problematic territorial sovereignty of the Russian state had not been resolved, as the second war in Chechnya that had brought Putin to power continued to drag on. And in fact, the issue of Chechnya was once more at the basis of representations of the

²⁹ *Putin Press Conference after Okinawa G8 Summit* (23 July 2000 [cited 27. July 2006]); available from <http://www.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2000/07/28799.shtml>.

imagined space of the West, although the meaning given to it was almost reversed in comparison to 1999. As O'Loughlin et al have shown, the official narrative in Russia consistently equated the US war on terror with Russia's fight in Chechnya, trying to frame the war on terror as a "Global Chechnya".³⁰ In a notable parallel construction to Zyuganov's "Kosovo is Chechnya", the Foreign Minister, Igor Ivanov, declared that "Chechnya and Afghanistan are branches of one tree, whose roots are in Afghanistan".³¹

The attempt to frame the global war on terror as a parallel to Russia's war on Chechnya was accompanied by a new emphasis on values. Significantly, however, the inclusion of Russia in a space of common values shared with the West was achieved not by adhering to liberal norms, as in 1991, but by re-defining Western values towards a stress on Christian values against the Islamic Other.³² This shift was implicit in the script of the Bush administration itself. However, even before this became a clearly discernible trend, immediate Russian reactions appealed to a common humanity which was not based on a universal conception of human rights, but on civilization facing the dangers of a Islamist terrorist threat. The identification in the face of a common Other, in Putin's initial reaction, was emotional and personal: "We entirely and fully share and experience your pain. We support you."³³ And in his television address on September 11th, Putin stated that "the event that occurred in the US today goes beyond national borders. It is a brazen challenge to the whole of humanity, at least to civilized humanity".³⁴

Equally significant was the way that this communality was phrased in these early reactions – not so much Russia joining a Western initiative in the usual form of hierarchical inclusion offered by the West, but the West finally catching up with an initiative that originated from Russia, which was in a privileged position due to its experience in Chechnya. In fact, Putin went on to state that "this gives added

³⁰ O'Loughlin, Tuathail, and Kolossov, "A Risky Westward Turn? Putins 9-11 Script and Ordinary Russians.", John O'Loughlin, Gearoid O'Tuathail, and Vladimir Kolossov, "Russian Geopolitical Storylines and Public Opinion in the Wake of 9-11: A Critical Geopolitical Analysis and National Survey," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 37 (2004).

³¹ Cited in O'Loughlin, O'Tuathail, and Kolossov, "Russian Geopolitical Storylines and Public Opinion in the Wake of 9-11: A Critical Geopolitical Analysis and National Survey."

³² In this, there were traces of one of the oldest self-representations of Russia, that of the bulwark of European Christianity against the infidels, the original meaning of Moscow as the "Third Rome". See Duncan, *Russian Messianism*.

³³ Vladimir Putin, Telegram to Bush 9/11, quoted in O'Loughlin, Tuathail, and Kolossov, "A Risky Westward Turn? Putins 9-11 Script and Ordinary Russians."

³⁴ "Statement by President Putin of Russia on the Terrorist Acts in the US," (www.lexis-nexis.com: Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast, 12 September 2001).

relevance to Russia's call for the international community to unite in the struggle against terrorism, that plague of the 21st century".³⁵ For a while this narrative became the official line, and was repeated by Ivanov and other government officials. The formula used by the Kremlin described Russia as "fully-fledged and equal partner of the West" – not identifying with the West (the fundamental distinctiveness of Russia was acknowledged with this formulation), but sharing an imagined space whose boundaries were drawn by common values.

However, this changing narrative was much less broadly shared than the one on Kosovo a little more than two years earlier. Speaking in March 2002, Alexei Arbatov estimated that no more than 15 per cent of Duma deputies supported Putin's pro-American line, including the pro-presidential parties.³⁶ Challenges came, predictably, from various nationalist and communist positions with Eurasian leanings, which not only stressed Russia's essential civilizational difference, but in some cases advocated an alliance of Russia and the Muslim world against the US and saw 9/11 as an instance of a legitimate war against US dominance.³⁷ Perhaps more surprising was the criticism by liberals such as Nemtsov and Yavlinsky, who were generally supportive, but expressed fears that Russia was not reaping enough tangible benefits from its cooperation with the US and that the radical policy decision that Putin had made in favour of giving the US Russia's full support would lead to an erosion of its influence over the CIS.³⁸ The essential desire to become part of Western space, at whichever cost, that had characterized liberal thinking in early 1992 had by and large vanished even from the most liberal positions (though it was alive and well in former politicians who had turned into political commentators, such as Kozyrev).

The narrative of a common war against terror led to a radical but short-lived change in Russia's relations with the West. In concrete terms, the opening of airspace, information sharing on an unprecedented scale and allowing the West to penetrate into the "near abroad", in the form of US airbases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, were moves that seemed to go directly against a dominant narrative of

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶"Press Briefing by Alexei Arbatov, Vice Chairman of Duma Defense Committee," (www.lexis-nexis.com: Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast, 26 March 2002).

³⁷"Press-Konferentsia Predsedatelja Gosdumy Vladimira Zhirinovskovo," (www.integrum.ru: Federal News Service, 13 September 2001), "Russian Politicians Apprehensive after US Attacks," (www.lexis-nexis.com: BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union - Political, 12 September 2001).

³⁸"US Antiterrorist Aid to Tbilisi Rankles Russians," *Christian Science Monitor* 4 March 2002.

(self-)exclusion. This change also led to an unprecedented NATO-Russia joint statement in December 2001, in which the script of shared values against a common threat was repeated.³⁹ In a series of summits in May/June 2002, the language of a new partnership was reiterated over and over again, as a new nuclear arms reduction treaty was signed between Russia and the US and a “qualitatively new relationship” between NATO and Russia was declared in Rome as a new NATO-Russia Council was established.

However, the official narrative of the unity of the West and Russia in the name of civilization against barbarous terrorists faltered quickly as it became clear that changes in Western policy towards Russia in reaction to Russia’s new commitment to the war on terror were not substantial. The unilateral abrogation of the ABM treaty by the US already in December 2001 (planned long before the 9/11 attacks), divergences over Iraq and Iran, the decision on further NATO expansion taken in November 2002, and the increasing US rhetoric of regime change and democratisation caused deep uneasiness among the Russian political elite. With the invasion of Iraq, bitterly opposed by Russia, and as the US more or less openly supported “democratic revolutions” in Georgia and Ukraine as well as in Kyrgyzstan, any idea of a commonly shared “imagined space” was eroded. By the time of the Bratislava summit in 2005, scripts of Russia’s community of values with the West had vanished from official discourse, even though the alliance in the war on terror was not put in doubt; instead, the presidential administration counteracted US criticism of democratic development in Russia with an attempted re-occupation of the concept of democracy, something that will be explored in greater detail in Ch. VII.

4. Europe as imagined space: true and false Europe

The dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in representations of the West coexisted and partly overlapped with different representations of “Europe”, some of which unequivocally included Russia. This made the distinction between Russia and

³⁹ *NATO-Russia Joint Statement 7 December 2001* (2001 [cited 21 June 2006]); available from <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2001/p011207e.htm>.

the imagined space of the West more opaque than suggested by a pure concentration on the discourse of “the West”. Indeed, Europe was the original West, was partly identified with it and, as such, was and is a central category in Russian identity discourses. However, the concept was differentiated from that of the West during the Cold War, and, as has been seen in Chapter IV, it has retained a different, and much older genealogy, one that puts Russia firmly within the imagined space of Europe.

On the level of practical geopolitics, the division of Europe during the Cold War meant that from a Russian perspective not all of Europe was “Western” (from the Western European perspective, the concept of Eastern Europe as distinct from the West had a much longer history, going back to the Enlightenment).⁴⁰ Above all, however, during the Cold War a strongly normative distinction between the imagined spaces of Europe and the West took hold. As Iver Neumann has shown, there is a long tradition in Russian intellectual history of constructing a vision of Europe as a utopian ideal, a truly imagined space of “true Europe” that was differentiated from an actually existing “false Europe”. During the Cold War the latter was a capitalist Europe, dominated by the West in the shape of US, while the former was the origin of communism.⁴¹ “False” Europe – occupied by the West - was the enemy, but this narrative also represented the Soviet Union as the really existing embodiment of “true” Europe, and the country that could ultimately liberate Europe from its own false consciousness.

This strongly normative representation of Europe, and the way that in this narrative the Soviet Union was the moral instance that represented “true Europe”, was tied in with older Russian self-images as part of European civilization in terms of high culture, a fundamental part of Russian (and indeed Soviet) identity discourses.⁴² For the first time, however, it allowed a depiction of Russia in socio-economic terms not as a learner, but as a beacon that represented Europe’s future. This was a representation that cross-cut Westernizing images of Europe, but at the same time did not fit into the Slavophile or Eurasianist images of Russia as a unique

⁴⁰ Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: the Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*.

⁴¹ Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe*.

⁴² As has been alluded to in Chapter IV, literature and the arts are often associated with “Russian civilization” in Russian political discourse – though it is precisely this meaning that is contested by Eurasianist representations of Russian civilization as separate and opposed to European civilization – something that once again draws on Western representations, such as Huntington’s Clash of Civilizations thesis. See also Andrei P. Tsygankov, “The Irony of Western Ideas in a Multicultural World: Russians’ Intellectual Engagement with the “End of History” and “Clash of Civilizations”,” *Int Studies Review* 5, no. 1 (2003).

civilizational space, wholly separate from Europe (though both these scripts persisted during the Soviet Union, from Stalin's nationalism onwards).⁴³

In this sense, representations of "true Europe" were, in the full sense of the word, an imagined space, and once again it was one where the boundaries between the domestic and external were thoroughly dissolved. Just like representations of the West, this was a narrative which ultimately concerned the nature of Russia. This pattern was reversed for a short period during Perestroika and in the "utopian Westernizing" positions of the early 1990s – here, for the first time, the liberal Europe of values represented by the EU appeared as the embodiment of "true" Europe, while Russia, by virtue of its liberal choices, was also on the way to an actual "true Europe" and could, therefore, expect to be fully included in its space.

However, as with Utopian Westernizing positions in general, this kind of narrative had been decisively weakened, to a point where it had become a marginal position in Russian political discourse. This marginalization went hand in hand with a turn away from the largely positive image of the EU and Western Europe that had dominated all but nationalist positions during the 1990s, and may, in part, be a reaction to European self-representations as firmly a part of the West. It may be significant in this context that not even the staunchest *zapadniki* (Westernizers) ever actually declared Russia to be part of the West – not even at the height of utopian Westernism in the early 1990s, and despite their hopes for an inclusion into Europe.⁴⁴

The crisis over NATO's bombing campaign in Serbia in March 1999 brought the tension between representations of Europe and the West into sharp relief. One factor underlying the almost unanimous condemnation of "NATO aggression" against the Yugoslav republic across the political spectrum was disbelief over the way that European states put themselves fully behind NATO's strategy and thus identified themselves squarely with the West. As Vladimir Brovkin has pointed out, "(...) centrist Russian opinion was shocked by the unanimity of Europe and the United States" in their support of the bombardment.⁴⁵ Not only centrists, but prominent liberal politicians like Khakamada and Yavlinsky condemned NATO actions, and the involvement of European states in them; in the heated Duma debate on the bombing campaign, Khakamada warned that European NATO member states

⁴³ Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991*, Hosking and Service, eds., *Russian Nationalism, Past and Present*, Shlapentokh, "Eurasianism Past and Present."

⁴⁴ Morozov, "Auf der Suche nach Europa."

⁴⁵ Brovkin, "Discourse on NATO in Russia During the Kosovo War."

were in danger of losing their status as “democratic Great Powers” by participating in the campaign.⁴⁶ In this sense, during the Kosovo crisis, representations of Europe and the West overlapped completely, transforming the actual Europe into a bounded space from which Russia was excluded.

It is true that the antagonistic language used over Kosovo died down relatively quickly. Putin, in particular, took pains to stress that Russia was indeed an inalienable part of Europe, and this was a script widely used in official discourse. Nevertheless, while the positive representation of Europe has not died out, especially amongst liberals, this must not be read as an indication that things returned to the position of the early 1990s. The dominant representation of Europe in Russian political discourse was changing.

Viacheslav Morozov has argued that the very frequency with which this script was used by the administration betrayed profound insecurities about Russia’s inclusion into the space of Europe that were a direct result of the Kosovo crisis.⁴⁷ However, even now these insecurities reflect only part of the story, and the regular references to Russia as part of Europe should not only be read as an expression of doubt over Russia’s belonging. It matters that a Russian self-image as part of Europe persisted in political discourse, and that this representation became more frequent, not from the pro-Western liberals, but the more conservative forces that now came to dominate Russian political space. Not only the presidential administration under Putin, but also *Rodina*, the new nationalist movement that captured its votes from the weakening CPSU and LDPR in the Duma elections in 2003, frequently invoked a Russia that belonged to Europe.

In this, the meaning of the imagined space of “Europe” was evolving once again. In fact, Pertti Joenniemi has argued that it reverted back to the normative level of a utopian “true” Europe that was distinct from the actually existing “false” Europe of the European Union. The values of “true Europe” were potentially embodied by Russia, and in this sense, Russia was European.⁴⁸ The categories of the imagined space of “true Europe” however, were filled with a meaning that was quite different from the communist vision of a Europe of progressive forces. Simply put, “true Europe” now became an idealized version of a Europe of the past, the Europe of the

⁴⁶ “Vneocherednoe Zhasedanie [Debate and Resolution of the Russian Duma].” 27/3/1999

⁴⁷ Morozov, “Auf der Suche nach Europa.”

⁴⁸ Pertti Joenniemi, “America’s Old/New Meets Russia’s True/False: The Case of Europe’s North,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 18, no. 2 (2005).

European Concert of Powers and the Westphalian narrative, Great Powers which respected sovereignty as a central norm of the international system.

Thus, while representations of a liberal “true Europe” after the Kosovo crisis went into decline, representations of Russia as part of “true Europe” as a Westphalian system of independent, sovereign states gained in strength. The former chairman of *Rodina* (and head of Russia’s delegation to the Council of Europe), Dmitri Rogozin, expressed this script when he said in 2004: “We are Europeans with no need for any European Unions and Euro-members with their unclear prospects and their sold sovereignties.”⁴⁹

This was a curiously nostalgic representation, one which took the Westphalian narrative as not only a normative ideal but a strongly idealized version of Russia’s own history. This European space, the space of Westphalia, included Russia in yet another respect – by treating all its components as different, yet equal. The narrative of “true” Europe did not impose the choice between identity and difference onto Russia: by virtue of its statehood it enabled it to be fully part of a pluralist space, an ensemble of sovereign states, conveying the normative basis for recognition as an equal that it sought in its relations with the West. It also emphasised the centrality of concepts of statehood that were connected with this narrative, above all, that of Russia as a Great Power.

Indeed, as has been seen in Chapter IV, the oldest and most uncontroversial way in which Russia was fully included into European space relates precisely to its representation as Great Power. It was as a Great Power that Russia was first unquestioningly part of Europe, participating in the European Concert of Powers as an active equal in ways that were never granted to the other great “marginal power” of Europe, the Ottoman Empire (ironically in contrast to the current situation, in which Turkey is at least considered as EU candidate, while Russia is excluded).⁵⁰ This historical meaning resonates in the frequently used official script that “Russia has always been and remains a European Great Power”, which appeared in conjunction with the even more frequent invocation of Russia as part of European civilization.⁵¹

⁴⁹Quoted in *Ibid.*

⁵⁰Malia, *Russia under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum*.

⁵¹Eg. Sergei Ivanov, *Speech at 42nd Munich Security Conference* ([cited 27 October 2006]); available from <http://www.securityconference.de/konferenzen/rede.php?sprache=en&id=171&>.

This latter remained a formulaic, unspecified script in official discourse, but was specified all the more in the nationalist script of *Rodina*, the new nationalist party that had been founded for the 2003 elections. As one article by Natalia Narochnitskaia, a prominent ideologue of *Rodina* put it:

Is Russia a part of Europe? Of course. Russia and Europe were united twice in history – in the epoch prior to the Enlightenment, and during the 20th century, in the communist period. And this is not a paradox. Where does this all-European unity lie? In the adherence to universal goals and values? (...) No – in the Christian revelation...⁵²

This, incidentally, linked back to the representation of a common civilizational space with the West after 9/11, and draws on historic identity discourses of Russia as the bulwark of Christianity – something that fitted in with *Rodina*'s ethno-nationalist and racist tendencies.

By the end of the first Putin presidency, liberal conceptions of Europe as the embodiment of Russia's future and doubts about Russia's belonging to a Europe that appeared to overlap increasingly with the West coexisted with a strengthening narrative of "true Europe" embodied by Russia. Given the erosion of a pluralist political space within Russia, these representations were only partly distributed along political fault lines and instead appeared across the field, especially in official discourse. What is perhaps most telling is the way that this narrative of Russia as the embodiment of a utopian "true Europe", with its central focus on the concept of sovereignty, was taken up by liberals. Strongly critical liberal reactions to Putin's westward shift after 9/11 have been mentioned above. As Sergei Prozorov has shown, this was only part of a wider trend that asserted itself precisely at the moment in which Putin's continuation of liberal economic and political reforms in the first phase of his presidency made it less necessary for liberals to seek integration into European structures to achieve their aims.⁵³ In fact, the position of seeking EU accession at almost any cost, which had been a common position amongst liberals during the 1990s, was abandoned by some in favour of an equal partnership that would respect the central value of Russian sovereignty. This did not necessarily

⁵² Natalia Narochnitskaia, *Budushee Rossii - Eto Budushee Evropy* [the Future of Russia Is the Future of Europe] (2005 [cited 29 October 2006]); available from <http://www.rodina.ru/article/show/?id=367>.

⁵³ Prozorov, *Understanding Conflict between Russia and the EU: the Limits of Integration*.

mean a shift against integration; it meant an integration only on equal terms, as a sovereign subject.

As a more radical version of this, there emerged a narrative of Russia as the potential guarantor of liberal values in the post-Soviet space, the liberal variant of the idea of Russia as the embodiment of “true Europe”, and the extension into the “near abroad” of Putin’s argument that only a strong state could guarantee democracy (something that will be explored in chapter VII). This was part of the election strategy of the Union of Right Forces in 2003, when its then chairman, Anatoly Chubais, called for a “liberal Empire”, Russia as the hegemon of a post-Soviet space economically integrated with Russia, under the banner of market economy and liberal democracy.⁵⁴ This, indeed, brought the idea of Russia as “true” Europe to its logical conclusion: instead of seeking integration with Europe, Russia should redouble Europe, create its own distinct, yet European space.⁵⁵ As Chubais wrote, “Our country has always been drawn to tasks of cosmic (...) significance. Russia is a country with its own destiny and undoubtedly with its own historical mission. (...) We must not enter either the EU or NATO. We simply will not fit there, either politically or geographically.”⁵⁶

5. Territoriality, domestic and external space: Russia’s inner and “near abroad”

The scripts of the West and Europe ultimately circulated around issues closer to home, both Russia’s own ambiguous territoriality and, increasingly, the way that Russia’s space in relation to the former Soviet Union was represented. It has been argued above that the imagined space of the West was at the root of divisions in Russia’s fragmented and antagonistic political space, but also that the West was increasingly represented as a threat to Russia’s own ambiguous territoriality –

⁵⁴ "TV Interview with RAO UES of Russia Chair of Board Anatoly Chubais," (www.lexis-nexis.com:Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast 29 September 2003).

⁵⁵ Prozorov, *Understanding Conflict between Russia and the EU: the Limits of Integration*.

⁵⁶ Anatoly Chubais, "Missiya Rossii v 21m veke [Russia's Mission in the 21st Century]," *Nezavisimaya gazeta* 25 September 2003.

regarding both Russia's "Inner Abroad" in the form of Chechnya, and its "near abroad".

The renewed turn towards representations of a "true Europe" in the image of Westphalia and the discourse of self-exclusion from the West thus not only put the strong state and Great Power at the centre of political imagery, but also tied in with an emphasis on unity – unity of political space, and unity of territory that was nothing other than a strengthening of the domestic sovereignty of the central state. This focus on unity, a central point of Putin's programme since 2000 and, not incidentally, the name of the "presidential party", *Edinstvo* (later United Russia), which was created in September 1999, was behind Putin's drive to curtail the power of regional governors, but, most importantly, it was one of the factors legitimizing the second Chechen war in official discourse.

Unity of Russian domestic space meant, above all, the reassertion of the domestic sovereignty of a strong central state, in parallel with the reassertion of its external sovereignty as a Great Power which would not tolerate interference into its domestic affairs. However, the context in which this connection was made in 1999 was one of weakness of the central state, of a sense of impending crisis and the real possibility of the break-up of the Russian Federation. In this, as has been shown with regard to the Kosovo crisis, representations of the fragility of domestic and external sovereignty were mixed. Chechnya was represented as a space that was part of the Russian Federation, but at the same time internationalized, a "hotbed of international terrorism". In a sense, Russian fears about the fragmentation of domestic space were crystallized in Chechnya. Official discourse represented the Chechen incursion in Dagestan which triggered the intervention of the Russian army as only the first step in an attempt to cut off the North Caucasus from Russia and to annex Tartarstan. As Putin put it in an interview in October 1999, "If we are to call a spade a spade, then we are talking about a challenge to Russia – in the direct sense of the word – by certain international forces whose aim is to destroy the territorial integrity of the state and we have given this attempt an adequate rebuff, in the broadest, most direct sense of the word."⁵⁷

The focus on unity and sovereignty went some way to put a greater emphasis on representations of Russian space as bounded and delineated. This, however, was

⁵⁷ "Interview with Prime Minister Putin, Ostankino Radio Mayak," (www.lexis-nexis.com: Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast, 16 October 1999).

an incomplete and patchy process, and with regard to Russia's relation to the states of the former Soviet Union, more a reaction to the increasing penetration of the West into the space of the "near abroad" than a real shift in conceptions of Russia's territoriality. Thus, while a discourse of sovereignty understood as *independence* from the demands made by the West on Russia and the reassertion of control over domestic space – or the independence of the central state from regional forces -- became stronger in political discourse, representations of the *territorial* sovereignty of Russia, and with this the central distinction between domestic and external space, remained more ambiguous, in direct opposition to the state building processes of the other states of the FSU, and indeed in direct opposition to one of the central paradigms of theories of state-and nation-building.

Indeed, given the encroachment of the West and the renewed emphasis on sovereignty, surprisingly little of Russian ambivalence in representations of the space of the "near abroad" has gone away, both in political discourse and in territorial practices. This ambiguity of space was characterized, on the one hand, by perceptions of FSU states as "not quite foreign", and on the other hand, by a latent fear that unless a distance was kept, Russia could be "exploited", and "lose out", especially in economic terms. What this reveals is a continuing vagueness in the use of the concept of sovereignty that to some extent continued the Soviet differentiation into external sovereignty (impenetrable boundaries against the West, absolute stress on principles of non-interference in domestic affairs), and the "layers of sovereignty" within the Soviet Union, in which sovereign states constituted the domestic space of the Soviet Union.⁵⁸

These ambiguities of space continued to be directly related to the identity of "Russia", a fact which remained visible predominantly in relation to the "little brothers" Belarus and, above all, Ukraine. During the 1990s it had remained a self-evident truth for many Russian politicians, across the political spectrum, that there would eventually be re-integration with Ukraine, the heartland of the first Russian state and a space that historically had been fully part of the imagined space of Russia. By 1999, this position had already begun to shift. The 1997 Friendship Treaty between Ukraine and Russia acknowledged for the first time the legitimacy of the

⁵⁸ Nor is this ambivalence only Russian: opinion polls in 2003 suggested that the majority of the population in Belarus did not think that reintegration with Russia would lead to a change in Belarussian sovereignty

borders between the two countries, although Russia continued to resist their demarcation. The new 2000 Foreign Policy Concept failed to include Ukraine as a country with which Russia had a special partnership, unlike previous documents.⁵⁹ And in 2001 Putin attended celebrations of Ukraine's independence day – the first a Russian leader had attended. However, this symbolic gesture came after the re-election of the pro-Russian President, Leonid Kuchma, and amid a rapprochement between Russia and Ukraine in 2001/2002 that also included many areas of deeper cooperation that concerned territoriality, such as preferential visa regimes.⁶⁰ In fact, in his 2001 speech at the independence celebrations, Putin seemed to indicate a shift in representation based on the imagined space of Europe in which the fact that both Russia and Ukraine were part of Europe allowed for the continuing ambiguity of space between Russia and Ukraine.⁶¹ In all this, the point was not reintegration into Russian space – even sceptical commentators noted that by the first years of the Putin presidency, the Russian state had largely accepted Ukraine's right to be an independent state – but rather the perpetuation of a lack of difference between the domestic spaces of Russia and Ukraine.

The continuing story of the Russian-Belorussian Union showed the same ambivalent approach to territoriality. While there had been a rhetorical commitment to full reintegration since 1995, culminating in the signing of a Union Treaty in December 1999 that aimed at the merging of the two countries, by 2006 not even the customs union that was promised as a first step had materialized. However, rhetorical commitments continued, effectively perpetuating a discursive construction of Belarus as a space that, while not part of the Russian Federation, was certainly not "external".⁶² This ambivalence of territory and identity with regard to the Slavic brother nations was expressed by the head of the Russian Border Guards and Duma deputy, General Andrei Nikolaev, in an interview in November 2001:

Russia, Ukraine and Belarus are in principle one people. We have one language and one culture. *It's not because I want to make everybody to line up. We may as well live in three separate states. By the way, the former*

⁵⁹ Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond "Identity".

⁶⁰ Arkady Moshes, "Russian--Ukrainian Rapprochement of 2001: How Viable?," *Security Dialogue* 33, no. 2 (2002). See also Leonid Polyakov, "Current Russian--Ukrainian Rapprochement: Forward or Backward? A Rejoinder," *Security Dialogue* 33, no. 2 (2002).

⁶¹ Vladimir Putin, *Speech at a Reception to Mark the 10th Anniversary of Ukraine's Independence* (2001 [cited 12 September 2006]); available from http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2001/08/23/0000_type82914type127286_139399.shtml.

⁶² Taras Kuzio, "National Identities and Virtual Foreign Policies among the Eastern Slavs," *Nationalities Papers* 31, no. 4 (2003).

*Soviet republics were also independent and sovereign states. (...) The border [between Russia and Ukraine] is not a frontier between states, it is a line of contact between states. It's kind of a zip that interlinks the two states.*⁶³ [emphasis added]

What all this indicates is that the linkage of territory and identity, in the Westphalian narrative of the European nation state expressed in the symbolic act of boundary drawing, of discursively construing a sharp distinction between identity and difference, continued to follow a different dynamic in Russia a decade after the inception of the new Russian state. Territory and identity continued to be linked through the concept of boundless space, an ambiguous territoriality in which the imagined space of Russia extended beyond the borders of the Russian Federation. In this representation of space and identity, borders and sharp distinctions between domestic and external did not have the symbolic significance they carry in the Westphalian narrative (combined of course with a host of material factors that made the construction and defence of borders between Russia and the CIS extremely costly). Arguably, it is precisely on this basis that the Russian state did not seek full reintegration of Belarus or other CIS states and did not use the issue of Russian-speakers in the newly independent states to stir up irredentist claims (or even to give much importance to the issue unless it could be used for other political aims, in neglect of Russian public opinion and in spite of official rhetoric).

Nor was this only a feature of relations with the Slavic “brother nations”, although the discursive construction of Russia as a boundless and extended state was undoubtedly strongest in relation to them. As of 2006, there was a continuing differentiation in official discourse between “internal” borders within the CIS and “external” international borders, thus continuing a practice that had its roots in Soviet times.⁶⁴

This ambiguity in representations of space had very real consequences. Border delimitation, let alone border demarcation, was still incomplete between Russia and almost all the states of the FSU by 2006; admittedly, progress had been made, but it was often the Russian side which blocked demarcation, as in the case of

⁶³ “Interview with Andrei Nikolaev,” (www.lexis-nexis.com: Official Kremlin Int'l News Broadcast, 12 November 2001).

⁶⁴ “Interview with Head of Russian Border Commission in Tajikistan,” (www.lexis-nexis.com: BBC monitoring Central Asia, 6 August 2006)., “Interview with Federal Security Service Director Nikolai Petruzhev,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 23 August 2005. See also Taras Kuzio, *Russia Continues to Hold up Border Demarcation with Ukraine* [PDF] (RFE/RL, 2001 [cited 25/3 2006]).

Ukraine.⁶⁵ Once again, this was precisely *not* about the re-integration of the constituent members of the CIS into the domestic territory of the Russian state, as the more than chequered history of Russia's relations with the CIS demonstrates. Russian claims that the CIS was its special sphere of influence are not in themselves evidence of ambiguous perceptions of space, but it is telling that until recently the Russian government has had a habit of speaking on behalf of the CIS on international issues such as NATO enlargement and Kosovo.⁶⁶ As Taras Kuzio summed it up in 2003, "Equating "Russia" with only the Russian Federation may only take place over many decades (...)."⁶⁷

Of course, ambiguity was not the only representation of Russia's territoriality available in Russian political discourse. Parts of the nationalist spectrum had always depicted a more sharply delineated idea of Russia – though not the territory of the Russian Federation. Neo-imperialist scripts, like those presented by Zhirinovsky, Zyuganov and the neo-Eurasianist thinkers by which they were influenced, did not accept the boundaries of the present Russian state, but advocated reintegration and incorporation of "lost territories", and in this, invoked very sharp dividing lines between a domestic Russian and external space, underpinned by geopolitical thinking and culminating in antagonism between Russia and the West.⁶⁸ *Rodina* equally advocated the re-creation of a Russian union state incorporating most of the former Soviet republics.⁶⁹ One of its leaders, Sergei Baburin, even moved into ethnocentric nationalism, though *Rodina*'s catch-all nature and chequered ideology means that other positions could be found within its ranks.⁷⁰

These were representations of space that competed with the discourse of territorial ambiguity presented above. They were not dominant, certainly not in official discourse, but gathered strength during the second term of the Putin presidency, underpinned by Western encroachment into the space of the FSU and the increased attempts by FSU states to assert their territorial sovereignty against Russia.

⁶⁵ Kuzio, *Russia Continues to Hold up Border Demarcation with Ukraine* ([cited]).

⁶⁶ Kuzio, "National Identities and Virtual Foreign Policies among the Eastern Slavs."

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Aleksandr Dugin, *Osnovy Geopolitiki: Geopoliticheskoe Budushchee Rossii*, 3rd ed. (Moskva: Arktogeiia-tsentr, 1999), A. I. Podberezkin, *Russkii Put'* (Moskva: RAU--Universitet, 1997). For party platforms see *Ideological Platform of the LDPR* ([cited 16 August 2006]); available from <http://www.ldpr.ru/ideology/>; "Press Conference by the Leader of the CPRF Gennadii Zyuganov," (www.integrum.ru: Federal News Service, 29 September 1999).

⁶⁹ *Programma Bloka "Rodina"* ([cited 5 August 2006]); available from www.rodina.ru/program.

⁷⁰ James H. Billington, *Russia in Search of Itself* (Washington, D.C., Baltimore: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 108.

There was thus an ongoing, if slow, process of discursive boundary demarcation between Russia and the states of the FSU that went hand in hand with the continuing physical process of boundary demarcation.

By the second term of Putin's presidency, the ambiguities of space described above persisted, but reactions to the Westernization of post-Soviet space were changing representations of Russia's territoriality. Processes of territorial delineation of FSU states from Russia had been continuing since 1991, but they gathered pace with the greater involvement of the West in the region after 9/11, especially from 2003 onwards when there developed something of a process of encroachment of the West into the space of the former Soviet Union. It came in the shape of EU and NATO enlargement to incorporate the Baltic states, and in the danger that NATO and OSCE might consider intervening in the space of the CIS. It also came in the wake of "colour revolutions" in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004) and Kyrgyzstan (2005), although calling the events in Kyrgyzstan a revolution is arguably an overstretch of the concept. All these developments led to the imposition of new dividing lines to which Russia had to react, giving an immediate territorial dimension to the narrative of (self-)exclusion from the West. By 2006, not only the Baltic states, but also representations of Georgia and Moldova had come to resemble very much that of two distinct spaces with sharply drawn boundaries; in fact, this was one of the elements that fuelled the conflicts in South Ossetia and Transdnistria. Even with regard to Ukraine, the Orange Revolution of 2004 which followed an apparent failed Russian attempt to influence the election outcome ignited a debate amongst the Russian political elite – within United Russia and the presidency – in which advocates of ambiguous space were pinned against those who saw Ukraine as a distinct space and pleaded to stop "interfering into Ukrainian domestic affairs".⁷¹

In this sense, Western encroachment hastened the strengthening of representations of territorial sovereignty – a sharper delineation of space between Russia and its neighbouring states – in the "near abroad". That said, with the exception of the Baltic states, this was a volatile development rather than a stable trend. Russia's economic and, above all, energy power remained a forceful pull. In fact, Russia had some success in pushing for closer economic integration with countries of the FSU and closer cooperation in sub-regional structures. Uzbekistan's

⁷¹ *Russian Political Elite Discusses Attitudes Towards CIS - Ria Novosti* (Johnson's Russia List 9117, [cited 15 September 2006]); available from <http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/9117-26.cfm>.

return to Russia's fold after Andijan and the re-election of the pro-Russian candidate, Viktor Yanukovych, as Prime Minister in Ukraine, in particular, showed that it was premature to speak of a dramatic shift in the division of the former Soviet space in the vein of a "new Great Game".⁷² In addition, EU "enlargement fatigue" meant that there was a diminished pull from Western institutions. Importantly however, the narrative of precisely such a shift and the threat posed by Western influence in the CIS was very present in parts of official and centrist discourse (the presidential administration and United Russia). This was true especially after the "colour revolutions" that, in a narrative which stressed Western covert involvement, once again linked representations of a threat to Russia's external sovereignty to the territorial sovereignty of the Russian state.

6. Conclusion

The spatial dimension of the identity of the Russian state – its territoriality and the role of the "imagined space of the West" – indicates a complex representation of space that does not fit easily into the categories of the Westphalian narrative or, indeed, the binary opposition between identity and difference given by Western self-representations. What it does suggest, however, is the centrality of the principle of sovereignty, and the way that the meaning of this principle had a very different emphasis from that suggested by the Westphalian narrative. Its appearance in the discourse of Russia's state elite, and especially in official discourse, was not in the sense of a strict delineation of territorial space, but as the centrality of state power. In this sense, the representation of an idealized form of Westphalia in the narrative of "true Europe" did not primarily refer to the model of the European nation state as bounded territorial space, but to representations of a Great Power, the central feature of which was sovereignty, i.e. independence of action. This dissociation between the principles of sovereignty and territoriality runs counter to basic assumptions about processes of state- and nation-building; in fact, it is almost

⁷² The Andijan massacres on 13 May 2005 occurred when Uzbek government troops fired indiscriminately into a crowd of that they claimed were Islamist militants. Estimated casualties run into several hundreds, among them women and children. In the wake of US admonitions, the Uzbek government withdrew its consent for a US airbase on its territory and turned back to Russia.

the opposite of the processes that have characterized some of the newly independent states. While the Baltic states, for example, emphasised the fixing of boundaries, especially against Russia, they abandoned part of their sovereignty when joining the EU. In the case of Russia, the process was reversed. It was sovereignty that was central, while the boundedness of territory and ultimately of political community appeared to be of lesser importance. The difference is, of course, that between nation- and state-based representations of collective identities, and it shows a dissociation between sovereignty and territoriality that is not covered by the Westphalian narrative.

This is a dimension of sovereignty concerned above all with the state as sovereign in its original meaning (which predates that of the territorial state). It is also the connection that links up spatial representations of the state with representations of the state as agent that are the focus of the following chapter. Sovereignty as power is the central meaning of the concepts of the state as Great Power and strong state that are one part of the foundational concepts of Russian statehood. The other part, democracy, is very much tied up with the way that the imagined space of the West was represented, and we will see in Chapter VII just how much the evolution of this representation from the early 1990s to Putin changed the meaning of the Russian state as democracy. Under Putin, if the West constituted a problem for Russia's self-representations it was not necessarily because of the socio-economic choices associated with it, but because it was perceived to define itself increasingly through values which undermined the principle of external sovereignty, and thus came in conflict with a central legitimizing category of Russian statehood. The connections that were drawn – between Russia's domestic space and international events, between Kosovo and 9/11 and Chechnya – all point to a continuing ambiguity of understandings of domestic and external space. This drawing of parallels between internal and external space was a pervasive feature of Russian political discourse and perpetuated itself in the way that the meaning of the central concepts of statehood intertwined representations of the Russian state as domestic and international actor.

CHAPTER VII

From “democratic Great Power“ to “Sovereign Democracy“: Representations of state agency 1999-2006

The most important thing is to understand the kind of Russia that we believe in and the kind of Russia we want to see.

Vladimir Putin, 2000 Annual Address to the Federation Council¹

Managed democracy – this is a schematic model forced indifferently upon all nations by a few centres of global influence – with force and with cunning – creating ineffective, and, as a consequence, managed from abroad regimes. Our Russian model of democracy is called “sovereign democracy”.

Sergei Markov, responding to criticism that Russia is developing into an authoritarian “managed democracy”,
25.06.2006²

1. Introduction

As has been seen in Chapter V, the semantic field of Russia’s “state identity” was highly politicized in the early years of the existence of the Russian state, and had

¹Vladimir Putin, *Annual Address to the Federal Assembly* (25 April 2000 [cited 23 October 2006]); available from

http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2000/07/08/0000_type70029type82912_70658.shtml.

² "Press Conference by the Director of the Institute for Political Research Sergei Markov " (www.integrum.ru: Federal News Service, 25 June 2006).

a legitimizing and mobilizing force in a deeply divided domestic context. If these concepts under Putin became less openly contested, this did not mean that their meaning became less contestable in principle, or that they lost their legitimizing power. On the contrary, this aspect seemed to be even more important, if the metaphorical flourishes of the Putin period and the attempt by official sources to find new scripts to legitimate Russian state power are anything to go by. One sign of the way that they remained foundational political concepts was that official discourse preserved the ambiguity of their meaning, as the state elite tried to legitimize the Russian state, and their own claims to power, as widely as possible. This was all the more important, since the events of 1999 showed (and analysts have noted) that the legitimacy of the political system was on shaky grounds.³ In such a situation, the legitimacy that foundational concepts of statehood conveyed was more important than ever.

This chapter traces the development of these key foundational concepts, in their relation to one other and to the context in which they were used. For the pre-Putin period, it concentrates on those scripts of Great Power and democracy that were to become relevant during the Putin era. In this, as in the early 1990s, interpretations of international as well as domestic events highlighted shifts in the meaning of this semantic field. In fact, these concepts still intertwined domestic and external representations of the Russian state as agent and subject. Yet, the meaning of these foundational concepts ultimately was not negotiated in international interaction, but in the interaction of the state elite and their self-legitimation. This self-legitimation was the immediate context in which the conceptual field of the Russian state developed.

2. The Russian state a decade after its inception

The years 1999-2006 situated the Russian state within a global context that, while not quite being the fundamental upheaval that had defined 1991, was nevertheless one of profound and rapid change. This international context could not fail to have an impact on the conceptual field that constructed the Russian state as an

³ Reddaway and Glinski, *The Tragedy of Russia's Reforms*, 630.

actor and subject. The same was true for a domestic context that was characterized by a transition from profound state crisis in 1999 to the reassertion of the central state and the re-modelling of the political landscape in the change-over from Yeltsin to Putin. The foundational concepts of statehood, representations of Russia as Great Power/strong state and democracy, were the same as in the early 1990s, but their relative weight and meaning changed in the transition from Yeltsin to Putin, and this meant both the elevation of Russia as Great Power to the central normative image of the Russian state and a shift in the meaning of Russia as democracy.

The external events that had a particular influence on the evolution of concepts of the state during that period, Kosovo and 9/11, have already been explored in Chapter VI. As in 1991/92, changing representations of space were part of the semantic field of “Russia” and linked with representations of Russia as Great Power and strong state. In this, the West, and Europe, remained Russia’s significant Other with regard to representations of the Russian state as Great Power, but the main question here was not that of (self-)exclusion, but recognition – or at least, the semblance of recognition. The reasons for this were grounded not only in the fact that the West continued to form the “power pole” of the international system, but also in Russia’s deep cultural intertwining with Europe. Representations of Russia as Great Power in particular, and the conceptual framework of the Russian state in general, was grounded Russia in Europe – it was as a Great Power that Russia had first been fully accepted into the European international order, after all. In this context, it would be wrong to see Russia’s Great Power discourse as inherently anti-Western, and especially anti-European. It was, on the contrary, profoundly European, and even Westphalian -- though emphasizing a narrative of states as independent, sovereign actors that is now rejected by Western Europe itself.

The period 1999-2006 saw an attempt at consolidation of state power in domestic space which was only partly successful, despite the rhetorical construction of Russia as a strong state under Putin. By 1999 Russia had returned to a state of domestic crisis which involved different elements to that of 1992, but presented a similar picture of a weakened central state with only partial control over its own territory, as centrifugal tendencies in the regions reached their peak.⁴ The antagonistic political field of 1992 had been replaced by another form of state

⁴ See Igor Klyamkin and Lilia Shetsova, *This Omnipotent and Impotent Government*, ed. Alan Rousso (Washington DC: Gendalf Publisher, 1999).

weakness, the “privatization of the state” by the Yeltsin “family”, which was brought into the limelight by the aftermath of the 1998 currency crisis and a political constellation which had resulted in the appointment of Evgeny Primakov as Prime Minister, against the will of Yeltsin, and his patronage of the investigations of the Russian General Prosecutor into the activities of Yeltsin’s inner circle.

The launch of the second Chechen war in September 1999 and Putin’s advent to power inaugurated a period of assertive state building, in which Putin tried to reassert the power of the central state, both over its territory and against the privatization of the state by the oligarchs. However, despite Putin’s success in breaking the power of regional governors, opposing oligarchs and opposition forces in the Duma, it remains an open question whether this was really about the strengthening of the state. There is some doubt about whether this really was a fundamental liberation of the state from its “occupation” by clans, or simply a replacement of one kind of network with another.

The same dichotomy between discursive representation and actual state strength was true with regard to representations of Russia as Great Power. Kosovo had revealed the extent of Russia’s external weakness and this weakness was not substantially alleviated during Putin’s time in office, despite the rhetoric of “energy superpower” and attempts to fill this description with high-profile actions. Putin’s alignment with the West after 9/11 was short-lived, and Russia gained little in concrete terms from the alliance. The penetration of the “imagined space of the West” into the CIS, especially in the wake of the colour revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine, could not be prevented by Russia, and its increased wealth and global weight as a result of the rise in energy prices after the Iraq war did not directly translate into more global or regional influence.

In all this, the Putin administration put the triangle of Great Power, strong state and democracy at the centre of political rhetoric in a much more concerted and planned fashion than had been the case during the 1990s. If these representations remained normative projections, the image of the Russian state that was now depicted in the national media, increasingly under control of the state, more and more resembled this projection. This control, and the limitation of public political space that went with it, meant that an open contestation of concepts almost vanished, in stark contrast to 1991/92. In fact, the Putin era saw the culmination of a process that had probably started shortly after Yeltsin’s victory over the opposition in 1993 – the

transformation of a relatively open political space, in which the meaning of political concepts developed through political contestation, to a situation in which these concepts were centrally masterminded and launched by “political technologists” (the Russian term for spin-doctors). In this context, political scripts dominated public political space simply because the state controlled the vast majority of the national media in which they could be presented.

3. The concept of Great Power in a weak state, 1999

This section traces the semantic field of Russia’s state identity during the “crisis year” of 1999. This was a year in which rather too much happened too swiftly, both in domestic politics and in international relations. As has been explored in Chapter VI, the first half of the year was dominated by the intertwining of domestic and external crisis; the second half of the year saw the renewal of the war in Chechnya, in response to a series of bombings in Moscow apartment blocks in August, and the parallel rise to power of Putin and a new “presidential party”, Unity (*Edinstvo*). In this unparalleled exercise in elite regeneration, the December Duma elections saw the Yeltsin camp back in control; the red-brown threat (and the perhaps more serious threat from Primakov) had evaporated and the stage was set for a victory by Putin in the presidential elections – sealed by Yeltsin’s surprise resignation on 31 December 1999.

3.1. Statehood in crisis and the semantic field of the state

In some ways, the “privatization of the state” during the Yeltsin period pre-announced the erosion of public political space under Putin: while the old cleavages between the red-brown coalition and the presidency continued to exist, the main battlefield was not ideological but personal – for power, influence, and profit.⁵ This

⁵ Vladimir Brovkin, “Fragmentation of Authority and Privatization of the State: From Gorbachev to Yeltsin,” *Demokratizatsiya*, no. June (1998), Michael McFaul, *When Capitalism and Democracy Collide in Transition: Russia’s “Weak” State as an Impediment to Democratic Consolidation*. (1997 [cited 21/11 2004]); available from <http://www.csis.org/ruseura/ponars/workingpapers/>; Richard Sakwa, “Russia’s Crisis and Yeltsin’s Leadership,” *Gateway papers* (Tampere: University of Tampere, 1999).

expressed itself not only in the weakness of the state, in the sense of its occupation by private interests (and more concretely Yeltsin and his entourage), but also in the weakness of opposition to the presidency within the Duma, despite the fact that the majority of the lower house remained hostile to Yeltsin.⁶ It has been argued that this was a political space that was already dysfunctional, in which the ideological cleavages that had dominated early post-Soviet politics were a façade that hid a political process that did not aim to serve the state or even the nation, but mainly private interests.⁷ As Sergei Rogov, Director of the Institute for USA and Canada studies, described the situation in a report published in 1996, “One could say that the state in Russia has attempted to suppress the state, but [in fact] the specific organs of the state have separated themselves in broad terms and started living their own lives, while ignoring the needs that the overall society expects the state to fulfil.”⁸ The first months of 1999 were inauspicious in this respect – they saw a domestic political crisis over an attempted impeachment of Yeltsin by the Duma, instigated by the red-brown opposition, amongst other things accusing him of precipitating the collapse of the Soviet Union. This crisis, at the time seen as “the biggest Russian domestic political crisis since 1993” petered out quickly and painlessly as the presidency bribed itself out of it in June 1999, though for a short while before this it had a major influence on the domestic political dimension of the Kosovo crisis.⁹

As has been seen in Chapter VI, the weakness of the Russian state in international affairs mirrored its domestic weakness, something that was made painfully clear to the Russian political elite in 1999. The context was set by the aftermath of the August 1998 financial crisis, which led to a humiliating begging campaign to convince a reluctant IMF to concede yet another loan to Russia.¹⁰ Russia’s weakness also was made painfully clear in security policy, where it was

⁶ As McFaul noted, “Strikingly, the opposition parties in the Duma have rarely acted like a genuine opposition, even though they hold a majority of the votes”. McFaul, *When Capitalism and Democracy Collide in Transition: Russia's "Weak" State as an Impediment to Democratic Consolidation*. ([cited], Peter J. Schraeder, “Russia's Political Party System as an Impediment to Democratization,” *Demokratizatsiya*, no. March (2004). Reddaway and Glinski, *The Tragedy of Russia's Reforms*.

⁷ Wilson, *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World*.

⁸ quoted in Stephen Blank, “Russian Democracy: From the Future to the Past,” *Demokratizatsiya*, no. June (1998).

⁹ Celeste A. Wallander, “Russian Views on Kosovo,” (Ponars Policy Memo 62: Harvard University, May 1999). See also Brovkin, “Discourse on NATO in Russia During the Kosovo War.”, Guillaume Colin, “Russian Foreign Policy Discourse During the Kosovo Crisis: Internal Struggles and the Political Imaginaire,” in *Questions de recherche/Research in Question* (2004).

¹⁰ See Primakov’s account of his time as Prime Minister in Primakov, *Russian Crossroads: Toward the New Millennium*.

reflected in Russia's failure to influence the outcome of the Kosovo crisis, prevent NATO enlargement, and influence US moves towards modifying the ABM treaty.

As a result of this domestic and external contest, by 1999 there was a widespread perception of Russia's statehood in crisis among Russia's political elite. This pervasive image of a fragile, weak state was reproduced in official and political discourse. As has been seen in Chapter VI, this included fears that the state would simply cease to exist as a unified territory; however, representations of the state as subject were equally affected. The pervasive sense of crisis was perhaps unavoidable, given the contrast of this domestic and external context with the core of the semantic field of the identity of the state, which continued to be the normative vision of Russia as strong state and Great Power.

Given the tension between the representation of the state given in these foundational concepts and the actual weakness of the Russian state, Russia's "statehood in crisis" not only raised the (perhaps exaggerated) danger that the Russian Federation would indeed fall apart, but also the more concrete danger for the state elite around Yeltsin that a weakened Russian Federation, and more importantly the state elite that identified with it, might lose legitimacy in the eyes of a majority of the population. Given Yeltsin's fragile health and his diminishing support among the political elite, the question of his succession was far from clear. In the complex and fast-changing political machinations of 1999, in the main it was not so much the CPRF and Zhirinovsky that threatened the regime, but Primakov (for a while at least), with his anti-corruption credentials and his intention to curb the powers of the presidency.¹¹ Primakov could eventually be persuaded not to run for the presidency, but as strong *gosudarstvennik*, he kept representations of Russia as Great Power and strong state in the centre of public political discourse – an element that was seamlessly taken up by Putin.

In this sense, the vulnerability of the state, which was really the vulnerability of Russia's "statespeople", was partly a result of the very way that the concepts of the strong state and Great Power, together with democracy, had been used to project the identity of the new Russian state, and to legitimize its existence. Despite this, this semantic field remained central to the self-legitimation of the state elite in post-Soviet Russia, something that developments over the course of 1999, and indeed

¹¹ Luke March, *The Communist Party in Post-Soviet Russia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

under Putin, amply demonstrated. In a context in which Yeltsin's popular approval rates hit single figures, the concept of the strong state and Great Power was not toned down, on the contrary.¹²

The meaning of concepts of state strength, together with that of democracy, had become more consensual over the course of the 1990s. To a large extent, the semantic field of the state in Russian political discourse in 1999 no longer mapped competing ideological positions that could be clearly differentiated from each other. Instead, concepts of the state were reduced to formulaic scripts which appeared wherever their legitimating function needed to be invoked, with the partial exception of a reaction to events which touched upon core meanings of these representations. In 1999 this was the Kosovo crisis, together with NATO enlargement, which made painfully clear that Russia's Great Power status, according to benchmarks given in Russian political discourse, was largely fictional, and thus, for a time, put this self-identification into crisis – contributing to the overall sense of crisis that characterized the end of the Yeltsin era. This was reflected in the critical analysis by the head of the Duma Foreign Affairs committee Vladimir Lukin, delivered in June 1999:

That means, from the point of view of Russia, the question emerges: why was Russia's role so small? Why did Russia's desire for a very great, significant role in this conflict not coincide with the real role it played? The truth is that this conflict showed that a serious role in European politics will be played not by that country which clamours most loudly about such a role, not the country which bangs its chest and says "But we do have such a wonderful history, such wonderfully close relations with the Balkans people, it's just necessary for us to play a great and decisive role".¹³

3.2. The Kosovo crisis as a crisis of statehood: Great Power as identity script

The events of 1999, and in particular the bombing of Serbia, were a turning point in representations of Russia as Great Power, just as they had been for representations of space. This was not so much because "Great Power" acquired a fundamentally new meaning but because in the context of the external and internal weakness described above, Russia ceased to be represented as an actual Great Power

¹² Lilia Shetsova, "Russia: Unconsolidated Democracy, Creeping Authoritarianism, or Unresolved Stagnation?", in *Beyond State Crisis?*, ed. Mark R. Beissinger and Crawford Young (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2002).

¹³ "Press Conference by the Head of the Duma Foreign Affairs Committee Vladimir Lukin," (www.integrum.ru: Federal News Service, 11 June 1999).

other than in the most general and symbolic terms – thus giving increasing importance to that aspect of the meaning of Great Power that connected it to representations of Russian identity.

In fact, by 1999 the semantic field of Russia as Great Power contained two interlinked clusters of meaning. One focussed on the automatic external recognition that was granted according to the norms of the international system – Russia as actual Great Power, symbolized by its membership of the UN Security Council, nuclear status and other incontrovertible assets. The other placed representations of Russia as Great Power firmly within the semantic field of Russian identity – the idea of Russia as Great Power as a core identity of “Russia”. More than was the case in 1991/92, it was this connection that made “Great Power” a foundational concept underpinning the legitimacy of the new Russian state. If Great Power-ness was presented as the essence of “Russia” in political discourse, representing the Russian Federation as Great Power was a crucial legitimizing factor. As has been seen in chapter V, this was the case also in 1991/92; but the emphasis then was on democracy, the identity that differentiated the new Russian state from the Soviet Union.

As in 1992, underlying this was a domestic political dimension, a continuing contestation, not of the essential importance of Russia’s Great Power status, and the identification of “Russia” as Great Power, which was acknowledged by all sides of the political spectrum – but of what kind of Russia merited this description, going back to the question of whether the actually existing Russian Federation really was a true embodiment of “Russia”. While this was a theme which had receded into the background since the early 1990s, it had not yet been settled, and a situation of domestic political crisis like that of early 1999, with the combined impact of the impeachment of Yeltsin and the Kosovo crisis, brought it into the open.

In fact, the underlying chasm about this question between the liberals and the Yeltsin camp, on the one hand, and many members of the red-brown faction, on the other, had survived the “pragmatic patriotic consensus” of 1994. For the communists and nationalists, the very weakness of the present Russian Federation in 1999, and especially its external weakness in the face of Operation Allied Force, was proof that this new state was not, in essence, “Russia”. Only the incorporation of its lost territories would restore Russia’s Great Power status, which for them retained a strong link to imperial statehood, be it by reclaiming the Soviet Union or a “Slavic

Union" including Ukraine and Belarus.¹⁴ The way in which Zhirinovsky, in press conferences during the bombing campaign and during the impeachment proceedings of Yeltsin by the Duma which ran parallel to it, oscillated between deplored Russian weakness, accusing Yeltsin of wasting Russia's greatness and grandiose plans to incorporate Serbia into a union with Russia and Belarus, is an illustration of this.¹⁵

This domestic dimension concerning the politics of identity and legitimacy did not override the fact that the concept of Russia as Great Power implied recognition as a Great Power not only within Russia, but in international interactions. Russia was a Great Power not only because of self-descriptions but by reference to international rules and norms that conveyed that status. Some of these were institutionalized in the markers of Great Power status mentioned above, especially membership in the UN Security Council. However, an important element of this was the recognition as equal by other Great Powers – and this, in 1999, meant predominantly the West. Although this recognition was in part formalized, it retained an element of subjectivity which had been reinforced by 1999 by the Western trend to see identification with the West as a democratic state committed to liberal values as a necessary precondition of recognition as an equal. That said, although this meant that the concept of Great Power could not be an entirely self-referential script, this was mitigated by the way in which recognition was interpreted and translated – given that the ultimate aim was domestic *perception* of international recognition rather than international recognition as an end in itself. It also meant that Russian and Western ideas about what recognition as equal involved differed quite considerably. While Western narratives stressed the element of identification, the belonging to an imagined space of the West, the boundaries of which were drawn by values, Russian scripts pointed to an understanding of recognition as equal through independence of action – the core meaning of sovereignty in the semantic field of Russia as Great Power.

Thus, those among the Russian political elite who did describe Russia as an actually existing Great Power in the present international system depended on

¹⁴ The latter was one of the few concrete foreign policy aims in the electoral programme of the CPRF in 1999. See March, *The Communist Party in Post-Soviet Russia*, 213.

¹⁵ "Press Conference by Vladimir Zhirinovsky.", "Press Conference by Vladimir Zhirinovsky on the Impeachment of President Yeltsin" (www.integrum.ru: Federal News Service, 15 May 1999). See also Vladimir Zhirinovskii, *Last Drive Southwards* (Moscow: V. Zhirinovskii, 1998)., and similar statements by Zyuganov, Gennadii Zyuganov, "Otveti na Narodom [Answers to the People]," *Zafra* 7 December 1999. "Speech by Leader of the CPRF Gennadii Zyuganov During the Duma Debate on Yeltsin's Impeachment," (www.integrum.ru: Federal News Service, 15 May 1999).

recognition – or the possibility to represent the semblance of recognition – as Great Power, and the possibility to be seen acting as one. This, in fact, was one element that explained the urgency of the discourse of crisis during the bombing campaign. The very centrality of representations of Russia as Great Power meant that the legitimacy of the new Russian state was made vulnerable to undeniable external weakness -- and thus to international events such as the Kosovo crisis and NATO enlargement that revealed this weakness. This was all the more the case, as these events revealed the contingency of seemingly institutionalized guarantees of Great Power status such as the UN Security Council seat. The sidelining of the Security Council by an emerging doctrine of humanitarian intervention and the introduction of NATO out-of-area missions (which was unveiled at the same time as the enlargement took place), were just the most visible examples of the way that developments within the international system could undermine this mainstay of Russia's Great Power status.

The way that this worked in political discourse could be seen during the resolution of a smaller crisis in Kosovo in October 1998, when NATO agreed to delay the use of force in response to Russian pleadings for more negotiation time. This was exploited by the executive, which presented this as a major diplomatic victory and proof that the actual Russian state could behave as Great Power.¹⁶ Russia's role as a full member of the Contact Group on a par with the US and the EU in the Rambouillet negotiation process (of which this incident was a part) had given the Yeltsin camp ample opportunity to do this. In fact, the executive tried to stretch this as far as possible to fend off opposition attacks over its handling of the 1998 financial crisis. Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov declared in a statement to the Duma, that "in the Kosovo crisis Russia has demonstrated that it is a Great Power, that it is not going to make any deals to get new [IMF] tranches and that it will not give up its national interests."¹⁷ A day earlier, Evgeny Primakov (at that point newly appointed as Prime Minister) had declared in a speech to the Federation Council: "Look only how Russia's position is being taken into account in the world. This was the case during the Iraq crisis and it is still the case now in Kosovo".¹⁸ The earlier stages of

¹⁶Thomas E. Graham, Jr., "Fragmentation of Russia," in *Russia after the Fall*, ed. Andrew Kuchins (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002).

¹⁷quoted in "Pobeda na Kosovom Pole [Victory in Kosovo]," *Kommersant* 15 October 1998.

¹⁸"Statement by Prime Minister Primakov in Front of the Federation Council," (www.lexis-nexis.com: BBC Summary of World Broadcasts SU/3358 B/12, 14 October 1998).

the Kosovo crisis could thus serve to confirm representations of Russia's "actual" Great Power status, conveyed through international recognition, and did so partly inside a politicized discourse of identity in which this interpretation was stressed by a weakened presidency which was trying to counteract the influence of nationalist and anti-Western forces in the Duma.

This attempt by the executive to cement the legitimacy of the Russian Federation was eroded by Operation Allied Force from March to June 1999 and NATO enlargement itself, a period which saw a striking absence of references to Russia as Great Power, both in political and official discourse. This was short-lived; and as the election campaign for the Duma heated up in the latter part of 1999, Putin became Prime Minister and a mysterious series of bombs in Moscow apartment blocks unleashed the second Chechen campaign, affirmations of Russia's actual Great Power status returned. The discursive context in which it was placed, however, had changed. As has been seen in Chapter VI, the time of the Kosovo bombardment saw a surge in scripts connecting identity and space in Russian political discourse, most forcefully with regard to the theme of Russia's self-exclusion from the West and, to a lesser degree, with representations of Slavic brotherhood. This discursive shift also affected representations of Russia as Great Power. More precisely, it brought to the fore the way that the concept of Great Power continued to function as part of the field of Russian identity, as a normative projection and the very essence of "Russia".

The conceptual field of Russia as Great Power was re-activated as a foundational legitimizing concept and a core marker of Russian identity in the run-up to the Duma elections and Yeltsin's surprise resignation on 31 December 1999. Within the conceptual field of the state, the close intertwining of representations of Russia as Great Power and strong state once more became evident, as the recently appointed Prime Minister Vladimir Putin launched a war on Chechnya, the republic which had come to symbolize the weakness of the central Russian state, and which in spring 1999 had been equated with Kosovo in representations of the crisis.

In official discourse in particular, allusions to the script of state strength were visible in the reiteration of allegations that the Russian Federation was de facto a Great Power, whatever its short-term weaknesses. This was mostly expressed as a self-evident truth, without need for further specification, illustrated by the Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov's insistence in his speech at MGIMO in September 1999 that

Our country is a global Great Power (*mirovaia velikaia derzhava*). This truth does not need special proof, regardless of any problems that occupy us at the moment. (...) We speak with confidence of Russia's Great Power-ness (*derzhavnost'*), and there is nothing to be ashamed of, like some are who claim that Russia is no longer a Great Power. We spoke and will continue to speak of Russia's *derzhaynost'* as an unalienable component of its course in international affairs.¹⁹

If this assertion was qualified, it was often underpinned by references to identity scripts that had been present in the meaning of Russia as Great Power throughout the 1990s, and which were largely consensual, so that they could be found both in official and liberal elite discourse and within the red-brown coalition. These identity scripts concerned Russia's culture, history and (though this remained mostly the domain of the red-brown faction), its unique spirituality (*dukhovnost'*).²⁰ Primakov made reference to such an identity script when he wrote in September 1999 that "Russia was and remains a Great Power, by virtue of its power and its potential...and its history."²¹ Some months earlier, the then Prime Minister, Sergei Stepashin, had similarly stated that "That we are a Great Power – that we are a country that must cherish its history, itself and its neighbours – that is a fact", and then connected this to a decidedly liberal vision when he said that

[Russia's Great Power status] must not exhaust itself in the fact that we have atomic weapons and the right of veto in the UN security council, but must result from this, that we today, by GDP and by real living standards, and by the growth of our culture, and...science, and simply by respect for one's country, are on the European world [sic] level.²²

This combination of liberal and Great Power scripts was reminiscent of the "normal Great Power" script of 1992, but was devoid of the aspirations to full identification with Western values that had characterized representations of Russia as

¹⁹ "Speech by Igor Ivanov at the Opening Ceremony of MGIMO," (www.integrum.ru: Federal News Service, 1 September 1999).

²⁰ Apart from the examples cited here, see also the *Electoral Manifesto of Our Home Is Russia* ([cited 25 July 2006]); available from <http://www.vybory.ru/spravka/archiv/ndrprogram.php3>. For similar language from the LDPRF and CPRF see "Press Conference by the Leader of LDPR Vladimir Zhirinovsky," (www.integrum.ru: Federal News Service, 29 September 1999), "Press Conference by the Leader of the CPRF Gennadii Zyuganov," (www.integrum.ru: Vybirat Rossiia (analiz media), 14 September 1999).

²¹ Yevgenii Primakov, "Ia i Sem' Minuvshikh Dnei [Me and the Last Seven Days]," 2 September 1999. The same phrase also appears in the election manifesto of Fatherland-All Russia (of which Primakov had become leader), which ran under the heading of *gosudarstvennost'*. See *Electoral Manifesto of Otechestvo-Vsa Rossiiia* ([cited 22 May 2006]); available from www.panorama.ru/vybory/party/p-ovr.html.

²² "Press Conference of Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin," (www.integrum.ru: Federal News Service, 3 June 1999).

a part of Western civilization. As will be seen below, this shift in emphasis was to become common during the early Putin period.

3.3. Russia as Great Power, multipolarity and democracy

As has been seen in chapter VI, the meaning of Russia as Great Power had been narrowed down since 1992, something that may have been a result of the “pragmatic nationalist consensus” of 1994. This consensus found its expression in Primakov’s vision of a multipolar world order, with its focus on sovereignty, both as independence of action (*samostoiatelnost’*) and as unity and territorial integrity – the former referring to the state as agent in international space, the latter to the sovereign power of the central state.

In fact, multipolarity resembled nothing more than a globalised version of the balance of power of 19th century Europe, idealized in the vision of “true Europe” discussed in Chapter VI and imbued with a dose of Eurasian principles. By 1999, this concept regularly appeared in official discourse and was used by both liberal parties and “parties of power”, while its allusions to Eurasianist geopolitical ideas and a certain emphasis on Russian uniqueness appealed to the red-brown faction, in particular Zhirinovsky.²³

As expressed in the concept of multipolarity, the semantic field of Great Power linked up to representations of Russian identity. It also contained a focus on sovereignty understood as control over territory as well as independence of state action. It was this focus that intertwined the Great Power script with an image of state strength in the domestic arena that began to be projected in the latter half of 1999 against the pervasive perception of crisis and fragility that dominated political discourse. As has been seen in Chapter VI, this image of the strong state was sustained by the parallels drawn between Russia and Serbia, parallels that were exploited in the official narrative used to justify the second Chechen war. This theme was expressed in the September 1999 election manifesto of the Fatherland-All Russia party (whose head Primakov had become), which declared that “Above all, a lover of

²³ For an example of its use in official discourse, see *Speech by Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov at UN General Assembly* (24 September 1999 [cited 17 August 2006]); available from http://www.un.int/russia/statemnt/ga/54th/plenary/99_09_21.htm#english. See also the discussion of the Yabloko manifesto below and Vladimir Zhirinovskii, *Ocherki Po Geopolitike* (Moskva: Liberalno-demokraticeskaiia partiia Rossii, 1997), Zyuganov, "Otveti na Narodom [Answers to the People]."

the strong state (*gosudarstvennik*) is someone whose aim it is to protect the territorial integrity of the Russian state.”²⁴

The third part of the triangle of normative concepts, Russia as democratic state, was also still in evidence in political discourse, although it too had been less politicized than it had been in the political battles between the presidency and Duma in 1991-93. That said, the semantic field of democracy in Russian political discourse retained much of the exceptionally broad and ambiguous meaning that had characterized its use in the early 1990s. In this, representations of Russia as democratic state reflected the political developments during which the concept had been used in Russia, with the result that the connection between the meaning of Russian democracy and core liberal values remained loose, even amongst democrats themselves. During the 1999 election campaign, Yegor Gaidar, for example, felt it necessary to stress that “For me, freedom has a higher priority than democracy. In my view, a regime that limits man’s rights and freedom by democratic means is unacceptable.”²⁵

The outcome of this was not that democracy became any less of a foundational concept. On the contrary, while democracy as identification – creating a Russian state identical to Western models – had lost legitimizing power among the political elite, identifying the Russian state as a democracy had not. In fact, during the Duma election campaign of 1999, as in all previous campaigns, Russia was once again represented as a democratic state by all major parts of the political spectrum, including the nationalist and communist opposition.²⁶

Like the concepts of Great Power and strong state, democracy as an attribute of Russian statehood intertwined domestic and external meanings. In this, the trend towards self-exclusion and the strengthening of the sovereignty discourse that had become so visible during the Kosovo crisis could not fail to re-describe the conceptual field of the Russian state as democracy. After all, in the early 1990s the liberals at least had connected the image of Russia as democratic state with the imagined space of the West. At the time, this association was reinforced both by their “democratic” programme of neo-liberal economic reforms and the inscription of

²⁴ *Electoral Manifesto of Otechestvo-Vsa Rossiia* ([cited]).

²⁵ “Interview with Yegor Gaidar,” ([www.integrum.ru: Vybirat Rossiia \(analiz media\), 23 September 1999](http://www.integrum.ru: Vybirat Rossiia (analiz media), 23 September 1999)).

²⁶ *Electoral Manifesto of Otechestvo-Vsa Rossiia* ([cited]), Morozov, “Auf der Suche nach Europa.”, “Vozzvanie K Patriotam Rossii. Vstavai, Strana Ogromnaia! [Appeal to the Patriots of Russia. Stand up, Great Country!],” *Sovetskaia Rossiia* 31 August 1999.

liberal values in the 1993 constitution, and an international context in which democracy was a precondition for recognition as equal by the Western powers. This had changed by 1999, although the strong external dimension to the meaning of Russia as democracy was, if anything, reinforced.

This new meaning of the external aspect of Russia as democratic state was anchored in the broad elite consensus over Primakov's concept of multipolarity, with its vision of an international system that was structured to prevent the "unipolar moment" of the superpower USA. It was visible in the election manifesto of Yabloko for the 1999 Duma election, which drew on multipolarity, doubtlessly under the influence of its co-founder and then head of the Duma's Foreign Policy Committee, Vladimir Lukin. The manifesto rephrased an important element of the external meaning of "democracy", when it called for Russia to fight for a "civilized and multipolar world, against the pretensions of the US and NATO to unipolarity and monopoly in the spheres of international economy, security and politics."²⁷ As Chapter VI has shown, in the early 1990s the civilized world was shorthand for Western democracies; now, in the election manifesto of Yabloko, this reference to a civilized world was no longer the language of belonging to the imagined space of the West favoured by Kozyrev. It stood for the norms of international law, not the normative premises of human rights and liberal democracy.

The shift was even more explicit – and anticipated developments under Putin – in the election programme of "Fatherland-All Russia", which called Russia a "powerful, democratic and prosperous Great Power in the 21st century".²⁸ At the same time, it stressed the need for a strong state as a precondition for democracy in Russia. This combination of the concepts of democracy and Great Power/strong state, too, moved the image of Russia as democratic state away from its earlier significance as a marker of identification with the West.

²⁷ Morozov, "Auf der Suche nach Europa."

²⁸ *Electoral Manifesto of Otechestvo-Vsa Rossiiia* ([cited]).

4. The development of the conceptual field of the state under Putin – sovereign democracy and democratic Great Power

Putin's advent to power did not mark a break in the meaning of foundational concepts of the state and their legitimating power, on the contrary – in his first years in office in particular, he succeeded in using almost all aspects of the conceptual field of the state in parallel, by combining liberal scripts with constant references to the core identity of the Russian state as strong actor domestically and externally, incorporating the essential ideas of multipolarity, and references to the Eurasianist script popular among the communists and the LDPR. It was not uncommon for these to appear in one and the same sentence, as in Putin's claim in his 2000 Annual Address to the Federal Assembly that "The democratic organization of the country and the new Russia's openness to the world do not contradict our uniqueness or patriotism, and do not hinder us from finding our own answers to issues of spirituality and morals."²⁹

What did constitute a break was the way that the conceptual field of the state, and especially the foundational concepts of strong state/Great Power and democracy, were now openly and consciously developed into a form of "state patriotism".³⁰ In his programmatic statement "Russia at the turn of a new Millennium", published on the day of Yeltsin's surprise resignation, Putin associated patriotism, *derzhavnost'* and *gosudarstvennichenstvo* (statism) as key components of a *rossiiskaia idea* (note the state-centric *rossiiski* rather than the more usual *Russkaia Idea*).³¹ In fact, the use of concepts of statehood now increased dramatically in official discourse, although the very diverse nature of the scripts, and the way that they remained at the level of political scripts, meant that this was by no means a coherent statist ideology.³²

At the same time, the domestic political context within which these concepts were used had changed considerably. The 1999 Duma elections, which saw a surprising success for a party – Unity – which had only been created by the Kremlin three months previously, resulted in a shift of power away from the traditional opposition parties, or their cooptation into support for the Kremlin. This was

²⁹ *Annual Address by President Putin to the Federal Assmby* (25 April 2000 [cited 12 May 2006]); available from http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/text/speeches/2000/07/08/0000_type70029_70658.shtml.

³⁰ Pal Kolsto, "Nationale Symbole in Neuen Staaten," *Osteuropa* 53, no. 7 (2003).

³¹ Vladimir Putin, "Rossiia na Rubezhe Tysyacheletii," *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 31/12/1999 1999.

³² Kolsto, "The Russian Debate on National Identity under Putin", Sergei Prozorov, "Russian Conservatism in the Putin Presidency: The Dispersion of a Hegemonic Discourse," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 10 (2005), Andrei P. Tsygankov, "Vladimir Putin's Vision of Russia as a Normal Great Power," *Post Soviet Affairs* 21 (2005).

cemented by Yeltsin's surprise resignation, which secured Putin as presidential candidate at the height of his personal popularity in the wake of the Chechen war. Within a year of the elections, and Putin's election as president in March 2000, the CPRF remained isolated as other opposition parties, including Zhirinovsky's Liberal-democrats, either merged with the new "presidential party" Unity into United Russia (Fatherland-All Russia), or cooperated with the United Russia bloc. Changes in the media landscape likewise had repercussions on public political space, as the Kremlin took control of private television channels and newspapers that had provided a platform for the liberal opposition.

The result of this became evident during the 2003/04 election cycle, when the pro-Kremlin parties had considerably more access to the mass media than the liberal and communist opposition, severely limiting the open contestation of ideas and leading to the fact that none of the liberal opposition parties succeeded in getting into the Duma.³³ This, together with the reconstitution of the central state that was soon evident as Putin's main domestic political project, meant that open political space, and thus the means of contesting these "essentially contested concepts" in public debate became severely limited by the second term of the Putin presidency, if not earlier.³⁴

Ultimately however, this was not about the repression of the scripts of the liberal and nationalist opposition, but about the cooptation of a large part of these scripts into what increasingly became a hegemonic official discourse. In fact, the erosion of public space by illiberal means was a process which ran in parallel to what Prozorov has called "the installation of the infrastructure of the liberal order" in Russia, that is Putin's unconditional embracing of liberal institutions for Russia and the erosion of those political forces which rejected both these institutions and the legitimacy of the current form of the Russian Federation.³⁵

However, in the process of this erosion, representations of the liberal state itself, and with it the meaning of democracy, became transformed in reference to what now clearly emerged as the central semantic field of Russian state identity –

³³ Michael McFaul and Nikolai Petrov, "What the Elections Tell Us," *Journal of Democracy* 15, no. 3 (2004).

³⁴ On Putin's state building project see Prozorov, "Russian Conservatism in the Putin Presidency: The Dispersion of a Hegemonic Discourse.", Richard Sakwa, *Putin: Russia's Choice* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2004).

³⁵ Prozorov, "Russian Conservatism in the Putin Presidency: The Dispersion of a Hegemonic Discourse."

that of Great Power/strong state. By the time of Putin's second term, these developments meant that official discourse was clearly dominant in representing the conceptual field of the state, something that was visible in the way that the presidential apparatus was able to launch scripts around which public debate centred (for example, Gleb Pavlovsky and his script of "managed democracy" as a euphemism for the increasing erosion of democratic freedoms during Putin's second term or Vladislav Surkov with "sovereign democracy").³⁶ Scripts emanating from opposition figures that did reach the national media, such as Chubais' launch of the concept of "liberal empire" before the 2003/4 election cycle (see Chapter VI), did not propose an alternative vision, but used similar language to the dominant representations of the Russian state given by the official discourse.

Throughout Putin's two terms in office, the core representations of Russia as strong state and Great Power continued to be linked to representations of the Russian state as democracy. As will be seen below, it is the meaning of democracy that changed most considerably, and its change in relation to the other two foundational concepts of the state, with which it was by now firmly associated in the dominant official discourse, encompasses the development of the conceptual field of the state under Putin.

4.1. The return of the strong state: the semantic field of state agency and space in the early Putin period

As has been seen in Chapter VI, the theme of the weakness of the central Russian state, and the danger of its imminent break-up, played a central role in the narrative given by then Prime Minister Putin to legitimize the second Chechen war. On his appointment as Prime Minister at the beginning of August, Putin had stressed that "the preservation of the unity and integrity of our state" was a central aim of his government.³⁷ This script, as we have seen above, was present in a large part of the political discourse during the last months of Yeltsin's term. It now became the basis on which the presidential administration construed a narrative of Russia's salvation through its return to what really was its inner nature – a strong state, and a Great

³⁶ Wilson, *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World*.

³⁷ Putin, "Rossiia na Rubezhe Tysyacheletii.", Vladimir Putin, ""Vyborg - Eto Borba Za vlast', No Ne Protiv Gosudarstvo" [Elections Are a Fight for Power, but Not against the State], "Nezavisimaya gazeta" 19 August 1999. Vladimir Putin, "elections are a struggle for power, but not against the state", NG 19/08/1999

Power.³⁸ In this narrative, Chechnya was the dominant factor. A year later, one of Putin's favoured "political technologists" (or spin-doctor), Sergei Markov, claimed that in 2000 the administration had had to deal with the "very foundations of Russian statehood (*gosudarstvennost'*), (...) firstly the formation on the territory of Chechnya of a de facto regime with aggressive intentions (...) and secondly, the collapse of the Russian Federation."³⁹

What this meant, above all, was a reinforcement of the emphasis on the strong sovereign state as a core normative representation of Russian statehood. The revised versions of the National Security Concept and the Foreign Policy Concept, published in January and June 2000, as well as numerous other official statements during the first few years of Putin's first term, all stressed this need for Russia "to preserve and strengthen its sovereignty and territorial integrity", as the Foreign Policy Concept formulated it, referring to the wording of the UN Charter.⁴⁰ Sovereignty here appeared in a dual meaning: as the reassertion of central power over the whole of Russia's territory and as a central attribute of Russia as an agent in international affairs – a Great Power capable of independent action. In this, sovereignty provided the link between the concepts of Russia as a Great Power and strong state that were at the core of the conceptual field of the state in official discourse, highlighting the way in which these two concepts intertwined representations of the Russian state as domestic and external agent.

That said, this centrality of representations of the strong state and Great Power was paralleled by the almost equally strong stress put on representations of Russia as a democracy. At the beginning of Putin's period in office, representations of Russia as a democratic state in official discourse came in two different strands, which had hitherto been upheld by different parts of the political spectrum. Especially in the first year of Putin's presidency, Russia was represented as a democratic state in terms that made unequivocal reference to liberal values, much more so than had been the norm in the official discourse of the late Yeltsin period. In Putin's programmatic document "Russia at the threshold of a new Millennium", the emphasis on state strength was directly linked to the identification of Russia as a

³⁸ Putin, "Rossiya na Rubezhe Tysyacheletii."

³⁹ "Press Conference by Sergei Markov," (www.integrum.ru: Federal News Service, 17 January 2001).

⁴⁰ Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond "Identity"...", *Russia's 2000 Military Doctrine* (first published 22 April 2000) ([cited 18 October 2006]); available from <http://www.freerepublic.com/forum/a394aa0466bfe.htm>.

democratic state that included core liberal values, an adherence to the “benefits of democracy, a law-based state and personal and political freedom”.⁴¹ This reference to liberal democratic values and their embodiment in the Russian state was a regular occurrence in the first years of Putin’s term, and sometimes took up the language of Russia as a new, democratic state that had rarely been heard since the early 1990s. As Putin declared in his 2001 speech for the celebration of Russia’s initial declaration of sovereignty in 1991 (*den’ konstitutsii*, “constitution day”), “Today we live in a different country. What changed was the very nature of Russian power and statehood...power in Russia got a new, democratic face.”⁴²

However, this liberal meaning of Russia as a democratic state was not only no longer put in opposition to the conceptual field of the strong state, it was explicitly connected with it. The phrase of the “dictatorship of the law”, coined in Putin’s “letter to the Russian voters” (the most that appeared by way of a programmatic statement before the March 2000 presidential elections) summed up this connection; as the letter put it,

The stronger the state, the freer the individual. (...) Democracy is the dictatorship of the law (...) Only an efficient, strong state can afford to live according to rules (i.e. according to the law). In addition, it is only such a state that can guarantee freedom: freedom of enterprise, personal freedom, and public freedom. (...).⁴³

The vocabulary of liberal democracy in connection with the strong state and especially the stress on the rule of law, was reiterated in numerous other public statements by Putin and members of the presidential apparatus and government during this period.⁴⁴ In this way, the connection of this liberal meaning of democracy with representations of Russia as a strong state, re-asserting its domestic sovereignty, became a core element of official discourse in the early Putin period.

⁴¹Putin, "Rossiya na Rubezhe Tysyacheletii."

⁴² Vladimir Putin, *Speech at the Celebrations of Constitution Day, 12 June* (2001 [cited 3 June 2006]); available from <http://www.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2001/06/28557.shtml>. Constitution day, 12 June, was renamed Russia Day in 2002, stressing continuity instead of rupture of statehood.

⁴³Vladimir Putin, "Otkrytoe Pismo' Vladimira Putina K Rossiiskim Izbirateliam [Open Letter to Russia's Voters]," *Krasnaya Zvezda* 2 March 2000. The letter was published in a wide range of newspapers.

⁴⁴See, for example, the 2000 annual address, where Putin stated: “only a strong, or effective if someone dislikes the word ‘strong’, an effective state and a democratic state is capable of protecting civil, political and economic freedoms, capable of creating conditions for people to lead happy lives and for our country to flourish.” *Annual Address by President Putin to the Federal Assembly* ([cited]).

The externalized meaning of democracy in the early Putin period was especially ambiguous, with two almost opposing conceptual clusters to be found in official discourse. On the one hand, the liberal democratic cluster also stretched to the external meaning of democracy, as official discourse again took up Russia's identity as a European state. In fact, in this early period Putin, and official discourse more widely, often used references to democracy as the equivalent of civilization based on universal values that came tantalizingly close to Kozyrev's description of Russia as a "part of Western civilization".⁴⁵ In fact, the presidential administration clearly recognized not only the need for Russia to integrate into international economic structures, but also the way that democracy had become a precondition for recognition as an equal partner by Western powers. As Sergei Markov put it in January 2001, "Democracy is a necessary imperative of the modern world. Russia...will have no opportunity to enter the globalised world if it has an archaic political system."⁴⁶ However, while Putin was at pains to stress the normalcy of Russia as a reliable partner in international affairs, the normative dimension of representations of Russia as a democratic actor in international affairs now also contained another meaning.

This, however, was not the only meaning of the Russian state as democratic actor in international space presented in official discourse. As has been seen above, the external meaning of democracy had already started to shift in the wake of the Kosovo crisis. Official discourse under Putin perpetuated this shift, which had begun to connect democracy to the concept of multipolarity (which had found its way into the new official Foreign Policy and National Security Concepts). Indeed, the renewed focus on sovereignty that came to the fore during reactions to the Kosovo crisis, began to be tied to the meaning of Russia as "democratic Great Power". This, in the first instance, was not about identification with Western values, but about stressing sovereignty as independence of action, a core element of representations of Russia as Great Power.

This shift in meaning is revealed by the way that the concept of Russia as democratic Great Power was put in relation to calls for a "democratic world order"

⁴⁵ Putin, "Rossiia na Rubezhe Tysyacheletii.", Vladimir Putin, *Speech in Kazan* (22 March 2000 [cited 15 July 2006]); available from <http://www.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2000/03/28585.shtml>. Vladimir Putin, *Speech at Presidential Inauguration* (7 May 2000 [cited 13 June 2006]); available from <http://www.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2000/05/28700.shtml>.

⁴⁶ "Press Conference by Sergei Markov."

which had little in common with the meaning given to the term in the West. In fact, with Putin's advent to power, "democratic world order" began to replace the concept of multipolarity, retaining its basic meaning but grounding it in an appeal for democracy. In fact, it was a central political script in official discourse, and appeared constantly throughout his two terms in office. These democratic principles, however, were not the liberal norms so much in evidence in other parts of official discourse, but the alternative meaning of democracy as equality and above all collective self-determination, drawing on a traditional socialist and particularly Russian understanding (see Chapter IV) that had so far been upheld in post-Soviet Russia above all by the CPRF. As Sergei Markov put it, "Democracy is above all the ability of people to self-organize, to solve problems on their own."⁴⁷ In this formulation, the possibility of a connection between democracy and sovereignty became visible, a connection that was exploited in the concept of a "democratic world order".

The 2000 Foreign Policy Concept clearly lent on this meaning when it called for a "stable, just (*spravedlivii*) and democratic world order, built on generally recognized norms of international law, including, first of all, the goals and principles in the U.N. Charter, on equitable and partnership relations among states".⁴⁸ This usage established a connection between the concepts of democracy and sovereignty in the semantic field of the state, through the stress on principles of international law familiar from the Kosovo crisis. It also upheld a certain moral element that had already been present in reactions to the bombing campaign and that directly or indirectly constituted a counter-claim to the moral language of human rights used by the West to legitimate breaches of the norm of sovereignty.⁴⁹

Incidentally, and in line with the more socialist meaning of "democracy" in this context, the term "democratic world order" was not new – it had been used by the Soviet Union in its role as champion of Third World countries against the hegemony of the United States.⁵⁰ The flurry of foreign travel by Putin in 2000 and 2001 saw, in the non-Western world, a constant repetition of this theme of a democratic world order, directed against what was depicted as the unilateral

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ *The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation* (28 June 2000 [cited 28 June 2005]); available from <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/econcept.htm>.

⁴⁹ See Charlotte Wagnsson, "Developing the Moral Arguments: Russian Rhetorical Strategies on Security Post-Kosovo?", (EU-ISS Occasional Paper 28, 2001).

⁵⁰ Melvin Croan, "Soviet Policy toward the Third World: The Long Road to Thermidor-and Beyond?", *Russian Review* 49, no. 3 (1990).

hegemony of the United States. During a visit to Mongolia, for example, Putin explicitly referred to the need to establish a democratic world order directed against “attempts to force the creation of a unipolar system”⁵¹

If this was a re-packaged version of the doctrine of multipolarity, it added a different layer of meaning to the concept of Russia as democratic Great Power. Here too, it put the stress precisely not on Russia’s identification with the West, but on sovereignty, and, above all, on the issue of equal recognition which has been shown above to be a central element of the “externalized” meaning of Russia as Great Power. Not only this, but in advocating a democratic world order, Russia was ascribed a leading role – indeed a Great Power, a democratic Great Power fighting for an international system not dominated by the few, champion of peoples endangered by Western interventionism.

In the first few years of Putin’s time in office, these different meanings of Russia as democratic state coexisted, leading to a perhaps purposeful ambiguity that was well expressed in Putin’s speech at the 2002 *Den’ Rossii*, which drew equally on the identity markers discussed above and external recognition as a democratic Great Power:

Russia does not claim any special path. She does claim, however, a place in the world and relations with her which correspond to our rich history and the creative potential of our people, and the vast dimensions of our great country. She claims this because we are constructing a truly democratic society and want to be active participants in the construction of a multipolar democratic world order.⁵²

Both meanings persisted and were encapsulated in the concept of Russia as a democratic Great Power; they were raised on different occasions and in response to different events, but often enough appeared in close proximity to each other. In the ambiguous interplay of these representations of Russia as democratic state, however, one image was clear – that of Russia as a Great Power, a pole of influence, be it

⁵¹“Putin Visits Mongolia, ORT News Item,” (www.lexis-nexis.com: BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 14 November 2000). See also Putin’s 2005 interview with CBS anchor, published in *Mezhdunarodnaia Zhizn’* and on the Kremlin website, in which Putin’s reference to a democratic world order is made in direct context of his criticism of US unilateral action over Iraq. *Putin Interviewed by CBS Anchor Mike Wallace* (9 May 2005 [cited 12 October 2006]); available from http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2005/05/09/0842_type82916_87807.shtml. For other instances, see for example “Igor Ivano’s Remarks During a Visit to India (Source: Radio Rossiia, 3.5.2001),” (www.integrum.ru: Monitoring Teleradioefira, 3 May 2001).

⁵² Vladimir Putin, *Speech at the 2002 Russia Day Celebrations* (12 June 2002 [cited 23 May 2006]); available from <http://www.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2002/06/28953.shtml>.

because it belonged to an exclusive club of democratic states, or because it was prepared and willing to counter US hegemony.

4.2. Sovereign democracy and democratic Great Power - the transformation of the semantic field of state identity

As has been seen in Chapter VI, the effect of 9/11 on relations of Russia with the West was somewhat contradictory, with a short-term alignment and even inclusion into a common imagined space (though on the basis of Russian, not Western values) soon replaced by increasing distrust, as the West began to encroach on the space of the “near abroad”. Tellingly, already in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, for a liberal like Nemtsov, the emphasis was not primarily inclusion in the West, but recognition as Great Power through inclusion. As he put it, “In actual fact, Russia has already had two opportunities of becoming a Great Power for real. (...) We are now faced with our third opportunity. I very much hope that both Putin and the country's leadership will not let it slip.”⁵³

As the Russian political elite reacted to global developments in the wake of the declaration of Bush's war on terror and the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, the essential ambiguity of the semantic field of Russia's state identity was diminished, privileging the meaning of Russia as democratic Great Power aiming to curb US hegemony and stressing the centrality of independence of action to Russia's status as Great Power. This was helped by the fact that by this point, after the 2003 Duma and 2004 presidential elections, with their fatal weakening of the liberal opposition, in particular, and the continuing erosion of opposition access to the mass media, official discourse had become clearly dominant, and the scripts that used normative concepts of the state were largely controlled by the Kremlin.

Domestic representations of Russia as democratic state also began to shift, in clear association with the consolidation of sovereignty as a central attribute of the semantic field of Russian state identity. As seen in Chapter VI, Russia's initial alignment with the West differed from the immediate post-Soviet period in that it was not primarily about identifying with the West on the basis of democratic values, but based on a narrative referring to Christian heritage and “common civilization”, and above all the projection of Russia as a leader in the fight against terrorism due to

⁵³ "Russia's Parliament Adopts Terrorism Decision, Deputies Interviewed," (www.lexis-nexis.com: BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union - Political, 19 September 2001).

its experience in Chechnya. This initial narrative was pushed to the background (though it did not vanish completely) after 2003, as Russian expectations of equal partnership remained unfulfilled and the relationship between Russian and the West began to sour. This gained an added dimension in the wake of the “colour revolutions”, and in particular the “orange revolution” in Ukraine. The revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine in particular had been supported by Western NGO’s and US state agencies, and it became clear that Western powers were prepared to actively support democratic change in the former Soviet space, perhaps even in Russia itself. This may have been a factor in the way that sovereignty and the representation of Russia as active, independent Great Power, acquired a privileged place in political discourse. In any case, perceptions of the imagined space of the West changed – and with this came a shift in the meaning of democracy away from the liberal script of the early Putin period. It became subordinate to the conceptual field of Great Power/strong state, where the concept of sovereignty had a central place. This concerned not only representations of Russia as a democratic Great Power, but now turned to the domestic set-up of the Russian state as well, indicated by a series of slogans launches by “political technologists”, notably the concepts of “managed democracy” and its 2005 replacement, “sovereign democracy”.

Representations of Russia as “democratic Great Power” became more prominent in official discourse, a development that gathered pace from 2003 onwards. In Putin’s *Den’ Rossii* speech in 2003, he declared that “we want to become an economically powerful, democratic Great Power which is open to the world” and in 2004, “hand in hand we are building a democratic, free Great Power with a leading and influential position in the world”⁵⁴

The essential ambiguity of this script did not vanish completely, especially in Putin’s addresses to Western leaders, such as his invocation of the unity of democratic powers against terrorism at Gleneagles in 2005.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the image of Russia as democratic Great Power became more clearly linked to the central status of sovereignty as independence inherent in the notion of a democratic world order, a term which continued to be used to describe the kind of world Russia

⁵⁴ Vladimir Putin, *Speech at the 2003 Russia Day Celebrations* (12 June 2003 [cited 24 May 2006]); available from <http://www.kremlin.ru/text/themes2003/06/47109.shtml>, Vladimir Putin, *Speech at the 2004 Russia Day Celebrations* (12 June 2004 [cited 24 May 2006]); available from <http://www.kremlin.ru/text/themes2004/06/72700.shtml>.

⁵⁵ “Putin Makes “Small but Emotional” Speech on London Terrorism at G8 Summit, 7 July 2005,” (www.lexis-nexis.com: BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union - Political, 8 July 2005).

was striving for.⁵⁶ This was visible in the 2004 Annual Address, where Putin stressed once again independence as a core element of Russia's identity as Great Power and linked it to democracy as self-determination. As he said,

Whether or not we can become a society of truly free people – free both economically and politically – depends only on us. Reaching our priority national goals depends only on us. (...) It is far from everyone in the world that wants to have to deal with an independent, strong and self-reliant Russia.⁵⁷

At the same time, the stress on sovereignty as independence also affected the development of the concept of democracy as it related to domestic political space in Russia. In fact, the externalized meaning of Russia as democratic Great Power began to be translated into a broader use of democracy in political discourse that equally stressed this external aspect. While the state elite retained a commitment to the institutional, procedural features of democracy, such as elections and the *semblance* of the existence of a multi-party system, this move emptied the concept of democracy of much positive meaning of its own and reducing it to an assertion of sovereignty as stance against Western interference.⁵⁸

This externalization of the meaning of democracy occurred in the context of the “colour revolutions”, and could be read as an attempt to protect Russian domestic space against possible Western encroachments. In fact, this focus on the external aspects may have been a way to “occupy” the concept of Russia as democratic state in a way that had as little as possible to do with the kind of normative demands the West put forward and on which, in the eyes of the US and the EU, a recognition as democracy increasingly depended (a shift from the 1990s, where institutional features of democracy were largely deemed sufficient for the recognition of Russia as democratic state).⁵⁹ This development culminated in the launch of the concept of

⁵⁶ A recent example is Putin's speech on foreign policy in June 2006, where he declared: “Consequently, Russia wants a more secure and democratic world order, for equal access of all countries and peoples to the fruits of globalization.” Vladimir Putin, “Speech on Foreign Policy,” (www.integrum.ru: Press-Zentr MID RF, 28 June 2006).

⁵⁷ Vladimir Putin, *Annual Address to the Federal Assembly* (26 May 2004 [cited 6 June 2006]); available from <http://www.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2004/05/71501.shtml>.

⁵⁸ The distortions of elections in Russia are discussed in M. Steven Fish, *Democracy Derailed in Russia: the Failure of Open Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). For the way that entire opposition parties in Russia are virtual see Wilson, *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World*.

⁵⁹ The political analyst Boris Makarenko, of the influential “Centre for Political Technologies” headed by Markov, commented thus on the concept of sovereign democracy: “Sovereign democracy and everything that is associated with it is the discourse of “catching-up” – we argue with the West in its own language, the language of post-communist transition”. In Boris Makarenko, “Predposlednee

“sovereign democracy” by Putin’s influential ideologue Vladislav Surkov in his “secret” speech at the *Delovaia Rossiia* business forum in 2005, months after the “orange revolution”.⁶⁰ Not long after that, Sergei Markov made this connection explicit when he pitted “sovereign democracy” against “managed from abroad” regimes.⁶¹ And in his 2005 Annual Address, Putin clearly made reference to this connection between sovereignty and democracy:

Russia is a country which has chosen democracy by the will of its own people. It has itself embarked on this road and, abiding by all the universally recognized democratic norms, it will itself decide, in the light of its historical, geopolitical and other features, how to implement the principles of freedom and democracy. As a sovereign country, Russia can and will independently determine for itself both the timeframe and the conditions of its movement along that path. (Applause.)⁶²

Both these quotes from the annual addresses of 2004 and 2005 show the way in which the conceptual clusters of “sovereign democracy”, “democratic Great Power” and “democratic world order” took key concepts of liberal, Western discourse – democracy itself, and freedom, and even references to universal values, and shifted their meaning to that of sovereignty and independence, and thus back into the conceptual field of the strong state and Great Power.

The core of this was the use of the idea of self-determination that is indeed part of the conceptual field of liberal democracy, expressed in the idea of popular sovereignty. However, once more its meaning was re-defined: it was linked not to the Russian people, but the state, making the state, not the Russian nation, the embodiment of Russia. As Surkov put it in his speech at *Delovaia Rossiia*, “I often hear that democracy is more important than sovereignty. We do not admit it. We think we need both. An independent state is worth fighting for.”⁶³

The reversal of the conceptual fields of democracy and Great Power in comparison to the Liberal Westernizing discourse of the early 1990s, and even to the liberal tendencies in Putin’s first term in office, was clear. While Russia’s Great

Poslanie: Staryi Zhanr, Novyi Diskurs [the Penultimate Speech: Old Genre, New Discourse],” *Politicheskii Zhurnal* 17, no. 112 (15 May 2006).

⁶⁰ Vladislav Surkov, “Transcript of Speech by Vladislav Surkov at “Delovoi Rossii” Business Forum, 17 May 2005,” (www.integrum.ru: Nasledie Otechestvo, 13 July 2005).

⁶¹ See the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter.

⁶² Vladimir Putin, *Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation* (25 April 2005 [cited 4 August 2006]); available from

http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2005/04/25/2031_type70029type82912_87086.shtml.

⁶³ Surkov, “Transcript of Speech by Vladislav Surkov at “Delovoi Rossii” Business Forum, 17 May 2005.”

Power status was then confirmed by its identification as democracy, now Russia's identification as democracy helped to stress claims to independence as a core element of its representation as Great Power.

This shift in meaning was underpinned by an effect of the 2003 Iraq war, which, in certain ways, made this stress on sovereignty as independence possible in the first place. As energy prices rose, Russia's wealth increased rapidly and its energy resources became a potentially important strategic asset. In January 2005, the Russian government prematurely re-paid the last of the IMF loans that it had been granted during the 1990s, a symbolic step that ensured Russian independence from a Western institution and a remarkable reversal of the situation of 1998/99, when the Russian state was saved from bankruptcy only by yet another hastily arranged IMF emergency loan.⁶⁴ In the run up to the G8 St Petersburg summit of June 2006, Putin declared Russia to be an "energy superpower". Once more, the Russian state elite felt there were internationally recognized criteria according to which they could demand recognition as a Great Power.

In fact, by 2006, Russia's representation as a Great Power in official discourse had become more forceful, once again demanding to be recognized on a global level, rather than just a concentration on the regional dimension of the CIS which had become common for post-Soviet Russia (although this, due to Russia's situatedness in three major world regions, nevertheless established Russia's global reach, as Eurasianists never failed to stress). As Sergei Ivanov, Defence Minister and close ally of Putin, wrote on the eve of the G8 summit in St Petersburg, "Russia today has fully regained its status of a great power which bears global responsibility for the situation on the planet and the future of human civilization."⁶⁵ This was written at a time at which not only relations with the West, and in particular the EU, were increasingly strained, but also Russian influence in the CIS was challenged as a result of the colour revolutions. Contrary to 1999, this was not reflected in a public discourse of state weakness – a result, no doubt, of the control of national media by the state, which allowed the presentation of Russia's foreign policy as a continuing success story.

⁶⁴ *Russian Federation Completes Early Repayment of Entire Outstanding Obligations to the IMF* (2 February 2005 [cited 27 August 2006]); available from <http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2005/pr0519.htm>.

⁶⁵ Sergei Ivanov, "Triada Natsional'nykh Tsennostei [the Triad of National Values]," *Izvestiia* (14 July 2006).

5. Conclusion

What becomes clear from the development of the semantic field of the state under Putin is that the normative projection of the state presented in the discourses of Russia's political elite more than ten years after the end of the Soviet Union remains ambiguous, with Westphalian terms taking on connotations that are implicit in Western discourses as well, but with a different emphasis. In many ways this was a post-imperial image of the state, characterized by a reversion to sovereignty as state power as the core of representations of the Russian state that stems from much older imperial traditions of statehood. The meaning of sovereignty that emerged stressed an idea of the state as "the sovereign", the ruler, rather than the clearly delineated distinction between inside and outside that is central to territorial conceptions of sovereignty.

Nevertheless, Russia's statehood was expressed in Westphalian terms, or rather, the idealized vision of a European concert of sovereign powers which recognize each other as equal. The concept of Great Power, in particular, referred to the image of an independent, sovereign state that was part of the metaphor of "true Europe". As long as the imagined space of the West and Europe was not only a concrete territorial space encroaching on Russia's borders (as was happening in the wake of the colour revolutions), but also an essential layer of Russia's domestic space, this stress on independence did not and could not translate into a sharp distinction between Russia and the West.

In fact, the ambiguity of space that was explored in Chapter VI, both with regard to the imagined space of the West and the territoriality of the new Russian state, was sustained and reinforced by the concepts of the state as agent presented in this chapter. This happened through the very way in which the semantic field of Great Power/strong state and democracy intertwined domestic and external references of state agency. The way in which the image of Russia as democratic state linked it to the "imagined space of the West" while being about domestic political choices illustrates this clearly. However, this intertwining was equally present in the way that the meaning of sovereignty as independent power connected representations of Russia as Great Power in international affairs with the reassertion of central state power over domestic space, as has been seen in the metaphorical parallel drawn between Kosovo and Chechnya. Under Putin, both concepts became the focus of

official discourse, and, indeed, were set in relation to one another. As has been seen above, this affected the representation of Russia as a democratic state, shifting its externalized meaning to that of the conceptual cluster of “democratic world order”, of Russia as a “democratic Great Power”, and finally of “sovereign democracy”.

Here too, the multiple overlay of domestic and external state agency that was projected in the semantic field of “state identity” contrasts with the sharp distinction between inside and outside that is made in many Western accounts of Russian state building, whether they stress a “neo-imperialist” or a “nation-state” image of the Russian state-building process. In some ways, the Russian state remained suspended between these forms, but the very strength of these foundational concepts of statehood suggests that any push into a more Westphalian, Western European model of territoriality, may be purely reactive and rather short-lived – unless and until the meaning of these concepts begins to reflect the new spatial realities within which they are used.

CHAPTER VIII

Conclusions and implications

1. Introduction

The ambiguities that characterized the semantic field of Russia's "state identity" continued to be evident in the late Putin period, even as there emerged an increasingly unambiguous consensus in the West that Putin's Russia was neither democratic nor worthy of inclusion into the imagined space of Europe, let alone the West. At the 2007 meeting of the Valdai discussion club, a high profile PR exercise in which the Russian president regularly meets with selected Western Russia-watchers, Putin said that "Russia is a country which cannot live without its own sovereignty. It will either be independent and sovereign or it will be nothing." He went on to assert Russia's democratic identity, explicitly referring to a multi-party system and claiming that "We are not inventing our own Russian wheel or our own moonshine democracy".¹

As this thesis has shown, these ambiguities are an inherent part of the semantic field of Russia's "state identity". The amorphousness of representations of space, and the overlapping imagined spaces of Europe, the West and Russia in representations of "Russia" were complemented and sustained by representations of the Russian state as agent, both in images of state strength and in those which represented Russia as democratic state. The more extensive delineation of space in the wake of the "colour revolutions" was a trend which complemented, but did not replace these ambiguities. These representations cross-cut the absolute dichotomy of

¹Vladimir Putin, *Meeting with Members of the International Discussion Club "Valadai"* (14 September 2007 [cited 25 September 2007]); available from http://president.kremlin.ru/appears/2007/09/14/2105_type63376type63381type82634_144011.shtml.

sameness and difference, inside and outside, which is presented in accounts of identity in the Westphalian narrative (and presented both to Russia by the West, and in Russia itself in the Westernizer/Slavophile discourse). The conceptual field of “Russia” contains a strongly subjectivized representation of statehood and posits the state, rather than the nation, as the expression of “Russia” – and yet does not correspond to the image of sharply separated spaces and the centrality of difference and boundaries that is suggested by the Westphalian narrative.

By tracing the semantic field of “state identity” in post-Soviet Russia, this thesis has therefore challenged the account of identity that dominates the “cultural turn” in IR. Identities are (also) about difference, but the way this is posed in constructivist and poststructuralist accounts in IR reinforces rather than challenges underlying assumptions about identity and subjectivity that have long been implicit in the Westphalian narrative. The dichotomy between identification and differentiation that has dominated research on identity in IR obscures the very real ambiguities that are part of representations of collective identities.

In this final chapter I will clarify the conclusions and implications of my work, both for the study of identities and culture in IR and for the study of Russian identity and foreign policy. I will begin, in section two, by returning to the “cultural turn” and highlighting the ways in which a framework based on philosophical hermeneutics and *Begriffsgeschichte* can help to broaden the scope of possible questions about identity and the state in IR. Section three takes up the representations of Russia’s “state identity” in 1991/92 and 1999-2006 and discusses basic continuities and changing trends. Finally, section four considers the ramifications and implications of my arguments both for the broader themes that I address and for the possible scope of future research.

2. Philosophical hermeneutics, *Begriffsgeschichte* and the study of identity in IR

In Chapter II, I argued that there exists a problematic and one-sided account of identity and the state within what could be called the “Westphalian narrative” – the basic ontology of the discipline of IR. I have also argued that the “cultural turn” has not substantially dislocated this account, despite the explicit deconstruction of

the Westphalian narrative in post-structuralist critiques and the general commitment to contingency inherent in the constructivist paradigm.

The highly normative account of identity and subjectivity in the Westphalian narrative revolves around related, but not identical features – the positing of the state as subject, sharply delineated boundaries between inside and outside, and the reading of the concept of identity as constituted by a dichotomous tension between identity and difference, privileging sameness over difference. Moderate constructivism, in introducing the concept of “state identity”, and in its focus on processes of identification and differentiation, reifies the Westphalian account of identity, subjectivity and the state to an unprecedented extent. However, I also argued that the explicit critique of the Westphalian narrative in post-structuralist approaches fails to step outside of this account because of its focus on deconstruction, which relies on a reversal of the logic presented in the Westphalian narrative without ultimately escaping its boundaries. Both moderate constructivism and post-structuralist critiques, therefore, remain bound up in a narrow, and ultimately Eurocentric, reading of state and identity. I also argued that part of this problematic entanglement of the cultural turn with the Westphalian narrative is the way in which the cultural turn in IR perpetuates a “fetishism of abstraction” and an uneasy relationship with empirical research that has long been a peculiar feature of the discipline of IR. In this, as John Agnew has pointed out, the concentration on Westphalian categories has led to a “failure to note how unequal, hierarchical, shared over space-spanning networks, territorially ‘leaky’, and functionally divisible modern state sovereignty has always been.”² More generally, the lack of openness to real, empirical Others is one of the factors that keeps the Westphalian narrative in place.

In Chapter III I proposed a framework based on philosophical hermeneutics and conceptual history as a way to open up questions about identity and the state in the cultural turn, and to re-focus on questions thrown up in empirical research that may go beyond the remit of the Westphalian narrative. Based on this framework, I have drawn on conceptualizations of state and identity in sociology and anthropology in order to investigate representations of Russia’s “state identity” – the semantic field in Russian political discourse that constitutes the Russian state as “Russia”.

² Agnew, “Open to Surprise?,” 4.

As I have argued, a fundamental task for the cultural turn ought to be the engagement with the particularities of real, empirical Others. There needs to be an openness to the contingency and ambiguity of meaning and a way to make the “cultural turn” more sensitive to historical, particular and culturally located experiences. This is something that is presupposed in a constructivist framework, but has so far remained under-explored in the actual development of the “cultural turn” in IR. Philosophical hermeneutics, with its central preoccupation of reflexively understanding the Other, addresses these issues much more directly than the dominant theoretical frameworks that are currently used to investigate identity in IR.

If there is one central insight that philosophical hermeneutics provides for IR, it is the way in which meaning can be understood not only as contingent and fluid (an insight shared by narrative theory and post-structuralism/discourse theory more widely), but inherently ambiguous and dependent on a context that is linguistic as well as extra-linguistic. In other words, the meaning of concepts travels, both across time (the diachronic dimension explored in Chapter IV) and across place, and will never be fixed – something that cannot be ignored when researching the international dimension of cultures and identities.

This insight puts the focus on the implications of the context-dependency of meaning for empirical research on identity. This means first of all acknowledging the reflexive element involved in the process of understanding, and the ways that our concepts of analysis themselves are contingent and context-dependent. The process of research does not only increase our understanding of the Other, but dislocates our own cultural horizon, the pre-judgements that we inevitably bring to our research. This is a result of the way in which philosophical hermeneutics describes genuine understanding as the understanding of something necessarily new and unexpected. In the case of identity and the state, this implies not only moving beyond the dichotomy of identity and difference and assumptions about the inevitability of boundedness, but also raises questions about the easy equation between international interaction and identity formation and the ways in which the concept of identity has been used in the theories of the constructivist turn.

Philosophical hermeneutics does not only reflect about the process of empirical research, but also points to a possible re-conceptualization of identity that throws in question the underlying assumptions of the kind of interactionist models of identity formation prevalent in moderate constructivism. It suggests that on the level

of collectivities (what Gadamer calls “tradition”, the intersubjective historical horizon within which any individual is embedded), any genuine transformation of identity – of self-understanding, in the form of dislocating the world-view given by these traditions – is linked to the process of understanding the Other. This raises the question whether interactions in which differentials of power and one-sided categorizations rather than this dialogical interaction are the norm can really be transformative of collective self-understandings or identities, as is implied in constructivist work on state socialization.

Arguably, power differentials and categorizations are characteristic of ascriptions of identity in international interactions. And in fact, as I argued in Chapter III and showed in the empirical part of this thesis, the development of representations of Russia’s post-Soviet “state identity” shows that interaction with significant Others does not necessarily transform collective identities. This may be due to the way in which external categorizations are appropriated into a cultural horizon and, in the process, take on a different meaning, allowing for considerable scope of interpretation which avoids the dislocation and therefore transformation of identities.

The other implication of an understanding of identity based on philosophical hermeneutics is an emphasis on the issue of recognition, away from the focus on identification and differentiation that underlies (albeit in diametrically opposed ways) both the modern and post-modern conceptions of identity that are predominant in the “cultural turn”. However, I have also argued that in the context of Russia’s post-Soviet virtual politics, the issue of recognition in turn needs to be treated with caution, given that recognition itself can be “translated”, and this process of translation is not necessarily dependent on actual instances of recognition from significant Others.

All this points to the need for empirical research into the contingencies and particularities of the international dimension of collective identity formation. I have suggested conceptual history, or *Begriffsgeschichte*, as an analytical strategy that incorporates the stress on ambiguities and context-dependencies of meaning in philosophical hermeneutics, while putting the focus on concepts of “state identity” as foundational political concepts. As foundational political concepts, they are not only inherently ambiguous, but in themselves carriers of power and legitimacy, and are essentially contested. In fact, representations of collective identity in public political

discourse are arguably in themselves political concepts which can convey legitimacy to whomever can lay claim to “occupying” them. This points to a focus on a predominantly domestic, but potentially international, “battle for meaning”.

Conceptual history provides tools for empirical research that enable research on concrete ways in which the ambiguity of linguistic expression works, starting with the way in which each speaker of language is situated in a historical tradition. My research set out in the empirical part of this thesis shows that Westphalian concepts do, indeed, carry more meaning than the IR literature typically gives them credence for, both diachronically and synchronically (in different cultural contexts).

As for the diachronic aspect, I argued in Chapter II that one of the reasons for the way that the “cultural turn” did not overcome the limitations of the Westphalian narrative was precisely the way in which conceptions of “state identity” and equating states with selves activated layers of meaning relating to subjectivity inherent in the concept of sovereignty. For the synchronic aspect, I have not made a case for incommensurability and separateness of different cultural traditions, but on the contrary have indicated that here, too, the meaning of Westphalian concepts of statehood can be both entangled with a Western European tradition and acquire new meaning in different cultural contexts. The meanings of concepts of “state identity” that emerge in Russian political discourse are by no means separate from those in West European traditions; nevertheless, the different emphasis given to them already undermines the dominant understandings of identity and the state that are reproduced in the Westphalian narrative in IR. Russian concepts of sovereignty, for example, take up precisely the connection between sovereignty and the state as collective subject, but lay less emphasis on what outwardly at least is the dominant understanding of sovereignty in the Westphalian narrative, that of territorial boundedness and the distinction between inside and outside space.

The kind of understanding of identity, but, above all, of the nature of understanding itself that is put forward in philosophical hermeneutics enables questions which move away from the boundaries posited by the Westphalian narrative. It also draws attention to the issue of reflexivity, the way that researchers are implicated in the research process and cannot escape their pre-judgements – something that needs to be confronted in researching different cultural contexts. Conceptual history, on the other hand, not only provides a concrete analytical strategy based on these principles, but points towards the political nature of

representations of collective identity in public political discourse. In this, it stresses the inherent ambiguity and context-dependency of concepts as much as the way that concepts create context, or open up a legitimate space for action.

3. Russia and “state identity”

In Chapters III and IV, I argued that it was possible and even necessary to speak about a Russian “state identity”, precisely because there exists a strong current in representations of Russian identity in which the Russian state stands for “Russia”. In the historical overview of the semantic field of Russian identity and the state set out in Chapter IV, I also showed how this representation of the Russian state as “Russia” contained elements that differed significantly from the equation between state and nation that is habitually made in the Westphalian narrative. At the same time, I used the concept of “state identity” in a sense that differs considerably from that given to the term by moderate constructivism. In contrast to an account that presupposes states as reified subjects, however defined, my emphasis is strictly on the way that state agency and the relationship between state and space were represented in public political discourse and changed during political contestation as well as in reaction to changing contexts – especially visible during events which touched upon the meaning of these representations of the Russian state as “Russia”. Basing myself on Timothy Mitchell’s conceptualization of the “state effect”, I assumed that such representations of the state as “Russia” were one part, but not the only part, of the reality of the Russian state.³ In doing this, I have taken the focus away from explanations of state behaviour based on a supposedly dominant “state identity” towards an understanding of “state identity” that is nothing more than the semantic field that locates the state in representations of Russian identity – comprising different layers, and invariably and inherently ambiguous.

That such a “state identity” can be found and, indeed, that it has appeared as an increasingly central element of representations of identity in the discourse of “statespeople” may be a case peculiar to Russia; it could be argued that the state has a specific place in these representations of identity that is not necessarily replicated

³ Mitchell, “Society, Economy and the State Effect.”

elsewhere. However, this in itself highlights one of the central claims that I am making in this thesis: that the seemingly familiar and universal may turn out to be quite different from what we, as observers located in a specific cultural sphere, have come to expect. Russian representations of “state identity” are expressed in Westphalian terms, but these terms are not given the same emphasis that the Westphalian narrative suggests. One finding of the empirical research presented in Chapters V, VI and VII is the blurring in Russian public political discourse of the distinction between domestic and international that has been so central to the Westphalian narrative. Both territorial distinctions of “domestic” and “abroad” and the complex relationship of representations of the imagined spaces of “Russia”, “Europe” and the West contribute to this blurring, as do representations of state agency that in themselves have both domestic and external dimensions.

The concepts of Russia’s post-Soviet “state identity” that I trace in the empirical part of this thesis reflected a rapidly changing and, in many ways, extraordinary context – that of the emergence of a new Russian state. It may have been because of this that significant shifts in the semantic field of state identity could be observed over a relatively short period of time, between the prolonged coming-into-being of Russia’s post-Soviet statehood and the Putin era. Two things are of note here: that the foundational concepts that formed the core of this field – of state strength and democracy, and their relation to representations of space – remained the same, and that the meaning of individual concepts and their relation to each other shifted considerably between 1991/92 and the end of the Putin presidency

The way that the concepts of Great Power/strong state and democracy remained central as normative ascriptions of the new Russian state during this period suggests that they have remained foundational concepts that have underpinned the legitimacy of the Russian state throughout the 1990s. As such they remained consensual across the political spectrum, delineating the way in which the Russian Federation could be represented as “Russia”. This is not to be taken as a strong causal claim for the fact that they underpinned the legitimacy of the Russian state elite; the issue of legitimization is notoriously difficult to research empirically and would have necessitated a very different framework from that presented in this thesis. Nevertheless, both the premises of *Begriffsgeschichte* and Barker’s argument about the identity and self-legitimation of rulers explored in Chapter III point to the ways in which the semantic field of “state identity” in Russia carries legitimizing

power. That this is not necessarily a prescription for action is particularly visible in the case of democracy, the actual status of which was undermined in Russia by numerous actions by “statespeople”, not only by Putin but starting at the very least with Yeltsin’s coup in October 1993 (which ironically imposed Russia’s first liberal democratic constitution).

The concept of Russia as strong state and Great Power preserved some of the meaning of imperial statehood, and it is not surprising that history was the marker of identity most often referred to when Great Power was reduced to a largely symbolic concept in 1991/92 and in the crisis of 1999. In fact, Great Power was the concept that allowed “statespeople” to anchor the new Russian state in the history of the Tsarist empire and the Soviet Union, a trend which, as we saw, started early in the history of the new Russian state. A return to establishing some sort of continuity between the Russian Federation and its predecessors was perhaps unavoidable, given the fact that whether or not the new Russian state represented “Russia” remained an open political question. Nevertheless, in a rapidly changing context, this meaning did not signify a continuation of Russia as imperial state, especially if this was translated (as some Western observers did) to expectations of an aggressive expansionism. Apart from the generic scripts referring to history, the most obvious remaining marker of a semantic field of imperial statehood was precisely the ambiguity of space, the continuing strength of boundlessness as a representation of Russian identity.

Both in the early 1990s and during the Putin period, concepts of the state as part of a broader Russian identity discourse were intertwined with, but by no means identical to, another central representation of Russian identity, the discourse on identity and difference with the West. As I have shown in Chapters V-VII, the focus on the state as a concept of identity in Russian political discourse therefore complicates the dichotomy of identity and difference that has been at the basis of the Westphalian narrative and, indeed, the majority of analyses of Russian identity in IR. This was especially true for the later Putin period, where the centrality of *independence* as a core meaning both for concepts of Great Power-ness and of democracy should not be interpreted as a choice for difference from the West, but precisely as a demand for recognition as Great Power with independent agency from a Western significant Other. Sovereignty, in its central significance for

representations of Russia as Great Power, was about independence, not differentiation – a subtle, but important difference.

Nevertheless, the “imagined space” of the West and Europe remained at the core of Russian identity discourses – not only embodied in a concrete, outside West but, as has been seen in Chapters V and VII, also as a domesticated imagined space, bound up with the imagined space of “Russia”, both through the conceptual cluster of identity and that of Great Power. The metaphor of Russia as “true Europe” is relevant here. As a Great Power, Russia’s belonging to European space was put beyond doubt – it was anchored in history and thus part of Russian identity. After all, for centuries Russia had been part of Europe precisely in its function as Great Power. And while recognition as equal remained a fundamental element of self-identifications as Great Power, this was an identification based on norms that had little to do with the sphere of liberal values that represented the West. In this sense, recognition, not identity or difference, was central to Russia’s identity as a Great Power, although in this the Western powers remained crucial as those which potentially conveyed this recognition – even if what mattered above all was the translated and interpreted semblance of recognition. What this means effectively is that the identity of Russia as Great Power does not in itself imply a Russia that is hostile to the West. That said, this picture was complicated not only by the way that the imagined space of the West began to encroach upon post-Soviet space after 9/11 and especially after the “colour revolutions”, but also by the way the West itself – and this meant increasingly the EU as well – posed the question of identity and difference as one of inclusion and exclusion.

Russia’s identity as a Great Power had always remained a consensual concept among the political elite, even during the early phase of Utopian Westernism in 1992 (what was contested was its meaning) but, as has been seen in Chapter VII, in the second term of Putin’s presidency it became central among the foundational concepts of statehood. That said, Putin’s attempts to present the Russian Federation as an actual Great Power may have eliminated the kind of contestations seen in the early 1990s and in the crisis of 1999 that refused to identify the new Russian state as “Russia” – although the erosion of public political space makes this difficult to verify. *Rodina*, by early 2006 the main nationalist opposition force (albeit possibly financed by the Kremlin, and vanishing without trace in the latter part of that year), still listed the re-creation of a Union state as one of its aims.

This subtle shift towards Great Power-ness as the central category of Russia's "state identity" in the Putin era was accompanied by a shift in meaning of conceptions of Russia as democracy and, indeed, as democratic Great Power. In Chapter V, I showed how there was an attempt by the reformers in early 1992 to occupy the meaning of Russia as Great Power by linking it to that of a "normal" country and identification with the West through Russia's democratic identity. This was a short-lived attempt, and, indeed, the persisting layer of meaning referring to Russia's imperial statehood in the concept of Great Power means that there was a latent tension between this and the dominant representations of Russia as democratic state in 1992. Nevertheless, this was a tension that showed signs of being resolved by the end of the Putin period, as the meaning of Russia as democratic Great Power had shifted away from identifications with the West and towards an emphasis on independence in a democratic world order not dominated by the US. This of course, is precisely the meaning of democracy that was developed in the concept of "sovereign democracy".

By the end of the Putin period there was, therefore, a clearly discernible shift in the meaning of democracy, away from its admittedly vague references expressing differentiation from the Soviet Union and identification with the West in 1992. The shift of the meaning of democracy to either external independence or to procedural/institutional factors (elections, the semblance of a multi-party system) developed in an international context in which the meaning of democracy was being re-defined by the Bush administration – away from the stress on institutional factors that had dominated in the 1990s and towards an emphasis on values – and put into practice with an aggressive doctrine of "regime change". It is in this context that it could be argued that in some ways there was an attempt by the Putin presidency to contest the meaning of concepts with the West on a global level. The mirroring of Western concepts such as democratic world order, and Chubais' borrowing of the term "liberal Empire" from a Western journalist, discussed in Chapters VI and VII, may be indicative of this. As the political analyst Boris Makaranko put it in 2006, "we are speaking with the West in its own language."⁴

This external dimension to the contestation of political concepts brings us back to the issues of recognition and translation. I have argued that the *semblance* of

⁴ Makarenko, "Predposlednee Poslanie: Staryi Zhanr, Novyi Diskurs [the Penultimate Speech: Old Genre, New Discourse]."

recognition interpreted and translated into a Russian context, rather than actual instances of recognition by Western significant Others in interaction, was sufficient to sustain representations of Russia as Great Power. In fact, as I have shown in Chapters VI and VII, it was only in part external recognition, and at least as much connections and parallels between developments inside and outside of Russia that put representations of Russia as Great Power and the semantic field of “Russia” in a relationship to external events. The Kosovo crisis, 9/11, and, in a less spectacular form, the aftermath of 9/11 and especially the “colour revolutions”, were specific events which made visible recognition – or the lack of it – by Western significant Others, but which were also meaningful in the context of Russia’s identity discourses for other reasons. In the case of Kosovo, this was because of the parallels drawn between the Kosovo Albanian’s claims to independence and the Chechen issue, which had once again reached crisis point at the same time. This connection raised fears about the strength of the central state and, indeed, the unity of Russia more widely. Reactions to 9/11, as has been seen in Chapter VI, once again drew parallels between this act and Chechnya. It was the symbolic force of these events that had the power to confirm or dislodge meanings – strands of representations that were concurrently present and in competition with each other in the conceptual field of the state.

4. Implications for theory and research

The concepts I have concentrated on do not replace other available representations of Russian identity, but complement them, and are arguably in themselves the most central, but not the only available representations of Russia’s “state identity”. I have raised questions about the relationship between concepts and context, but make no claims to having elaborated a model or established a causal relationship. While I did claim that the semantic field of Russia’s state identity changed in response to changing domestic and international contexts, this must remain an issue of correlation rather than causation. There certainly remain open questions about what this relationship between concepts and context implies. Concepts were employed and showed shifts in their meaning in the interpretation of

significant international events, such as Kosovo, but other contexts seemed to matter less than originally envisaged, and indeed as is generally assumed. This was true above all for the question of the audiences to which statements were addressed. On the level of basic identity scripts on which this thesis focuses, it made surprisingly little difference whether these were international or domestic audiences, fellow “statespeople” or the population at large.⁵ This may be because in some cases at least these scripts were consciously designed to be screened back to domestic television audiences and directed primarily at them. It may also be a reflection of the ambiguity of meaning that has been stressed in this thesis. Putin and Bush, for example, could both refer to Russia as “democratic Great Power” – the meaning that each speaker implied, and the way that this term was understood of course would differ significantly. All this is something open to further investigation, but the lack of difference between scripts for external and internal audiences has remained as true for the Putin era as it was in the early phase of the Utopian Westernism of Yeltsin and Kozyrev.

There are other issues that I have raised which could be explored further, but would necessitate a different focus and a different framework for research. This is true, for example, of the question of legitimacy, which I posited in connection with the legitimizing power of foundational political concepts such as the concepts of Russia’s “state identity”. Conceptual history identifies this legitimizing power as a distinguishing feature of foundational political concepts, the reason why they are both consensual and essentially contested. As I have argued, the concepts of state strength and democracy do appear to have this function in post-Soviet Russia, and, indeed, are widely consensual and (where contestation took place) essentially contested. That said, the issue of legitimacy and legitimization is difficult to research empirically in post-Soviet Russia and would require a very different approach than that taken in this thesis, which concentrated on the meaning, and the shifts in meaning, of these foundational concepts. Whether or not these representations of Russia really convey legitimacy, within the narrow circle of Russia’s “statespeople” and, more importantly, to the Russian people, is open to further exploration.

⁵ A finding that differs markedly from recent claims by Ted Hopf. See Ted Hopf, "Identity, Legitimacy, and the Use of Military Force: Russia's Great Power Identities and Military Intervention in Abkhazia," *Review of International Studies* 31 (2005).

The same is true of the issue of external recognition. I have argued, and shown in the empirical part of this thesis, that a lack of recognition by significant Others of Russia as Great Power or as democracy did not lead to an abandoning of these self-ascriptions. I also have suggested that not all forms of international interaction are transformative of identities, and that ascriptions of identities by significant Others are mitigated by processes of translation. Phases in which external recognition for Russia as Great Power was in short supply coincided with phases in which it was evident to the state elite that the central Russian state was exceedingly weak, such as in 1992 and 1999. The lack of recognition by Western significant Others was one factor in this perception of weakness, but it would be difficult to disentangle this from other factors which were regularly referred to in political discourse. Altogether, the questions of whether instances of actual recognition make a difference to those in which recognition can be simulated, in what precise ways the issue of translation comes into play and whether there are ever instances of dialogical understanding and mutual transformation of identities in the interaction between Russia and its Western significant Others, remain to be explored in more detail.

Ultimately, I believe that my argument has wider implications for the way that identities are being researched in the context of Russian foreign policy and for the uses of identity in the “cultural turn” in IR more generally. A central point in this thesis is the way in which current conceptualizations of identity in IR, wedded to the framework of the Westphalian narrative, fall short of addressing the complexities and ambiguities of real processes of collective identity formation and fail to address important questions about the relationship between collective identities and the state. As I have argued, this is not only a question of a one-sided focus on identity and difference, distinctions and boundaries. It is also a problem of what is being researched, and what is assumed about identities and the state within that research.

What this thesis should have made clear is that we cannot overlook, not only the very real ambiguities and contingencies that are an inalienable part of identity scripts (which are precisely not well thought-out ideologies with prescriptions for action), but also the possible divergence between public representations of identities and identifications (when the latter is assumed to provide the link between identity and action). This point alone throws doubt on the straightforward link between identities, interests and actions that underpins the uses of identity in moderate constructivist theories in IR. In many ways, the idea that a causal link between

identities and actions can be established is inherently problematic, something that is underpinned by a wide-ranging and unresolved philosophical debate about the relationship of intentions and actions. However, the inherent legitimizing power ascribed to concepts in *Begriffsgeschichte* offers a potential way to address this issue. Although this has not been a theme in this thesis, the postulate of conceptual history that foundational political concepts have legitimizing power and thus delineate a space for legitimate action indicates that representations of “Russia” may put limits on the actions that a statesperson who claims to speak for the state can take. This is a shift away from identifications and intentions of individuals or corporate actors to the way that the level of discursive representations enables and constrains practices. Although these do not amount to causal relationships, since actions are always open to interpretations, the development of the post-Soviet Russian state shows that representations and practices in the name of the state are not entirely dissociated.

In this sense, one important implication of this thesis is that we should think more carefully about identities and the state in IR, and about the kind of explanatory work the concept of identity can do in constructivist approaches. The framework I have used – philosophical hermeneutics, and sociological and anthropological approaches – do not supersede others that have been drawn on previously in IR. Nevertheless, they, and the empirical material I have presented, make clear that there is scope for a widening of questions when it comes to the “core foundational question” of constructivism in IR.⁶ This is particularly true of research on Russian identity and foreign policy, which presents an incomplete and therefore distorted picture if it focuses only on Russia’s identification with or differentiation from the West. The concepts of “state identity” that have been traced in this thesis are part of a semantic field of Russian identity and are as relevant for understandings of the external dimension of Russia’s identity formation question as is Russia’s relationship with the West.

More narrowly, I have argued that the moderate constructivist concept of “state identity” that has been extensively theorized by Wendt, but has been widely used in moderate constructivist work in IR needs to be treated with caution. As my investigation into the semantic field of Russia’s “state identity” has shown, this concept can acquire meanings that, while representing the state as agent, were not

⁶ Ruggie, "What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-Utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge."

constitutive of unitary state agency. This was because of the nature of Russia's state building process and because of the functions that these discourses had – functions that were linked to the claims that “statespeople” made to legitimately representing the state, and to the legitimate representation of Russia by the state. In this sense, research on cultures and identities needs to be much more open to different ways in which power operates in representations of collective identity, ways which are by no means limited to the international interaction between states or other agents.

The issue of reflexivity is the last central point that emerges from this thesis. I have made a case for a reflexive questioning of the kind of Eurocentric assumptions that are present in cultural analyses in IR and a greater focus on empirical research as a way to dislocate these assumptions. I have also argued that this should be a basic feature of research, especially in research on culture and identity in IR. This is linked to a point that is an underlying thread of my argument: the need for openness to new questions, to real, empirical Others, because it is only in this interaction that a reflexive questioning of one's own assumptions can occur. Ultimately, this is also important for the possibility of critical theory in IR. Any form of critique, however radical and stringent, will be limited as long as it remains located in an abstract, almost virtual space of “the international” and fails to make this engagement with real, empirical Others. It is unfashionable to refer to “methodology”, and its positivist connotations are problematic. However, if by methodology is meant a greater reflection on empirical research, on our own background assumptions, both when conducting empirical research and when doing theory, this must be welcomed.

5. Final remarks

In her celebrated work, *Imagining the Balkans*, the anthropologist Maria Todorova states that the analysis of Otherness has become an academic industry in its own right, spanning disciplines from anthropology to literary studies, from sociology to history and philosophy.⁷ Otherness, and its implications, has also become a central question for the cultural turn in IR, but, as has been argued in this

⁷ Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*.

thesis, the way that it has reached IR has been marred by a very specific, and narrow, reading of the *problematique* of the Other.

Todorova has contrasted the central concerns of an Orientalist reading of the East – an imputed opposition – with the fundamental ambiguity that characterizes representations of the Balkans. This thesis likewise has found ambiguity rather than opposition, and in this sense it is an attempt to unravel the ambiguities that “confuse or contradict cherished classifications” in the study of Russia, and in categorizations of interactions between the West and the rest of the world more widely.⁸ It is an exercise in incorporating those “uncomfortable facts” that distort or contradict the seemingly clear vision we have of “Russia” and how it relates to “us”, a vision that is underpinned rather than challenged by positing Russia as rational Europe’s irrational Other, the “riddle wrapped inside an enigma”.

In tune with Todorova’s Balkans, the ambiguities that come to the fore in the semantic field of Russian identity and the way that they incorporate the ambiguous stance towards the “imagined space of the West” could be read as an expression of Russia’s marginality, the way in which it both does and does not belong to the space of European civilization. However, it might be wrong to ascribe this ambiguity only to a transitional or marginal position, be it geographical or cultural. In fact, it is the merit of philosophical hermeneutics to highlight the possibility or rather necessity of this ambiguity in a much broader sense.

It may be that the geographical and cultural closeness between Russia and Europe makes more visible ambiguities and multiple overlapping imagined spaces that are really a global phenomenon. Ambiguous representations of the West are not only an attribute of a close outsider. They exist within the imagined space of the West and Europe itself, where almost everywhere is also, in some ways, a space that is transitional and marginal to something else, beginning with Britain and its location between Europe and an Anglo-Saxon imagined space. However, and perhaps more importantly, in an increasingly globalised world, marginality is no longer just the result of geographical locations on the edges of Europe. It is true that the “imagined space of the West” has gone global, and so have the exclusions and divisions that it

⁸ Ibid., 17.

carries. In reality, however, it may well be that the overlapping imagined spaces and spheres of different cultures and the West, are the norm rather than the exception.⁹

Despite its emphasis on contingency and the open-endedness of interpretation, the account of dialogical understanding in philosophical hermeneutics is not relativist. A truly dialogical situation and the understanding that occurs in this situation will be superior to – more truthful, in a way – than the understanding informed by pre-judgements that exists prior to dialogue. This implies a hope that it is possible to escape from the closure in Eurocentric traditions that the Westphalian narrative represents and the problematic normative assumptions that it perpetuates. In this sense, it can be beneficial for the discipline of IR if this contingency and ambiguity is made more visible – indeed, it might be a departure point for a post-Western IR.

⁹ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

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