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Master's Thesis

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Deconstructing Contemporary Russian National Identity: Analysing Discursive Reactions to Crisis Situations

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I have written the Master's thesis independently.

All works and major viewpoints of the other authors, data from other sources of literature and elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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ABSTRACT

The following thesis addresses Russian identity in times of crises and the differences between the official pro-government discourse and the discourse in the public sphere. In order to trace contemporary Russian national identity, I use discourse analysis of three cases of crises: the war in Syria, the conflict in Ukraine and the refugee crisis in Europe. As conflict situations, crises and wars involve opposition between two or more sides. Therefore, drawing on Hopf's idea that identities are relational, identities become more explicit in crises situations as they are shown in relation and opposition to each other. The other aim of this research is to find differences between the official discourse and the discourse in the public sphere. This is done through discourse analysis of the pro-government popular media outlets (for the official discourse) and pro-government bloggers (for the discourse in the public sphere). I argue that discourse differs in those too. Drawing on Foucauldian 'truth regime' and concepts of body and power, I contribute another topic for the analysis - body control through homophobic sentiments. Based on the notion that the state needs to take control over the human body, fertility and demography (which is particularly important during the time of crisis), I argue that biopolitics is a leitmotif for the other aforementioned topics and has to be taken into account. I also argue that strong support for the promotion of traditional values is used as a tool to strengthen identity building.

Keywords: the war in Syria, conflict in Ukraine, refugee crisis, homophobic propaganda, Russia, United States, European Union, the West, discourse analysis, national identity, biopolitics.

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1. **Introduction**

In the early 2000's, at the beginning of Putin's presidency, revolutions in the post-Soviet space were beginning to take shape in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. Moscow found its interests increasingly insecure in post-Soviet countries. Upsurges took place not only in surrounding countries, but within Russia itself. Dissenters marches took place in Russia starting in 2006 in Moscow and continued in Saint-Petersburg, Voronezh and Nizhniy Novgorod. The main aim was to remove Putin from power. All of these events threatened Putin's lead in the state, and new ideology and strategy were needed to bring back popularity among the electorate. This has put Russia on a conservative turn. Concept of the "Russian World" appeared, being financially backed by the Russian World Fund and ideologically supported by Russian Orthodox Church. The project aimed to support the Russian-speaking population in post-Soviet space and to increase the Kremlin's influence on "brothers" and "sisters" abroad. Besides that, Russia needed to get rid of Western pressure to improve human rights, or at least to minimize its influence on the country. Western values became unwelcomed due to Putin's turn towards traditional Russian values with disrespect towards liberal concessions. The West became a degrading part of the world in official narrative, while Russia had to be driven forward by traditional relationships and order in society. Contemporary Russia reestablished its idea and mission of the country fighting American hegemony. Putin has brought back into Russian foreign policy a certain system of opposition with the US since the Cold war. However, if the Cold war was more about the nuclear arms race, the current race can be seen in regards to information. However, despite the polarisation between the US and Russia in contemporary discourse, the EU is always somewhere in between. It is not considered a full value opponent as it is a part of the American hegemony, because Brussels, according to the Russian worldview, follows orders from Washington. The World is majorly polarised again between the United States and Russia.

Due to the conservative turn and new needs of the Kremlin, the Russian propaganda machine was integrated into new media outlets, while old ones were bought and united under the state owned companies such as "Gazprom Media" and "Rossiya segodnya." This thesis approaches the problem through the new step in development of the Russia -West identity relations through media discourse. Analysis is performed through the examination of relations between Russia and the West (a collective image, which is sometimes split into the US and the EU) in contemporary official media and public debate. I pose the question whether or not political debate in the public sphere differs from the one present in official state-owned sources? How are countries' identities represented in the debate on the recent Russian political activity in Ukraine and Syria as well as its view on the refugee crisis and the traditional family? In Russia, despite the wide disbelief in politicians due to a highly corrupted system, the people are not refraining from supporting the established government and its president in the face of Putin. Despite politics being unresponsive to the nation's concerns, its unwillingness to struggle with economic and systemic problems for the common good, the people remain supportive to the state in its opposition to the West due to the well-built collective Self and developed habitual action.

Internal debate on a series of international issues illustrates how opposition between Russia and the West adds up to the creation of the nation-state identity building. This study helps to evaluate differences and similarities present in the pro-government media and public sphere and give an in-depth analysis of the construction of Russian identity contrasted through the Western approaches to the current crises. A range of topics given priority in the media will help me do so. The research questions I place here are: first, how Russian, American, and European identities are represented in pro-government official media outlets and blogs, and second, how discourse related to these identities differs in the official and public spheres. I will answer the aforementioned questions through analysing critical situations, when identities are precisely represented. As it is important to mention, this work does not address the crisis of Putin's regime or crisis in foreign and domestic policy, nor does it refer to any form of economic crisis. Furthermore, it has nothing to do with Marxists or Gramscian theories of organic crisis or crisis of capitalism. This work refers to war crises, military conflicts and a consequence of war - the refugee crisis. This

work researches discursive reactions to crisis situations, where crises are any other crisis outside of Russia that causes such reactions, and influences or threatens identity. As Gareth Evans states in his keynote speech:

"The sense of national identity is never stronger than when countries are at war with each other, at imminent risk of war, or remembering war. Cultural achievements can stir national pride, and sporting contests can excite national emotion in memorable ways, but it is war, the prospect of war, and the memory of war that has traditionally shaped and defined that collective national sentiment and sense-of-self we think of as being at the core of national identity" (2016).

Through the analysis of discursive reactions we can see how crises opened up a space for the debate around Russia's Self and the Western Other, because crises show that Other can never be fully excluded from the Self's discursive space, and can always be traced contesting the Self (Leek and Morozov, 2016). Also, the article suggests that "event-generated crises are a key mechanism of identity politics, which account for how identities evolve and adapt to new circumstances" (Leek and Morozov, 2016). Due to that, identities have to be provided with certainty, where it is clearly articulated, where "us" and "them".

Taking into account constructivist assertion that identity and foreign policy are highly intertwined and interconnected, it can be assumed, therefore, that Russia's foreign policy is directly related to its identity and the construction of it. Furthermore, foreign policy helps not only to promote a state's values abroad and develop its influence, but also adds up to the consolidation of identity inside the country (Leek and Morozov, 2016). Moreover, discursive reactions to external crisis situations were taken into account in the analysis, because foreign policy is central to the production and reproduction of identity (Campbell, 1992).

Therefore I take into account for analysis current crises that involve recent media presentation of the war in Syria, crisis in Ukraine, refugee crisis and homophobic policies. Anti-homosexual propaganda is taken to represent a mediated reaction to the crisis of identity, which could have been caused by crises. Due to the crisis in Russian foreign policy, identity is being contested and threatened; therefore the Russian Self has to make attempts to strengthen it. In the Russian case, anti-homosexual propaganda is not only a

result of state biopolitics, body control and support for fertility and demography, but also a part of identity relations with the West and Russia's contested Self in the time of crises. In order to delineate and strengthen Russia's identity, there is a need to take something that is discarded in the West and bring it into Russia discursive space, where it will become a cornerstone to build upon. Traditional family values were taken as such and along with that anti-homosexual propaganda is present to strengthen those values in discourse and eliminate the breach in Russia's national identity and idea.

The research framework requires empirical analysis of the pro-government official media outlets reporting on the aforementioned issues. Nevertheless, besides official state owned media outlets, the public sphere is also taken for analysis in the form of popular blogs and the patriotic encyclopedia. Official sources are constituted from RT (formerly Russia Today) and vesti.ru. The material is used to present the official position on the issues. Popular bloggers from the most widely known platform livejournal.com and patriotic encyclopedia ruxpert.ru are taken for the representation of the pro-government discourse in the public sphere. For the research method I use discourse analysis, which helps to interpret how Russian identity and power are exercised in the official and public discourses and how it interacts with the Western one. Need for tracing Western identity is indeed important, because identities are visible while contrasted, they exist and are build up in relation to each other (Hopf, 2002).

Research is organized as follows: the theory chapter creates a conceptual and theoretical framework for the analysis of the Russian case as well as it gives an overview of literature on media studies of the official and public sphere that is taken for analysis in this research. It also gives a historical overview of the long-lasting debate on Russian position in regards to the West (Slavophiles/Nationalists vs. Westernizers) and its contemporary arguments. Description of the research design, used in this work, finalises the chapter; the empirical chapter focuses on the discourse analysis of the four topics that are on the spotlight in the national media and according to the research highlight how they help to deconstruct Russian identity and find a difference in the official and public discourses.

This research is focused on media analysis as different types of media are key players in reflecting state-owned perspective and rhetoric as well as those representing the

public sphere. Overall, such research gives a broad understanding of Russian modern thinking. Besides general media analysis of pro-governmental sources, this study is focused on a certain selection of topics, which are currently given the main priority in the World debate. Understanding of the current Russian thinking could help to predict and analyse its future foreign and domestic policy moves and thus be prepared to react accordingly. This research can be useful for the NGOs and media outlets that are working with Russia or concentrate on the coverage of the Russian politics. It also can be useful for those who plan to do comparative analysis of how discourse and Russian identity have changed after the crises situations in 2015-2016.

2. Theoretical background

This chapter gives an overview to the development of the West as a significant other, beginning with the historical emergence of the concept and ending with the contemporary importance of othering in the decision-making processes of Russian foreign policy. After the historical part, I proceed to analysis of the cases chosen for this study: the war in Syria, the crisis in Ukraine, the refugee crisis and LGBT rights. These topics are presented through the prism of media outlets and blogosphere.

2.1 Russia's construction of the West as a significant other: a historical debate

Russian media commonly refers to "The West" was a means of drawing opposition between Russia and countries such as the United States and entities like the European Union. Whenever the clash of value systems is encountered, authors immediately turn to this opposition with regards to the West.

The widely used concept of "The West" is not a recent phenomenon simply appearing after Putin's conservative turn in Russian politics of 2005. Russian intellectual thought came up with the concept in the 19th century during dispute between Slavophiles and Westernizers looking for a better future for Russia and for a Russian position in the European cultural context (Bova, 2003). This occurred when the question of Russian place in the world system and its identity was crucial to determine. The concept of "The West" was constructed during the discovery of Russian identity (Browning & Lehti, 2010). At that point it was convenient to describe and base Russian national identity in opposition to the West. The country is placed geopolitically on the border where Asia and Europe meet; therefore intellectuals look to identify which values are closer to the Russian Self and what can better construct the framework for the decision-making processes in internal and foreign policy moves. The West was associated with better developments in the political and social spheres. So being "Western" meant being on the edge of the world. Peter the Great first tried to cross the feudal remnants of the past monarchical period. Doing so extended beyond political orientation, as it meant changing habits, attire and modifying the

identity. Whether this was a productive move can still be questioned in terms of the benefit of revolutionary methods. In this case, changes were not the outcome of gradual developments, but occurred immediately and unexpectedly - when the ground was not ready, when identity have not had enough time to adapt. But this revolutionary shake was not the only time in Russian history when the political system changed rapidly without leaving space and time for the population to digest possible changes such revolution can bring.

The Russian Empire came to an end in 1917, with the Bolsheviks taking over power, which was also an unforeseen change imposed on the population. Immediately the direction and attitudes regarding the West were transformed due to the changes in the values-based system. Russia appeared in clear opposition to Western values. The West has turned into the place, contaminated with the bourgeois capitalist disorder, while Russia was the core of the World's best prominent feature, spreading socialism. Russia was previously a part of the European Christendom, which played a unifying role, but the Soviet ideology led people to deny their religious beliefs.

The concept of the West was also not always stable. It started from Western Europe in the 19th century and increased its area of coverage first to the United States and then included the European Union. No longer was the West defined by only economic development and borders, but by the protection of political pluralism, democracy and human rights.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, its population was left with the identity in ruins. Soviet identity was no longer valid in a new socio-economic and political situation. Identity had to be built from the scratch. It started with reassessment of Russian relations with the West. Capitalist values came in place and freedom of press allowed people to express their opinion. The media became a watchdog of the state. These developments took place until the Putin's conservative turn.

His new move in foreign and domestic policy could be seen as an attempt to re-evaluate the Russian historical past and to rule out the idea that Russia is ahead of the Western developments. The country had to be identified in its own unique way and to be predestined to some role in international relations. Resources are dedicated to the

promotion of this idea, to bringing back Russia's great mission. On the third of March 2016, the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov issues an article in the "Russia for Global Affairs magazine" under the headline: "Russia's foreign policy: historical background" where he tries to evaluate Russia's past" (Lavrov, 2016). The main point of the article is to bring people's attention to the country's prior successes on the international arena, starting with the Victory in WWII and celebrations dedicated to this event and other anniversaries. Lavrov discards Russian position in the backyard of the European history. He argues that "Russian people possessed a cultural matrix of their own, an original type of spirituality and never merged with the West" (Lavrov, 2016). Russia's bond with Christianity regained importance.

Russia positions itself as a power which calls world sovereigns to unite in order to pursue common goals of peace and stability in the world. While Russia cares about the common good, there are countries that try to destabilise and marginalise Russia, meaning that that they do not care about the common goals of humanity and international peace. This leads to the assertion that Russia is the only country carrying this burden. Russia also positions itself not only as a guarantor of the global peace but also a custodian of the traditional family values with regards to the World's most shared religions: "We believe that human solidarity must have a moral basis formed by traditional values that are largely shared by the world's leading religions. [...] support for the family as a natural centre of life of individuals and society" (Lavrov, 2016).

Moves in Russian foreign and domestic policy could be evaluated and explained from the standpoint of political culture. As it was described above, Russia possesses distinct historical heritage and is motivated by its own assumptions in regards to international relations.

During Putin's presidency Russia stepped into a new dimension of its foreign and domestic policy. Gradually recovering from the post-USSR collapse, the loss of military power and undecided destiny of the black sea navy, the "bloody 90s", the extensive introduction to the market economy and loss of the national idea, the country chose the new leader. Putin has become a symbol of the new epoch. The new president normalised market function and started building up the new national idea, which was lost after Russia

appeared to be on its own in 1991. The four cases analysed in this research are representations of how President Putin managed to deal with the legacy left to him after chaotic 90s and managed to breed the new nation-state identity. Syria has become a ground for testing of the military capabilities, of the renovated Great Power, whose influence is recognised internationally. Ukraine has brought back Crimea and the Black sea navy fully returned to Russian control.

The widely discussed traditional values and anti-immigration sentiments have become an integral part of refurbished national identity, which is now is based on Russian aspiration to present itself in the opposition to the West and to showcase its new mission in the world system. All four topics, which appeared in the center of media attention and public sphere, add up to the strengthening of the national identity.

Putin has managed to find and build up the new ideals. First, an institution of social control had to be created, and the Russian Orthodox Church regained importance in public sphere. Second, information dissemination had to be improved and taken under control as well. This function was taken over by the newly created news sources as well as old strongholds of independent media such as NTV and TV6, which were acquired by the state owned companies and the pro-Putin oligarchy. In foreign policy, as it was already mentioned, the strengthening of the new national idea was supported by the involvement in Syria and the annexation of strategic land formerly belonging to Russia.

An important issue in historical debate was if Russia has to be positioned as superior with its values to the West or inferior and with the need to reach the developments already achieved by the West - to reach equal development. In this sense, Russia could have been seen as superior to Europe, as the state that is meant to guide Europe through the darkness of current time: "Moscow therefore seeks to realize a mission civilisatrice" (Lo, 2015, p. 104). Back in the 80s-90s, according to Neumann, Westernizers claimed that Russia just has to be equalized with the West, that it cannot be either inferior or superior because Russia, historically, is a part of the common European values space.

> "The Westernizers emerged both out of the dissident movement and out of Gorbachev's entourage of reform Communists. The framework within which they represented Europe was a cultural one, stressing liberal ideas about the integrity of

the individual and the limited rights of the state vis-a-vis the citizen and the common political goals of the mankind. Russia was not held to be morally superior to Europe; rather, it was seen as its potential equal and in certain respects its contemporary inferior" (1999, pp 65-100).

Drawing on Neumann, Westernizers were split between those that were for the pure support to the idea of Europe - where Russia would have to learn from it and develop accordingly with its respect to individual rights, market economy and political pluralism - and other Westernizers that elaborated on the idea of "Eurasia", where Russia could be a core of the union no longer under control of Western ideas of development and not guided by them, but where it has its own unique way. Nevertheless, the Westernizers were not the only group undertaking part in discourse, as nationalists also participated in the beginning of the 90s (Neumann, 1999). Nationalists were involved in figuring out the further way that could be the development of the strong ideologically independent state (Pozdnyakov, 1991). The other camp of nationalists represented the idea of looking for "spiritual regeneration." Neumann turns back here to Solzhenitsyn's ideas: "Russia should not expand its force on being a superpower but on attaining spiritual clarity" (Neumann, 1999, pp. 161-180). Solzhenitsyn came back to Russia from his exile in the US in 1994 and called for the country's spiritual uprising. But the country was turned to the West and the benefits of the market economy together with multi-party system. Solzhenitsyn's ideas on spirituality were not met with a great success, as they were to deny multi-party system; hitherto the multi-party system was seen as one of the greatest ideas from the West.

There were arguments between Westernizers and nationalists on the idea of imitating Europe or creating a Russia-centered Eurasian idea, where the new strong state would appear in the middle to balance the East and the West. But the result of it was not only an inside split of the future idea of Russia, but also outside denial of Russia by the West as equally developed and strong (Neumann, 1999). This meant that the West was not planning to let Russia be a fully-fledged civilized part of it. That added up to the nationalist sentiments of Russian uniqueness. Therefore, as Neumann develops, that became a reason as to why Westernizers were not able to carve an easy way for their ideas. On the other hand, the Nationalists built up on the Russian historical uniqueness, on its religious and

conceptual differences from the West. Russia could have played a bigger role if it took its own way, rather than follow and therefore subjugate to Europe as Neumann asserts:

> "The national representation was able to draw on the symbolic capital in its discursive work, which first forced the westernizing representation into a dialogue and then transformed it to make it more compatible with the nationalist representation. Put it in other way, there was a stiffness in Russian discourse that the westernizing representation could not break down, and so it happened that it was itself transformed instead" (1999, pp. 161-180).

The political elites in Russia dedicated a lot of attention to the construction of Russian national self-image as that of a Great Power. But when it came to the downplaying of this image and stripping Russia from this status by the West, it was turned into the evil other. Here the purpose of Russian history is to support identity management strategies and get rid of flimsy rhetoric that is unsustainable for its Great Power status (Clunan, 2009).

Nationalists appear where a crisis of identity is endangered or exposed to a critical situation. Middle class and intellectuals are usually involved with nationalistic movements in order to elaborate the way for a traditional society and guide the nation in the era of modernity. Eric Hobsbawm argues for the need of nationalism that appears in the circles of intelligentsia during periods of crises or social changes (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). Old traditions could appear no longer applicable to the contemporary situation (like it happened after the collapse of the Soviet Union). However, nation needs a unifying element and nationalism can help one in doing so: "Nationalism became a new secular religion and the class that most needed this mode of cohesion, was the growing middle-class, which lacked other forms of cohesion" (Rabow-Edling, 2006).

At the same time Slavophiles were leaning towards othering from the West in an attempt to depict Russian values as opposed to the western ones. Drawing on the theory of ressentiment formulated by Greenfield, such was the outcome of the psychological condition of self-abasement that appeared in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when historical background was not much applicable to the construction of the contemporary identity on the ruins of traditional values incompatible with modernity (Stern & Greenfield, 1993).

"Indigenous cultural resources were absent, or insufficient, so that ressentiment was the single most important factor in determining the terms in which national identity was defined. This explains why the Slavophiles gave much more attention to refuting Western values than presenting Russian ones, and why those values, which actually were presented, were portrayed as directly opposed to Western ones" (Rabow-Edling, 2006).

A big part of the debate on the Russian place in Europe can be dedicated to the concept of the 'true' and 'false' Europe, where Russia is to represent the 'true' Europe (Morozov, 2009). The European Union is viewed as being built on lies, in which the real idea of the union is not to create a borderless space, but to strip of the member states from their sovereignty. This was one of the major ideas from the Soviet propaganda:

"Domestic political community in this was was embedded into the chain of signifiers "true" Europe: sovereignty - peacefulness - real support for peoples, which was put into a strict opposition to the chain "false" Europe: americanization - loss of sovereignty - aggression (including formation of aggressive military blocs) - anti-popular movements" (Morozov, 2009, pp. 277-290).

As another point, opposition between Russia and the US can be seen as opposition between masculine and feminine or as a fight between two males in the face of Russia and the US to protect or subjugate Europe as a female (Morozov, 2009, pp. 277-290). Europe also seems to be vulnerable to the influence of the US and Russia, wherein Russia plays the role of a guardian to its fragile state. The Russian mission in Europe is to support it, to not let Europe lose itself. Therefore it has to be present in talks between Europe and the US - to help keeping the balance of power (Morozov, 2009). In the debate Morozov also draws on Danilevsky idea of the Slavic peoples as those that are the core of 'true' Europe, while romano-germanic group of peoples are the 'false' Europe (Danilevskii, 1869).

In the context of significant other represented by the West and its relation to Russia, deconstruction reveals that this signifier contains mostly negative references towards the US, while Europe itself is situated between the two. Europe itself does not represent a threat to Russia, but the US is the one bringing complication into Europe-Russia relations.

Russia only wants to protect its neighbor from the degrading influence from the West, but also to help save Europe from any negative impact meant to destroy European civilization and culture.

2.2 Identities in post-structuralist approach

Hopf argues that identities and their development is needed only due to "human desire to understand the social world and the consequent cognitive need for the order, predictability and certainty" (Hopf, 2002, pp. 7-18). But suggested by his other statements, we can see that, besides the need for the order, humans need a framework to make sense of themselves. There is a need for categorization, as only this will allow a framework to be constructed. Without a framework, the behavior of social groups, nations and peoples does not make sense. I will speak about this later in the chapter in terms of the Foucauldian 'truth' regime in which 'truth' is not a ready-made framework that we have to believe or not, but a toolkit for creation of this framework.

Human behavior has to be labeled according to the established system of values. While talking about the Self and the Other, it is important to mention that Self does not want to be lost after the encounter with the Other, which means that Self has to be strongly established within its own system of categories: "The greatest threat to the Self is a comprehensive alternative identity, an Other that can plausibly be understood as a replacement" (Hopf, 2002, pp.10-16). Here Hopf draws on Gramsci's theory of hegemony (Gramsci, 1972), where regime is more threatened to be replaced by other ideology rather than to be just overthrown. He also proposes linking to Emile Durkheim (Durkheim, 1982), where exercising of identity is a habitual action rather than rational, normative or emotionally driven from the categories[1] suggested by Max Weber (Weber, 1968). Hopf argues that reproduction of identity through the opposition of the Self to the Other is an everyday habitual action that is exercised through discourse. In my empirical part I am

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[1] In his work "Economy and society", Weber suggested four types of orientation of social action:
Instrumentally rational (determined by expectations), value rational (based on the conscious belief), affectual (emotions and feelings) and traditional (habitual)

analysing this work of a habit. We will see how individuals perceive and respond to an action of the Other in the case with blogs and how official sources are building up the habit through media, as well as how questioning of the issues and events is becoming patternized. Speaking of the logic of others, Hopf recalls a notion that identities cannot be understood without a comparison; therefore the Other is required for creation and sustaining of the Self. The individual understands oneself through comparison - and so does the nation. As Hopf draws on Edward Sampson (Sampson, 1980), we should take into account that the Other can be different: an imagined other, a historical other and a generalized other. In the case with the West, we see an example of two combined into a generalised historical Other (Hopf, 2002).

While studying the habit and how it influences perception of the world, Hopf states that people behave according to the common knowledge they possess. People have a "taken for-granted-knowledge" that constitutes the habitual response to events in reality (Hopf, 2002). Identities are relational, because in order to understand your own identity you have to see yourself in opposition to something else existing in the outside reality. In our case, Russia needs to be contrasted with the West in order to define itself. Our identities are constructed through social practices that we encounter in everyday lives. Identities define our perceptions of the outside world; they may push us to the understanding of a case in a certain way, while at the same time having our perceptions under control. Identities define which behavior is normal and which one is deviant. Since our identities are intertwined with social structures, those structures tell us how to act. If there is a couple consisting of two male individuals walking along the streets of Moscow, there is a high chance that people from outside world may use some hate speech or will condemn their action. Without identity, socialisation would be hard to imagine due to psychological obstacles for that. In order to adapt to a certain society or a group of people, there is a need for understanding of principles their identities are built upon.

2.3 Biopolitics and 'truth regime'

The other theoretical framework to be applied here is a so-called Foucauldian 'truth regime' that he describes in *Power/Knowledge*. There is an established apparatus of 'truth', with the system of values built up around it. The intellectual is functioning in society and locating itself based on that system. As he mentions, the 'truth' is not itself a system of values to be incorporated intersubjectively, but it is a set of rules that are created to build the 'truth' around: "There is a battle 'for truth', or at least 'around truth' - it is being understood once again that by 'truth' I do not mean 'the ensemble of truth which are to be discovered and accepted', but rather 'the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true' (Foucault, 1980, pp. 110-130). Defining identities is important to understanding that it can be observed through the "the battle about the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays" (Foucault, 1980, pp. 110-130). Foucault suggests imagining the political problems in terms of 'truth' and 'power.' In *Power/Knowledge* he also makes several statements that could be tested: "Truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extends it. A 'regime' of truth. 'Truth' is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements" (Foucault, 1980, pp. 110-130). It is important to figure out how identities are intertwined with the system of 'truth.'

There is a discourse that keeps the regime of truth functioning. There are mechanisms being created that help to distinguish what is true and false. 'Truth' is a result of political demand, it is disseminated under the state's control. Foucault states that in different periods of time power exercised and functioned differently. In progress power was trying 'to gain access to the bodies of individuals, to their acts, attitudes and modes of behavior" (Foucault, 1980, pp. 110-130). In this research I will also examine how power exercises through the media in the age of information and how media plays a role in carrying forward the 'truth', that further help to build assumptions, modes of behavior and act accordingly.

One of the main goals of 'truth', system and identities is to attain access to people's bodies. Bodies help the state function, because people and their bodies are a constituent part of the state and since they need a sovereign to rule them, the sovereign needs to possess certain tools to control them (Hobbes, 2009). Bodies are regulated within a discourse. That is why for the state it is so important to regulate human's health and fertility. It is critically important in the times of crises, when wars or military conflicts are occurring and the state needs human bodies to defend the state's politics. The state takes control over the production and circulation of human bodies. And here we are defining identities and defining them in contrast to the ones belonging with those that the state is in conflict with:

> "New techniques of power needed to grapple with the phenomena of population, in short to undertake the administration, control and direction of the accumulation of men: hence there arise the problems of demography, public health, hygiene, housing conditions, longevity and fertility" (Foucault, 1980, pp.110-130).

> Crusade against homosexuality in Russia is a discourse of repression:

> "In reality however this discourse serves to make possible a whole series of interventions, tactical and positive interventions of surveillance, circulation, control and so forth, which seem to have been linked with technique that give the appearance of repression. How effects of truth are produced within discourses, which in themselves are neither true nor false" (Foucault, 1980, pp. 110-130).

However, that is only a homophobic repression towards the minorities themselves, while the same ideas work to develop the identity of those who are not related to minority and share the homophobic sentiments. As deconstruction will show, that helps to plug in the breach in contemporary Russian national identity that was affected after the collapse of the USSR. Now, homophobic repression gives space to build around traditional family values. Therefore, discourse of repression is very selective and targeted. Being built up by the means of 'truth', it arms its supporters with constructions to use against the minority and elaborate on the concept for the sake of identity development. Nevertheless, power is not directly repressive, it does not eliminate the existing reality of alternative, it only

provides people with band aids for breaches they have in conceptualising their own identities as it is suggested by Foucault:

> "If one defines effects of power as repression, they are wrong and have a very narrow view, because in this case you apply only juridical conception of power. Power is not just law that says 'no' to what you would like to do. Power would not be obeyed if its only purpose and aim was to say 'no'. Besides being only law, power also produces discourse and knowledge. Power needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body" (1980, pp. 110-130).

Analysis of blogosphere helps to trace this circulation of power through social bodies, as well as the established system of 'truth' that has been created by the current government and chained to the historical and cultural context. For Russia, biopolitics also not just only a matter of control, but a part of the identity construction mechanism. This mechanism needs to be based on the significant Other: for Russia it is the West and its tolerance towards homosexuality. Since Russian identity becomes contested in times of conflicts and its discursive space invaded with new constructions of Western Other, it has to bring up new tools and topics to repair breaches.

2.4 'Mimetic theory' and 'scapegoating' in the context of othering

'Scapegoating' could be seen as a mechanism that helps to strengthen the opposition between the Self and the Other. The Self constantly has to be represented as a positive and right, when the Other is wrong and destructing. The mechanism of 'scapegoating' can therefore be helpful in creating an image of the Other as negative. If the 'scapegoat' is found and approved, then it is used to plug the breach, which has appeared in identity construction during the crisis.

Drawing on the 'mimetic theory' by Rene Gerard, the deconstruction of Russian identity can be approached through his concepts of scapegoating and violence (Palaver & Borrud, 2013).

In the development of official Russian discourse, the construction of the Other places the US for being a scapegoat 'Scapegoating' in Girard's theory is a process during which, instead of finding a solution for the internal conflict, society or officials search for and create a scapegoat, that can be blamed for the disorder present in the community (Borrud, 2013). Scapegoat is created, when one person makes a statement of accusation of another person or the entity. By having this accusation repeated by other members of community, soon the whole community starts seeing this person or entity as to be blamed for the disorder in society or the state. Scapegoating helps the community to sustain itself and not be torn apart until disappearance. The scapegoat draws attention from the real problems that exist in the community and switches attention from it to the outside entity.

In the case of scapegoating, we can clearly see the scapegoat in the face of the US. 'Violence' as a part of 'mimetic theory' helps us to interpret Russia's line in the official discourse. According to Gerard, violence can be justified in the actions of the state, if that state creates an image of a good one while scapegoating - the bad one. In our case this is the US. In all the instances where war conflicts are involved, such as the war in Syria and the crisis in Ukraine, Russia's military actions are justifiable. In the first case, they are justified by legitimacy (meaning the invitation for help from the official Syrian government in the face of Asad), while the actions and violence, performed by the scapegoat US are seen to be unacceptable violence, Russia's military involvements are justified by the war on terrorism. The situation in Ukraine resembles the theory: Russian military intervention in the Eastern Ukraine is justified for the matter of protection of the Russian World, while the presence of the foreign military is a matter of wicked Western powers. Russia needs someone bad in order to present itself as a good one for its own community. The US is not only a scapegoat in the discourse in general but also the one to be blamed for the arising conflicts entailing victims. And Russia as justified force uses violence to 'increase' the degree of violent behavior of the bad scapegoat. According to Gerard, 'the good one' has the ability to strongly condemn the other's violent actions, but their own actions are always perfectly justifiable. Rene Gerard sees the main problem in humanity justifying violence as a means of achieving piece.

2.5 Literature overview on the media analysis

Blogs serve as a litmus paper for the reactions of identities to crises. Whereas democratic societies use blogs for holding a political dialogue in the public sphere, they also function as a representation of political activity of the population and their willingness to participate in social life.

According to Habermas, media plays an important role in the opinion making processes in the society. Generally speaking, expression of opinions in the public sphere is needed for designing the law base and proposals in the government, hence making the democratic system legitimate (Habermas, 1996). It is important to notice that methods and ways of communication as well as linguistic techniques are crucial. They help to understand the map of the world and understanding of reality which is hidden behind the discourse. It also helps to detect patterns of population's involvement and activities (Habermas, 1996).

The topic of discourse in the Russian blogosphere was not widely covered, but several studies have been conducted. Notable works were done by The Berkman Centre for Internet and society at Harvard University (Elling, Roberts & Faris, 2014). Studies cover great variety of media such as blogs and other web-based media, as well as television and Russian official sources. The study was set to investigate how the discourse in the blogosphere differs from the one represented by the official media. The conclusion of the analysis found that blogs represent an alternative public sphere in Russia, which is a place for opinion sharing. In the end blogs have been found to provide an alternative point to the governmentally owned sources. However, the research does not emphasize and differentiate bloggers into pro-government conservative ones, who support the government from those who are based on the liberal standpoint. Authors of the research "The blogs as an alternative Public sphere" from the Berkman Centre for internet and society point out the recent studies by McCombs and Shaw, on the role of media in agenda setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), which sets to analyse how media decides which topic has to be more broadly covered. It also points out Entman's research on the framing of the events, where the author studies how framing works for the presentation of events to be more salient to

the audience and draw more attention (Entman, 1993). These frames are important for the state as in the case with Russia, because they help to identify current problem for the audience. How RT frames and emphasises the issues which are on the agenda for the state that is what we can find out in this research.

Similar research has been done by Philo Wasburn and Barbara Burke from the Purdue University and the University of Minnesota, Morris respectively (Wasburn & Burke, 1997). They analyse newscasts from the Russian national television news program "Vremya" to find out how the news are meant to be based not on the facts but are constructing an ideological discourse, with the main aim to guide the audience to follow the state-set discourse. The research analyzed how Vremya constructed discourse mirrored an American one. Eling, Roberts and Faris drew upon Rogers and Dearing classifying four major political agenda types: media, public, governmental, electoral and adding the fifth one presented by Wallsten - blog agenda.

An interesting study has been conducted by a set of authors from the aforementioned Berkman centre for Internet & society at Harvard University on the "Public Discourse in the Russian blogosphere: Mapping RuNet politics and mobilization" (Etling, 2010). They have analysed political and public affairs bloggers and went with the livejournal blogging platform as it has been done in this research. It was selected for study due to its variety of discourse and openness for public discussion and debate. Another crucial point for the choice was a matter livejournal incorporating blogging platform and social networks. During the study it has been discovered that pro-government bloggers "do not constitute their own cluster, but are mostly located in a part of the network featuring general discussion of Russian public affairs" (Etling, 2009).

Among the notable researches in the field of media and propaganda we can find American Professor from MIT - Noam Chomsky. Besides being famous for discoveries and studies in the field of linguistics and philosophy of language, he is famous for his works on media in the political field. Nevertheless, he does not make a debunking of Russian propaganda, but work on the issues related to American media and U.S. Foreign policy (McGilvray, 1999). He criticises mainstream media outlets for a state oriented coverage of the popular topics related to the U.S. involvement into Israeli-Palestinian conflict, War in

Vietnam, the Gulf War, etc. (Chomsky, 2002). The spotlight in his works is on the false magnification of certain issues, and the silencing of other ones. He points out inappropriate actions of the U.S. in his works and is often rated as anti-American, although the topicality of Chomsky's works and the country of interest differ from the one that is present in this study; it is widely related due to its concentration on the propagandist side of the mass media.

2.6 Research design

This study will address Russian Federation. Eliminating study of multiple selves helps to do the comprehensive analysis of one particular Self in a more complex and focused way. Nevertheless, during the study it is possible to observe how it is contested by other selves and which responses it presents for the competing discourse.

This research addresses such issues as the war in Syria, conflict in Ukraine, refugee crisis and homophobic sentiments in Russian society. The war in Syria, crisis in Ukraine and refugee crisis are taken for study in order to see how identities are circulated in discourse in the times of crises. Crisis implicates two or more conflicting sides, therefore accentuation of Self and Other is more explicit. At the same time, the study of Russian established pass to fight against LGBT minority and for family values is also important to observe. Traditional family is the one that is fertile, therefore produce bodies for the proper circulations of the state. It is important to see, why this approach to body in Russia is so important, because it exists on the backstage for other three topics that are analysed here: all conflict situations and aggressive external politics needs production of bodies. The importance of study is explained by the lack of related investigation and interest in comparative study of discourses, which are present in pro-government public sphere and state-owned information services such as RT and Vesti.ru. The other point of importance is that all the crises are contemporary and therefore not widely covered. Furthermore, is important to research how body-politics is present on the background for Russian foreign and domestic policy moves.

Hansen proposes several more dimensions for the research design, therefore moving further from the number of Selves, we are facing the question of temporal perspective (Hansen, 2006). This study sets to investigate the discourse within years 2015 and the beginning of 2016 through the aforementioned topics.

The other important dimension is intertextual model. For my research I have chosen two intertextual models, where it is an official pro-government discourse represented by RT and Vesti.ru. Russian pro-government public sphere is represented by popular bloggers from livejournal.com and Russian online encyclopedia ruxpert.ru (which was also created by the blogger from livejournal.com).

Data selection

Source selection represents what has motivated the choice of sources that were taken for analysis in this study. Self, time, events and intertextuality have been established already and then Lene Hansen suggests that the selection of sources should be based on the following criteria (Hansen, 2006, pp. 73-74) :

1. The majority of texts should be taken from under the time of the study.
2. The body of text should include key texts that function as nodes within the intertextual web of debate.

News articles selection for the primary sources of analysis resemble the criteria, which have to be met by the contemporary data (Hansen, 2006, p. 76):

1. Texts are characterized by the clear articulation of identities and policies.
2. They are widely read and attended too.
3. They have the formal authority to define a political position.

Responding to this criteria, RT and Vesti.ru have clearly articulated the Russian pro-governmental identity and internal as well as external policies dictated by the Kremlin; Russian official media sources are widely watched and read, therefore they have a huge impact on public opinion; official media in Russia represents a narrative that is loyal to the government, due to its ownership and control by the state. Bloggers represent pro-governmental discourse, but with respect to their own political opinions. That creates points

of differences between the national media position and within the public blogosphere. Blogs are also important to analyze due to the interest towards people's reactions in social networks. State-information services, which implement their propagandist agenda, do a job emphasizing and reacting to what official sources, such as MFA or spokesmen, do not cover much but that has to be covered. Hitherto, blogs represent reaction of the population towards what was covered by the official Kremlin representatives and in the state-information services. Therefore blogosphere gives a broader overview of discursive reactions and helps to make an in-depth analysis of those in relation to the identity construction.

Description of sources

RT news outlet appeared in 2005, when Putin set it up with the budget of $30 million. It became a solution to stream the Russian official perspective to an external audience. It was mainly focused on spreading the word of the Kremlin to the non-Russian speaking world, with service in English, Spanish and Arabic. RT was created as a resistance force against social media. "The aim of RT is to 'inundate the viewer with theories about Western plots, to keep them dazed and confused,' says Peter Pomerantsev, a British expert on Russian propaganda" (Shuster, 2016). Margarita Simonyan is an editor-in-chief and has been working for RT since its launch. She does not agree or disagree with RT being a mouthpiece of the Kremlin's message to the world, but she also does not accept the notion of objective reality: "No one shows objective reality. The Western media are not objective, reality-based news sources" (Shuster, 2016).

Russian online news portal vesti.ru can be a representation of another official perspective on international as well as local events. Vesti.ru is an online representation of the Russian state-owned channel Russia24 (called Vesti since 2010), that has begun its history with its first broadcast in 2007. Channel streams its broadcast in Russian to a Russian-speaking audience. It was created to cover domestic and international news. During the year it has produced its own discourse regarding the topics in focus. Broadcast

of Russia24 is banned in Ukraine and Moldova due to incompatibility with local laws on broadcasting.

Russian blogosphere represents an alternative discourse to the official one. Despite being pro-governmental, discourses within it differ. Bloggers were chosen from the list of 100 pro-government bloggers according to ruxpert.ru. A more narrow selection was made based on the relevance of their blogs to the topics covered in this research as well as by popularity. Popular Russian bloggers also produce pro-governmental narrative, but in the public sphere. Russian popular blogs were taken from the Livejournal.com blogging platform. Livejournal.com is very popular in Russia, making up 56.3% of all Russian blog site visitors. All the analyzed blogs score high in the ratings of livejournal, having more than 2500 followers.

Ruxpert.ru in this research represents a narrative which lies in official state discourse and at the same time being led by the livejournal blogger with articles of a patriotic nature. It was founded by the livejournal blogger Fritz Morgan and, according to the description from the encyclopedia, is meant to provide Russian patriots and governmental policy supporters with arguments in support for official politics. It also gives explanations and arguments in regards to the topics we draw upon in this research such as: War in Syria and conflict in Ukraine. This portal positions itself, as it is mentioned in the description, as a source which can help to debunk "black myths about Russia" and "white myths about the West" as well as bringing "the news from fronts of the information war" (ruxpert.ru). The site description also says: "Here we collect the truth about Russia - without agitation and gloom, but also without embellishment. Background information on the project is meant to arm Russian patriots with durable and well-constructed argumentation on the variety of topics, related to Russia" (ruxpert.ru). Fritz Morgen and his portal are described as the "unofficial voice of the Kremlin" and suspected in transmitting official information from the Kremlin before the appearance of this information in the official media, which is a means of testing public opinion according to the description from lurkmore (Lurkmore.to).[2]

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[2] Lurkmore is an alternative Russian encyclopedia, which contains sarcastic articles and opinion.

Russian information portal ruxpert.ru presents names of about 100 bloggers and communities concerning geopolitical topics. Many of the bloggers have some status in the political field and position themselves as specialists, which lends credibility to their reports for their followers. Bloggers, who will be investigated below, are mentioned in the list of 100 bloggers, who constantly defend the pro-government point of view in Runet through ruxpert.

As it has been described above, the propaganda machine in Russia has been largely developed. Nevertheless, sources of the Russian official standpoint are not limited only to those which are reviewed and analysed in this research. However, those are the most significant and widely discussed once.

Pavel Shipilin (pavel-shipilin.livejournal.com) - expert in geopolitics, who "disassembles" liberal myths and other disinformation on Russia, according to the information from the ruxpert.ru. Pavel presents himself as a specialist and brings to the table materials by other authors.

User albert-lex, otherwise known as **Naryshkin Albert** (albert-lex.livejournal.com), is a member of the project politrussia.com, which is aimed at "bringing people to constructive discussion with no matter of political views." Nevertheless, topicality of the webzine is strictly pro-Russian and anti-Western.

Pro-Russian blog, which is aimed at combating anti-Russian propaganda and a negative image of Russia, is primarily authored by **Andrey Manzolevsky** (manzal.livejournal.com), who covers different events happening in the Middle East and Ukraine.

One more blog, carried by an entrepreneur from Ekaterinburg, **Sergey Kolyasnikov** (zergulio.livejournal.com), is directed to fight so-called Western propaganda machines.

For some bloggers the main aim is to develop and protect the idea of a Russian world. Blogger **Eduard Birov** (russkiy-malchik in livejournal.com) stands out for the values of Putin's Russia. Posts with anti-American topicality prevail in his blog.

The blog by **Stanislav Apet'jan** (politrash.livejournal.com), a collaborator of the "fund for the development of society," teaches a course on the new media on the faculty of the applied political science. Took part in the oppositional movement, which has taken

place in the beginning of the 2000s. Worked for different political organizations and administration of the president, which he left in 2010. Besides work for the fund, he has different non-political projects in IT as says the description of the blogger on his personal blog in livejournal.

Limitations

One of the limitations concerns the focus of the research. Only pro-government discourse is analysed in this paper. Opinion of the sources in opposition to the state are not viewed. Besides oppositional discourse I also exclude analysis of speeches by government officials and official documents due to the focus on the media outlets and blogosphere. This gives an opportunity to focus on tracing major trends present in pro-government discourse in official pro-government sources and blogosphere in regards to the opposition with the West concept. Pro-government discourse is important due to its popularity among the population and broad coverage, because Putin's activity as a president is highly supported by the population as we can see it from the polls. Polls are done every month by the Russian statistical-agency "Levada- Centre." From the report of Interfax, there is 86% of population that is in support of Putin's activity as a president (Interfax, 2016). Decision-making processes in Russia are highly dependent on the president and the president holds control over the government, where most of the popular media outlets are owned and controlled by the state. Therefore, this research is mainly focused on the pro-government discourse. Pro-Kremlin position in it is clearly articulated and, as it can be seen from Putin's popularity, supported by the population. From here, I can state, that the analysis of only official pro-government discourse is representative of the opinion of the Russian population due to its wide coverage and influence.

Another limitation that can be suggested is number of blogs and articles from the official media outlets that can be taken into consideration. Most of the prior studies in the sphere of media analysis of the blogs have been done with the help of quantitative research methods, where there was a possibility to grasp a bigger cluster of blogs. However, discourse analysis gives more in-depth view of how identity is contested in the times of

crisis, gives an opportunity to focus on cultural and historical context that is hidden behind the statements in blogs and articles from the official information services.

If a number of state-information services taken for the analysis here could be seen as a limitation, it should be mentioned that all the state-owned information services in Russia serve as a mouthpiece of the Kremlin's rhetoric with a slight difference depending on the audience it is targeted to. In this work I am drawing on one outlet directed to the domestic audience (vesti.ru) and one to the foreign one (RT), which provides the broad coverage of Kremlin's information propagation both within and outside the country.

This work is not aimed to be viewed as a complex analysis of discursive reactions to crisis situations, represented in the full range of sources present in Russia. It is aimed to give an in-depth analysis of discourse in a certain type of information services and a selection of popular widely read blogs in pro-government blogosphere. It helps to deconstruct contemporary Russian national identity and establish relations within the text and meaning as well as differences among the sources and language used.

3. Finding/defining identities and differences between discourses

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has not fully become its sole successor. While USSR was one of the superpowers due to its military capabilities and influence in the international arena, Russia has encountered economic and systemic problems that have made it difficult to compete with the US as a superpower. After the fall of the USSR, the world took a unipolar turn with the "lonely superpower" in the middle. Russia's actions in foreign policy today ellude to the reestablishing of its influence in world politics and contesting of the US as the sole superpower. Nevertheless, the country is not financially strong enough to build up significant military forces that could contest the American military, nor does it have a progressive human capital to develop innovations in the military field. Interest among intellectuals to leave the country in search for better jobs is high, people applying for work abroad, knowing that working conditions outside of Russia are better and wages are higher. Taking into consideration the current situation described above, we can assume that there are no real preconditions for the emergence of Russia as a contesting superpower. However, Putin's ambitions are rather high and that causes his interest in Russia regaining its superpower status.

Drawing on a lack of facts for Russia's regaining its power and status in international affairs, the country tries to fake this image. There has been no significant change in the shift of power, as the state tries to present. I am trying to interpret the intersubjective reality that is revealed in the texts and find out what meaning is hidden behind the language. Derrida was the first one to introduce and describe what deconstruction is and how it works, where it is a method of revealing the relations between the text and its meaning (Derrida, 1976). Therefore, by the means of discourse analysis I try to deconstruct the meaning in the text given by media outlets and bloggers. In the context of deconstruction is important to mention that the language is based on the signs and signifiers, which are present in the text and needed to be analysed, because they exist and obtain a meaning only when are used in opposition or relation to other words and signs (Saussure, 1959). Along with that we can trace in the discourse that Russia perceives many activities subjectively as a threat. The US stayed the main competitor for Russia; therefore

Russia exercises its power and competes with the US, because in objective reality that competition is not possible due to the lack of real material evidence. Russia, as everyone else, identifies itself through relationship to ideas, ideals and ideologies.

3.1 The War in Syria

Russia began military intervention in Syria in September 2015 after Damask officially asked for help. The conflict started in 2011 as part of the Arab spring as a movement to make democratic changes to Bashar al-Asad's government. The main threat in the current situation is presented by the terrorist organization the "Islamic state," which is listed as the main reason Russia got involved in the war. According to this, Russia now is in Syria to fight terrorism. Sociologist Polina Borisova brings in statistics from September-October 2015 from recent polls (Borisova, 2016), where fund "Public opinion" has discovered that 64% of the population supports Russian involvement; a more recent poll shows growing support at 70%. The primary disagreement between Russia and the West lays in Russia's interest in keeping current president Asad in power, while the US and the EU countries' officials consider him illegitimate and undemocratic. This creates a barrier for countries to cooperate in the fight with ISIS. The United States has been accused of not sharing intelligence with the Russian side. Nevertheless, recent meetings with Kerry showed that agreement regarding the cooperation and regime change in Syria is possible.

Syria has become of critical importance for developing Russia's Global image. Therefore the media has dedicated a lot of attention to it. It represents Russia's military power and success in combat operations. It is a bridgehead for Russia's battle with the US. The US in this case is constructed through emphasising its aggressive politics in the Middle East and lack of willingness to cooperate. The US is never referred to as a superpower or a Great power not that ever mentioned its military capabilities, presence and recognition overseas. In the public sphere it is present as a "not-fully-hegemon," which tries to put the world under control and Russia is the only power which can oppose to the US. Syria brought up competition from the times of the Cold War, where there was an international battle between the USSR and the US. Nevertheless, narrative in the aforementioned sources

differs. While RT, which is directed to foreign audience, brings more of the information on military power of the Russian Federation, ruxpert and bloggers pay more attention to the ideological component. The public sphere tries to develop the idea of opposition between Russia and the US as well as putting blame on the EU and Turkey (after it shot down a Russian jet) for being subjugated to command from Washington. An important component is a strong spirit, which is why vesti.ru has paid attention to the concerts of famous Russian performers at the military base in Lattakia. During WWII, entertainment activities were also important for the soldiers to keep up morale. The central narrative present in all these sources help to develop the system to understand US-Russian identity relations, it helps to develop a habitual reaction to any form of US involvement into any country's domestic politics.

Analysis

Crisis in Ukraine and the War in Syria largely illustrate conflict of identities between Russia and the US. Nevertheless, there are differences within pro-government discourses. RT and Vesti.ru draw on ideas of legality, truth and lies in the media, and military power: "Legitimate government," "actions legal," "violated the international law" are used referring to the US's unlawful actions against the lawful authorities in Syria (RT & vesti.ru, 2015). Combating Western media here can be seen as the main goal of RT in the whole depiction of the War in Syria. Western media information is called a "campaign of psychological warfare, blatant lies," "reports of Russian missiles falling in Iran lies. Part of psychological war," "biased journalists were trying to lie" (RT, 2016). Description of Russian military power and capabilities gets a significant amount of coverage; from description of "successful" military operations to military innovations, "the bombing campaign has hurt the morale of the militant troops," "Russia's fleet of jets is varied as well" (RT, 2016). At the same time US campaigns are called "unsuccessful."

Overall official media dedicates more attention to fighting the Western position in the media and establishing 'truth', showing off with military muscle and building up on the US unlawful actions in Syria (where we can recall the US blaming Russia for violating the

International law during the crisis in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea in particular.) Bloggers do not set a goal for them to debunk Western propaganda.

Discourse in public sphere differs from the official one. Already in Ruxpert we can see victimization of Syria, where the evil is the US. Syria is called "a current victim of the US" (Ruxpert.ru, 2016). Also it compares Syria to Iraq and Iran, where the US helped to change the existing governments. Besides presenting US as an aggressor, bloggers use the word "supremacy" a lot in regards to the US. The US is "the world not-fully-hegemon" (Ruxpert.ru, 2016) which is looking for supremacy. Bloggers see a threat in the US actions towards Russia's security and influence in the world by mentioning "main goal of the US is a breakdown of Russia," "even not trying to hide their aims and goals which are real destruction of Russia" (Ruxpert.ru, 2016). By naming these goals, bloggers also call the US a "geopolitical enemy" and list as another "geopolitical provocation" the American intervention in Ukraine (Ruxpert.ru, 2016).

Compared to the public discourse, official media do not call the US an enemy, but it similarly use the word "success" close to the Russian military actions: "success of Russian forces," "successfully defending Latakia" (Birov, 2016). Bloggers also appeal to the historical/patriotic Russian identity, where "Syria - is a Stalingrad of today. Asad's surrender would lead to the unacceptable geopolitical catastrophe in Central Asia" (Shipilin, 2016). That references WWII, where Stalingrad is named in Russian history books to be the significant breaking moment in the war. The Soviet army won this battle, which has changed the flow of war and was associated with the beginning of Soviet victories until the end of WWII.

Since Russian identity, in this case, is largely constructed through the othering from the US, we should first draw on how Russian media portrays the US. The US here is an aggressive interventionist, who tries to get involved in the domestic politics of other countries with a desire to establish its supremacy and hegemony. Nevertheless, Russia does not want to accept the US as a hegemon therefore it calls it a 'not-fully-hegemon.' Furthermore, Syria is not the first country where the US tries to intervene and bring changes to the distribution of political forces; Russia always takes a chance to mention Libya, Iraq and Egypt. Adding to that, the US is always violating international law when

intervening into foreign countries; therefore it is portrayed as a country which does not dare to accept international law and conducts politics only from the point of its interest. It is shown as a country which does not have or accept principles of peaceful coexistence with other Great powers. There is only one everlasting interest in the US foreign policy and it is world supremacy. The US does not want any competitors to emerge. However, the West understands that Russia is an emerging power and its foreign policy is more efficient and successful, but ambitions of the US are always a component in every major conflict that takes place in the world. Besides intervening into other country's internal affairs, the US also tries to present it in a way that appears legitimate and with the intention of bringing peace, democracy and development to the less developed, corrupted countries with high level of crimes. From the discourse that is present in Russia, we also see the US covering its foul game with spreading lies in the media and opening of the psychological war to destabilise its main competitor - Russia. It also tries to hide its unsuccessful actions in the military conflict.

Building on that as a concept of the Other, Russia builds an image of itself as the one whose actions in the zone of conflict are legitimate, that Russia's only intention is to help the country and the world in fighting terrorism, where the US never gets mentions of any successful actions or even intentions to fight it. Russia stays strong against 'blatant lies' and tries to debunk 'Western propaganda' in the information war. At the same time it is important for the country to contrast unsuccessful American actions with successful campaigns, helps to present its military capabilities, because military power is one of the major points on how to define a Great power. Russian media wants to show through contrasting that there is no strive for the world's supremacy, but rather, that Russia respects other countries' right to elect their governments and make decisions independently from outside political and military intervention.

3.2 Crisis in Ukraine

Demonstrations began in Ukraine in February 2014; the whole action was named "Euromaidan"[3] and was caused by refusal of the official Kiev[4] to sign the association agreement in November 2013. The association agreement was meant to build closer ties between the EU and Ukraine, where Ukraine has always been in the sphere of geopolitical interest of Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union. During the conflict, two regions in Eastern Ukraine made a decision to establish independent republics. Therefore, two newly proclaimed republics emerged: Lugansk People's Republic and Donetsk People's republic. Tensions between Russia and Ukraine have developed since the annexation of Crimea in March after the referendum. The act was not recognized as a legitimate action; therefore mechanism of sanctions was introduced to Russia by the EU and the US. Russia was asked to refrain from the annexation of Crimea and stop military action in eastern Ukraine. These requests were not fulfilled, therefore sanctions remain in place. Tensions between the two, political as well as military conflicts are ongoing.

Ukraine here is divided between two contesting sides and at the same time represents a threat to Russia's Self. The threat is situated in the system of values, cultural and historical approaches, and economic developments. The common system that was shared by Russia with Ukraine is now getting replaced with a new one from the West, which is considered in Russia as alien and unacceptable. Historically Ukraine has been closer to Russia in its values and development. But the West, under the lead from the US in its contemporary definition by Russia, is trying to heat regional instability therefore meddling into Russia's national interests. Ukraine is getting a symbolic meaning of the country which was cut off from its motherland, while still does not suit the West as a sufficient, fully accepted partner. It is stuck inside the concept of Russia vs. the West. Crisis in Ukraine has heated the debate of country's ideological attachment.

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[3] The main uprising took place in Kiev's central square called "Maidan"
[4] Official Kiev has been represented at that stage by the former pro-Russian Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovych

<u>Analysis</u>

Official media portrays Ukraine through describing its actions in the conflict as of a violator of the Minsk agreements. Ukraine here does not follow the established ceasefire resolution. Vesti.ru dedicates a lot of attention to the problem of corruption, emphasising that Ukrainian government is highly corrupted: "War doctrine of Ukraine consists not of generals but of financiers. All the statements about wins over Russia is only a desire to 'warm pockets'[5]" (Menyailo for vesti.ru, 2016). In this interview to vesti.ru, Menyailo also says that "allocated money will not reach soldiers, but will help Kievan authorities to build some five-storey villas on the seaside by the Caribbean" (Meniailo for vesti.ru, 2016). 'Villas in the Caribbean' is a reference to the offshore financial capital that Ukrainian authorities withdraw from the country and store overseas. Besides being a good place for vacations, countries of the Caribbean offer investment programs that can double the money and help with money laundering through selling shell and shelf companies. Official sources try to discredit Ukraine through corruption scandals, where Ukrainian authorities receive money, but where money never reach the target entirely and flow abroad.

While official discourse is focused on the financial side and dishonest behavior of Ukrainian authorities, bloggers draw attention to American involvement in the conflict and Ukraine's historical past, where it is a "brotherly nation to Russia" (Ruxpert, 2016). Ruxpert in its articles aims to trace links that bound Russia and Ukraine historically and then drives to the US, which has sponsored Maidan and "turned Ukraine into the colony of the USA," "key decisions they [politicians, dependent on Americans] take in accordance with American embassies and the U.S. Department of state" (Ruxpert, 2016). Reference to the 'colony' tells that Ukraine is needed by the West, not as fully a member, but only as a colony, where colony historically is a country or lands that benefit its owner. Colonies do not have their part in decision-making and are not responsible politically; they are subjugated to the owner. Furthermore, this comparison relates to that a common tactic for colonizers was to build a local government that supports them, which is what happened in Ukraine. Generally, being a colony means not being a sovereign state. Therefore, Ukraine,

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[5] 'Warm pockets' is a Russian slang collocation for taking bribes.

by becoming a colony of the US, is giving up its sovereignty. It is so important for the Russian national identity to show that their "brotherly" nation, while getting detached from its historical motherland, has lost its sovereignty. As for the other cluster of meanings traced in the public sphere, I found mentions in regards to common history shared between Russia and Ukraine. Here many Ukrainians have a Russian ancestry. The WWII is brought up, where some Ukrainians have taken part in the War on the side of Nazi Germany - "banderovci." Therefore, despite being a brotherly nation, Ukraine has healthy (pro-Russian) and unhealthy (anti-Russian) identities within. The healthy part is the one with ethnic Russians, who took part in the war on the side of the Red Army, while the unhealthy part, led by Stepan Bandera, collaborated with the biggest enemy of Soviet Union - Nazi Germany. Collaboration with Nazis is the biggest mistake that one could have done during the war, which stays a sensible issue now in Russia and is widely used for patriotic upbringing and inspirations. Bloggers and national information services tend to use comparisons to WWII[6] while talking about contemporary wars, because it symbolizes bravery, self-dedication, and patriotism and puts interests of the nation above personal interests. Ruxpert calls anti-Russian, pro-Western population "russophobes." It also calls the Ukrainian language a "poorly understood dialect of Russian" (Ruxpert.ru). National language is highly symbolic, representing a country's independence, and defining identity through contrast with other nations. By calling language a "dialect," one tries to devalue its symbolic meaning and significance. Ukrainians use the language to distinguish themselves from Russia. Ukrainian language is called a dialect and therefore bloggers tend to use some Ukrainian words, or stylize them to Russian for the purpose of mockery. Bloggers call activities in Ukraine and perceptions of them by the authorities and people as insanity and call to "spray haloperidol over Ukraine" (Zergulio, 2016).

As we have already seen it in the case with Syria, Russia likes to build up the Other in portraying it as a violator of law or agreements, which automatically make Russia a follower of principles of legality. Russia in its own view follows the law, as opposed to the

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[6] As we saw it in case with the war in Syria, where the whole war was compared to the historic battle of Stalingrad

West. Ukraine has violated the Minsk agreements. Nevertheless, in the case of Ukraine, Russia does not portray it as a complete Other, because countries still have common historical legacy, therefore creating the Other from Ukraine could be perceived as casting doubt on the Russian Self. Russia and Ukraine have been too close and Ukraine has been a part of the Russian Self. Therefore, in this case, Russian discourse represents opposition between Ukraine's Self and the Western Other. We can observe a contradiction here Ukraine cannot become Western, because, according to the Russian viewpoint, it is more Russian. The Self cannot become the Other. To show the absurdity of it is the main emphasis of the Russian media and bloggers.

3.3 Refugee crisis

The refugee crisis hit Europe in the summer of 2015 with more than a million civilians fleeing from the war in Syria. Many of them illegally arrived to Europe through the Mediterranean Sea with the help of smugglers. Some asylum seekers got drawn on their way to the European continent, which caused a broad media reaction. The refugee question has been discussed at the EU summit in June 2015. Quotas instrument has been applied to share asylum seekers among the EU countries since summer 2015. Opposition to the idea of welcoming more immigrants got stronger. Russia has taken a critical position from the very beginning of the crisis.

Russian official media emphasises incapability of the West to solve common security problems and implement strategies directed to the protection of national interests of each country and their citizens, values and culture. Human rights that stand on the provision of asylum to all who flee from war are depicted as damaging to local communities. Russia here takes a chance to point out failure of the West, absence of a viable plan and bringing the US (as part of the West) into the debate. The US is accused of being a cause of the war. Russia itself represents a state which takes care of its compatriots as in the case with Liza.[7]

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[7] The case, where Russian girl Liza was first claimed to be harassed by migrants in Berlin, but later that was disproved and got the status of provocation, where official Moscow stated that the case got downplayed due to bad relations between Russia and the West.

As well it is presented as being protective for its culture, history and religion from the foreign destructive influence.

Refugee crisis does not threaten the Russian Self, but helps to build a habitual response to the Western incapability of dealing with common security problems. This crisis helps to develop the idea of Russian strength and fairness put against Western failure.

Drawing on the concept of Russia's desire to preserve European culture and save it from any outside influence that was described in Morozov's "Russia & Other," we can see that Russia tries to protect Europe from allowing a Muslim "invasion" into Europe in the form of the refugee crisis. It sees the US as the one who fueled the war to earn money on it for its capitalistic and ideological purposes. Now, due to American interests, Europe suffers from degrading influence of the refugee flow and threat to its security.

Analysis

The most prevailing cluster of meanings in the official discourse is related to gender equality. Analysis shows that female insecurity is the main point that is made by the official media outlets. They are highly concerned about a "male-dominant migrant wave [that] threatens Europe's gender equality" (RT, 2016). Drawing on that Islam has a general rhetoric of female subjugation to a man and widely spread idea that Muslim men are rapist. Several cases of sexual assault[8] that made it into the media caused headlines such as: "German mayor says schoolgirls should not walk near refugee centre to avoid sexual harassment" (RT, 2016). Gender equality is used overall to emphasise a threat to female security. Other phrases that come along with the topic refugee crisis and Islam in general are "misogyny and murder" and "balanced sex ratio." The other important point noticed is that apart from blaming refugees, official discourse brings to question cause-effect relations, where the US and the EU are blamed to be the cause of war, therefore, contextually, they are the cause of sexual harassments and threat to "female security" (RT, 2016). Official discourse also mentions "threat to the norms": "Deceived in their expectations and imposing cultural and social norms to the indigenous people [of Europe]."

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[8] Sexual assault that have taken place on the New Year's Eve in the German city Cologne, where Muslim men were claimed to harass women during the mass gathering for celebrations

Official media also largely based narration on stories about sexual harassment in Cologne[9], the attack on Dutch journalists in Calais[10] and the case with the Russian girl in Cologne, when 13-year-old girl was supposedly kidnapped and raped by migrants[11] (vesti.ru, 2016).

While official media is mostly concerned with female security and gender equality, bloggers are roaring. The main construction here is related to a threat to the "cultural code of Old World" (Shipilin, 2016). Ruxpert is highly negative towards the migration policies of the European Union and it becomes explicitly obvious from conversations centered on the idea that Europeans are forced to change their habits and adjust to cultural traditions and behavior of the migrants. Ruxpert draws on that the "official reason is lack of money" (Shipilin, 2016). But in reality Europeans are just scared and not willing to provoke unwelcomed guests. In the article on migration ruxpert quotes pro-Russian, nationalist resources such as "Zvezda" and "Ridus." Causes of the crisis are seen in the illegal activities of ISIS, which makes Syrian passports for people who want to migrate or assist in illegal immigration while official discourse tells that the cause of the crisis is the "architects of war," the US and the EU governments (RT, 2016).

Some authors are metaphoric in their expressions and stylize narration to chronicles, where it starts with: "It was a year of 2016 A.D. The day of foundation of the Al-Luton city - one of the new settlements of the evolving European Caliphate. Oswald Spengler is sending hello to his white brothers from the deep obscurantist 20th century, who clean toilets after non-doing-anything migrants. 'Crawling Muslim occupation of the West' - approximate name of the last paragraph of the History of Europe" (Birov, 2016). This chronicle type of narrative tells us about the times when lands were still under contest, when countries fought between each other or planned occupation. This also can be associated with the Muslim occupation of the Iberian Peninsula in the middle ages up until Reconquista and the victory of the Christian Kingdom. Refugee crisis talk has overall many references to history of opposition between Islam and Christianity in Europe.

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[9] Ibidem

[10] Journalists, who tried to film conditions in the Calais jungle were attacked by migrants. Muggers wanted to steal cameras, but other migrants came to help the journalists

[11] Ibidem

The main point in this conflict that helps us to deconstruct identities is related to 'female security' and 'Christian values.' Europe in the discourse is built up as the one who does not secure its female population. For Russia, the 'female' takes a crucial role in increasing the fertility rate, they are a necessary part of the family, which is a unit of society and meant to produce children. When there is no control taken over the women's safety, then there is no control taken over the family. The state has to provide the female population with safe conditions for finding a male and bringing a child into society. Europe has created uncontrolled risk for its female population, therefore endangering demographic situations. Hitherto, the risk was fueled by Europe itself through involvement in Syria and through indirect support to terrorists through oil deals.

Another issue adding to the deconstruction of Self and Other is the implied protection of Christian values, particularly present in the blogosphere. With allowing migrants to come and settle down in Europe in such large numbers, Europe could possibly undergo change in the 'cultural code.' Christian Europe allows Islam to conquer Christian lands, which is not acceptable for Russia. Russia is an Orthodox country with a strong Christian tradition and will not allow extremist religious intervention from anywhere abroad. Therefore, to conclude here, Russian in its Self is meant to 'protect' the female population and not only in its own country but in its neighborhood, while Europeans do not pay much attention to this.

3.4 Homophobic sentiments

The topic of homosexuality has a high importance to the Russian identity not only because it represents control over the body, where the state is involved. The approach and policies towards homosexuality are taken to establish Russian identity in contrast to the West. As Morozov draws on the words of Dmitry Kiselev, who suggested to "forbid homosexuals to donate blood, sperm and their hearts in the case of a road accident, must be buried or incinerated as unsuitable for continuation of anyone's life" (Morozov, 2015). Later Kiselev argued that the same policies in the US, EU, and other countries, are taken further in Russia; therefore, Russia here is not presented as opposing Western values, but as

being superior to them, because it went further in stripping homosexuals of natural rights (Morozov, 2015).

Besides multiple abuses and bullying of homosexuals in Russia, the government has enforced federal law which officially proclaims Russia's homophobic position. Gay-propaganda law was signed by Putin in June 2013. This law put recognition of homosexuality in society as a norm to minors. Despite that, non-traditional relationships are still considered legal, though it became illegal to claim it as a norm. The reason for it lies in the assumption that dissemination of information about recognition of homosexuality as normal may be harmful for children through negative impact on their young minds. Which, furthermore, can be harmful for the notion of traditional family values in Russia overall. Local activists, LGBT-communities on social networks and organizations were even put under investigation for the propagation of homosexuality to children. In Late 2015, communist party members drafted a ban on coming-outs, nevertheless the new anti-gay law proposal was not supported.

In 2015, when the US Supreme court overturned a series of homophobic laws and set precedent allowing same-sex marriages in all the states, Kiselev changed his rhetorics as is seen from the analysis.

Analysis

Discussion of homosexuality shows us the biggest difference within official and public discourse. In official pro-government discourse, this topic is presented in the most neutral way. There were no negative allegations noticed in regards to the US, the EU or the West as a whole. Compared to other cases, the Russian official position on the issue is not present, therefore relation to it can be characterised as neutral. Phrases that were used in conjunction with the topic: "crimes against the LGBT minority," "transgender or gender non-conforming homicide victims, "LGBT community" (RT, 2015). Nevertheless, US the Supreme Court's decision[12] could not have been left without comment. The head of Rossiya Segodnya and the host of "Vesti nedeli" on vesti.ru, Dmitry Kiselyov, dedicated

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[12] Decision to declare the prohibition of same-sex marriages unconstitutional, which has taken place in summer 2015

attention to that in his TV program. If, as we saw in 2012, Kiselev was suggesting 'to incinerate hearts of homosexuals,' in 2015 he delivers a TV program with a much more reserved position on the issue:

> "But if without jokes, then in Russia this topic has to be discussed from time
> to time. LGBT-community - is a fact. And we can think about how to
> simplify life of adults in the case if they decided to take a responsibility on
> paper to take care of each other" (vesti.ru, 2015).

From here we see, that after the law in the US has been adopted, Russia, in the face of Kiselev, officially accepted the existence of the LGBT- community as fact. Although, he underlines age - "adults," which is important due to the long-lasting habit of drawing parallels between homosexuality and pedophilia. Nevertheless, as it can be seen from the former statement by Kiselev, it is a matter of showing Russia as a better developed country then its Western opponents. Kiselev says: "Especially that in Russia legally-registered same-sex unions are already in force"[13] (vesti.ru, 2015). Kiselev's program, at its best, declares the Russian official position and creates a division between sex and love, where same-sex unions are about love only: "That is not necessary to sexualise everything, the talk here is not about sex. Sex - separately" (vesti.ru, 2015).

Compared to quite reserved official discourse, the public sphere is more expressive in regards to the topic, it is abound with hate speech, metaphors and historical references. The public sphere is not only concerned with traditional values, but also uses them as a main contrasting point in the debate with the West. This case is the most explicit in terms of defining Western and Russian identity.

The most widely mentioned reference regarding LGBT in vesti.ru is Milonov, the author of the gay-propaganda law from Saint-Petersburg. Besides introducing the law in 2013, his political activism continues to be directed against the LGBT community. In 2015 he made the news because of anti-gay activity, chiefly the interruption of an event held by LGBT activists in Saint-Petersburg, and through the suggestion of a ban rainbow T-Shirts and Nike shoes due to their resemblance to the LGBT-flag and through criticism to the

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[13] He means guardianship

theatre's play by Konstantin Raykin "All Shades of Blue," which was created to expose problems which are faced by the LGBT community from the side the society. Milonov considers this play to violate the gay propaganda law. Nevertheless, despite wide spread anti-gay activism in Russian legislative authorities and state apparatus overall, Vesti.ru does not use hate speech or opinion making pieces.

Quickly, while searching for related terms in the database of ruxpert, one gets redirected to an article titled "Sodomy." By the definition of ruxpert sodomy is a "modern totalitarian ideology, where adepts believe in the necessity of propaganda of homosexuality and demand for ritual respect to homosexuals" (Ruxpert.ru).

Sodomy is referred to as a religion and ideology at the same time, which is assumed to subjugate all spheres of people's life in the US and the European Union. For a better understanding of gender, ruxpert links two articles on the portal "pravoslavie.ru" with the headlines: "Transsexual and hermaphrodite - new examples for the youth" and "A ghost is haunting the world - gender ideology" (Pravoslavie.ru).

Homosexuality is not only seen as deviation from the norm, but also as a threat, an overwhelming ideology or a young religion which tries to take people under control through so-called "Crusades" or "Jihads" (Ruxpert.ru). As promised in the description for the portal, it gives arguments that can be used to protect patriotism in Russia. Among the arguments for the negative aspects of sexuality is a description of the negative aftereffects of the anal sex. It also tries to "debunk" the "myth" that homosexuality is congenital and protects the point of view of its family related origin and psychological influence, even using historical facts as supporting evidence: in societies where pederasty was allowed it was widely spread, while in the societies where it was not allowed there were far fewer homosexuals.

Widely used words and phrases present in the discourse in regards for homosexuals and the LGBT community include "propagandists of same-gender relationships," "mass baiting by the LGBT-community," "sodomites," "regular people with not so regular habits" (livejournal.com).

Sodomy has a meaning deeply rooted in history, and is associated with a city destroyed by God for the deviant sexual behavior of its citizens. It might be seen in the

context that the West is the next Sodom, it could also be destroyed once by God and Russia is a country with deep believers who would not follow the sinners.

Article mentions the win at the Eurovision by Conchita Wurst, with a comment: "it can be stated that homosexual image of Thomas was chosen by Europe as the main cultural reference point for the future." It also says that the "community of homosexuals support the action of Pussy riot" (Ruxpert.ru). From the discourse in the public sphere we can trace the explicit construction of "us" and "they":

> "We are not against LGBT, we have a democratic society. But when it comes to the LGBT-propaganda, which is, literally, sticks to social initiatives, about virtual aggression, which parasitize in response to other - traditional - opinions, this is , I am sorry, totally unacceptable, and more than that, illegal" (Manzal, 2016).

Another blogger expresses his neutrality also saying "they are and are" (Shipilin, 2016). "Press faggots as shit" with the blog posts headed as "Remove faggots from the streets" (Manzal, 2016).

LGBT issues as a part of human rights stay the nodal point in depicting discrepancies between Russia and the West. This issues cause the most emotional approach from all sources. Support for the justification of homosexuality is seen as the key element which makes the West "rotten." Traditional values are the only topic here among all that is directed towards domestic politics. Since Putin's conservative turn, Russia has started to defend traditional family values with new vigor, categorizing homosexual relationships as abnormal and damaging for society. Since this idea was widely incorporated within the nation it became a great point that will always allow the media to play this card in order to strengthen Russian self and inflame its othering from the West whenever it comes to the topic on LGBT in the framework of Human rights. Here the clash between civilizations appears most explicitly.

The conflict in regards to traditional values differs more from the aforementioned situations. Deconstruction showed that difference between discourses is more explicit. Contrast was built mostly in the blogosphere, while in the official discourse the language and attitudes are highly neutral. Official media discourse lately does not build the Other of

the West based on the homophobic sentiments, while discourse in blogosphere is building up on these issues very strongly, contrasting Russian traditional culture and family values to Western values. Homophobic rhetoric is important here due the crisis of values that is currently experienced by the Kremlin. As we saw before, patriotism in the form of remembrance of WWII can be traced throughout discourse on war related topics. However, financial problems and political instability, particularly in the case of Crimea and sanctions, present the need for further search of the values to bring up patriots and support sustainable constitutions and the existence of identity. Traditional values are those which could be added to fill in the gap/breach in identity construction. However, a huge difference in the discourses shows, that this topic in the official sources is more to show the development of Russia, which is ahead of the US. At the same time, in the blogosphere the topic of traditional values and homophobic sentiments show that the public sphere is more leaning towards emphasising it in the Russian contemporary identity and as a crucial part of it.

4. Conclusion

The initial interest of my research was dedicated to finding how the study of crises can contribute to the deconstruction of Russian contemporary identity in the pro-government discourse and how this discourse can differ between the official and public spheres. From 1991 to 2007, liberal democratic developments in Russia were an indicator of the country's move to the West. Nevertheless, this trend did not last long. The new page in othering since the collapse of the Soviet Union was Putin's conservative turn, which laid the foundation for new approaches to Russian identity construction. This research showed how that has evolved based on the recently discussed topics of major concern. It also has shown how the conflict between Russia and the West can be seen from the perspective of Hopf's theory of identities.

While deconstructing contemporary Russian national identity, I tried to trace and investigate current breaches that appeared after the collapse of the Soviet Union due to the big conceptual change in the national idea. Current crisis situations helped me do so, because conflicts are considered to be the best environment for deconstruction since they reveal contested identities. In conflict situations identities are either more explicit due to the need of self-assertion within the state or, at the same time, highly contested by the foe. In order to fight, people need to realise who they are and what are they suffering for. So as for the remedies to the breaches, I found anti-homosexual propaganda headed by the discourse on traditional family values, and the use of the US as the scapegoat for the calamities in life of Russian people.

Through analysis of media on recent crises, we can see how they contribute to the construction of the Russian Self and create a bigger gap in relations with the West. Nevertheless, discourses of the official and public spheres differ. Official sources work on mostly building up sufficient facts to help to support public opinion against the West by means of contrasting political motivations. Public sphere discourse is mostly built up through the emotional dimension. Bloggers evaluate crises based on their feelings, concerns, fears and hates. Discourse in the blogosphere tends to be more nationalistic and resembles the ideas of Nationalists in the period of the 90s, when the movement started to

be more widely supported. Bloggers tend to "scapegoat" the US more, which helps to unite people around the blaming of the US for the development of world conflicts and unjustifiable use of force and violence. At the same time, bloggers justify Russian military actions and interventions at large.

The war in Syria helped draw the image of the West as that of an aggressor (in the case of the US) striving for world supremacy. The image of Russia was constructed in contrast to this. Russia was not an aggressor: it entered the war by request. It has shown constitutive foreign policy initiatives and actions compared to those of the US. The Self was praised through propaganda in media.

The crisis in Ukraine shows how Russia can be intimidated by the presence of the Other in its territory. Russia perceived Ukraine as a part of its Self, a country that shared a part of its identity. Overthrowing the regime was not a simple coup to change the authority, but was aimed to change its identity with a Western one. The reaction from bloggers was highly sarcastic. Russia's Self was in shock therefore the reaction lacked in logical facts and turned into mockery over that which contested its identity. The main differences in discourses can be seen in portraying Ukraine as a corrupted country and a violator of the cease-fire agreements in official media, as well as having a wider discussion on the historical attachment of Ukraine to Russia and calling it "a brotherly nation." Bloggers express a stronger condemnation of Ukraine's explicitly strong decision to join the system of Western values.

The refugee crisis in Europe does not contest Russia's Self in a direct way but helps to degrade the image of the Other. This case also draws upon Russian nationalism, as the nation gains higher position on other nations from different religious and cultural backgrounds. It adds up to the building of countries's Self not in a direct way, but through positioning Muslim refugees as a threat to the Russian and European one - although Russia is a non-Western civilization and is leaning towards the oriental culture. It differs from the West on the bases of religious beliefs, traditions and habits. In the case with refugees, we see this clash from a different perspective. It gives a different dimension, where oriental cultures are exposed to the collision and are not ready to open dialogue and cooperation. At the same time, the West, while negating Russia, tried to build up relations with another

oriental culture. The West here is ready to accept refugees with even stronger differences and religious beliefs rather than the Russians. One of the distinctive causes of this is that refugees flee from war, which makes the West reassess its views. The clash between European Other and Russian Self is also seen through the attitude towards the protection of the female population and the protective/unprotective attitudes towards the Christian values. However, the threat to Russia's identity is not the only reason for the importance of this topic. Russia sees itself as the exclusively caring about Europe, its values and future, because the debate on Russia's place in the discussion of its Europeanness is still vague and not clearly defined. As we saw from discourse analysis, the "cultural code of Europe" is threatened to be changed. As we can see from the bloggers, European friendly migration policy is perceived as a mistake and a not well-thought domestic policy move.

Homophobic sentiments from the government and their attitudes to the LGBT-minority were meant to give an overview of the part of Russian biopolitics, as well as to see how important it is during the time of crises. This topic here showed how the traditional family is important in the time of crises. The research suggested that it causes the most emotional and aggressive response in the public sphere. On the other hand, the official sources remain moderate and do not provide a wide range of negative sentiments towards minority rights. Russian identity is more explicitly homophobic in the public sphere. As bodies are controlled by the means of human interaction in public sphere, statements in official sources are not explicitly negative or clearly neutral. Besides promoting traditional family values as a need for improving demographics, it has also been observed that homophobic rhetoric is needed to show Russia's superiority to the West. Manipulation of the topic of homosexuality turned to be a dual-use tool: to control bodies and to fill the missing elements of identity construction.

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