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**The Great Patriotic War in Putin's Russia**

MA Thesis

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**Authorship declaration**

I have prepared this thesis independently. All the views of the authors, as well as data from literary sources and elsewhere, have been cited. Artificial intelligence tools were used in limited capacity for bibliography formatting and grammatical assistance.

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**Abstract:** This thesis investigates how Vladimir Putin's political discourse transforms Ukraine from a brother nation into an enemy, and what role the Great Patriotic War myth plays in that transformation. The Great Patriotic War myth made this possible because of its specific character. It is a myth not of origin but a myth of survival and continuity. As a survival myth it is politically inexhaustible and the existential threat can always be renewed, the enemy reidentified, and a preemptive logic reactivated. Therefore this thesis analyses fifteen primary sources from 2014 to 2026. The analysis reveals that Ukraine's transformation was built in sequence, and that by 2026 the myth and the war have become mutually dependent where the invasion continues in part to make sense of the narrative that allowed the beginning of it.

**Keywords:** Great Patriotic War, Memory Politics, War Merging, AnOther, National Myth.

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## Introduction

On the 9th of May 2022, less than three months after ordering the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Vladimir Putin stood before the assembled ranks of the Russian military at the Victory Day parade in Moscow and declared that the military was once again fighting for their people and the security of the Motherland as it was done in the past. *“Today, as in the past, you are fighting for our people in Donbass, for the security of our Motherland, for Russia”* (Putin, 2022). The introduction of the element of the past implied that this war is not merely a contemporary war but a continuing one. This claim is the central puzzle of this thesis. It is a claim that should not work. Ukraine was not only part of the Soviet Union that defeated Nazi Germany. It was one of its most devastated members, losing between five and seven million people in the conflict. Ukrainian soldiers fought under the Soviet banner across every front of the war. Ukrainian cities like Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa suffered the full weight of Nazi occupation. However in 2022, Putin stood during the day to remember that shared sacrifice and used it to justify sending Russian troops across the Ukrainian border. This raise vary of questions and brings to the spotlight to understand what kind of narrative work is required to transform a brother nation (Which was also a co-author of the victory) into the enemy that must be defeated all over again.

This thesis argues that the answer lies in the deliberate manipulation of historical memory, specifically in the transformation of the Great Patriotic War from a historical event into a political instrument. The Great Patriotic War is the Soviet and Russian name for the conflict fought on the Eastern Front between June 1941 and May 1945. Firstly it is important to understand what that conflict actually was. The German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, named as Operation Barbarossa, was one of the most catastrophic events in human history, approximately 27 million Soviet citizens perished (Harrison, 2019). The siege of Leningrad lasted 872 days (Britannica, 2024) and the battle of Stalingrad killed over one million people. One quarter of Belarus’s entire population perished in the conflict (Snyder, 2010). The war left the Soviet Union simultaneously victorious and devastated, a paradox that would shape its political culture for decades. The victory of 1945 was genuine and immense. It was also achieved at a cost so deep that it generated a grief too large for ordinary commemoration.

It is precisely this emotional magnitude that made the Great Patriotic War available as a political resource. The transformation of the war from lived experience into state-managed myth did not happen immediately. Under Stalin, the memory of the war was carefully controlled and in some respects suppressed. The chaos and catastrophic early losses of 1941 reflected poorly on his leadership, and the genuine popular heroism of the war threatened to generate loyalties that bypassed the party. It was under Leonid Brezhnev, beginning in the mid-1960s, that the decisive shift occurred. Victory Day on 9 May was reinstated as a public holiday in 1965 for the twentieth anniversary of the victory (Tumarkin, 2003, p. 595). A big commemorative structure started to be constructed: war memorials, eternal flames, the title of Hero City, new museums and monuments. The war was progressively elevated from a traumatic historical event into the founding myth of Soviet identity which became a sacred narrative in which the Soviet people, had to face the absolute evil and prevailed. This is the turning point: the moment when the Great Patriotic War stopped being primarily a memory and became primarily a myth. By the time of the Soviet collapse in 1991, the cult of the Great Patriotic War had been so thoroughly institutionalized that it outlasted the state that built it.

Vladimir Putin inherited this myth and recognized its value immediately. When Putin came to power in 2000, Russia was a country in search of itself. The Soviet Union had collapsed nine years earlier, taking with it the ideological framework that had organized Russian identity for over seventy years. The 1990s under Boris Yeltsin had been a decade of economic catastrophe, political instability, and profound national humiliation (Malinova, 2017). During this period there was no clear substitute for the Soviet identity. The Great Patriotic War myth offered a solution. It was the one element of the Soviet heritage that carried genuine popular emotional weight across the political spectrum that could not be easily dismissed, and that by the myth itself could lead to a narrative of national greatness capable of filling the identity void from the Soviet collapse. Putin did not invent the myth. However he recognized, developed, and weaponized it in ways that went far beyond anything his predecessors had attempted.

The escalation of this weaponization is easy to identify across time. In the early years of Putin's presidency, the Great Patriotic War functioned primarily as a source of national pride and cohesion, a way of asserting Russian greatness and demanding international respect. After the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the breakout point of the conflict in the Donbas, lead to a critical

shift where the myth began to be deployed not only internally but externally, and having new functions like to legitimize active military operations. Ukraine became a site of troubling historical ambiguity rather than shared heritage. By 2021, with the publication of Putin's article "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians," the ideological groundwork for the full-scale invasion was being explicitly laid: Ukraine's separate national identity was reframed as an artificial construction, its statehood as a threat to the Russian world. And by February 2022, the myth had been fully militarized. The narrative aim to tell to those soldiers sent into Ukraine were told, that they were fighting the heirs of the Nazis that their grandfathers had defeated. The Great Patriotic War then turned into a living and new justification for a new war.

Ukraine's role in Putin's narrative has suffered a transformation that appears to be contradictory. For most of the post-Soviet period, Ukraine was framed as a brother nation, people sharing the same civilizational roots, the same Orthodox heritage, the same memory of 1945. The language of brotherhood was not merely rhetorical; it reflected a genuine and paternalistic, conceptual framework in which Ukraine was understood as an extension of the Russian Self rather than a separate Other. However by 2022, the same leader who had spoken of Russians and Ukrainians as one people was ordering the bombardment of Ukrainian cities and calling the Kyiv government Nazis. The question is how it works. What narrative mechanisms allow a brother nation to be recast as an existential enemy.

The central research question driving this thesis is: **how does Putin's narrative transform Ukraine from a brother nation into an enemy, and what role does the Great Patriotic War myth play in that transformation?** This question is pursued through three subsidiary inquiries. First, through what specific narrative mechanisms does Putin's discourse merge the wars of 1941-1945 and 2022 into a single moral framework? Second, how does Ukraine's role within the Great Patriotic War myth shift across the period from 2014 to 2026, and what does that shift reveal about the evolution of Putin's political identity project? Third, what does the concept of war merging reveal about the relationship between historical memory, national identity construction, and the legitimization of authoritarian military aggression in contemporary Russia?

To answer these questions, the thesis selects on fifteen primary sources: Putin's 2021 article "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians", his Pre-invasion address 21 Feb 2022 and his presidential Victory Day addresses of 9 May 2014 to 2026. These documents are

analyzed using qualitative content analysis, a method that allows for the systematic, theoretically grounded interpretation of how meaning is constructed within political texts. The analytical framework is built from three theoretical pillars: constructivist International Relations theory, which establishes how state identities and interests are produced through discourse and social practice; memory studies, which explains how collective memory is institutionalized, politically directed, and made to serve the needs of the present; and the literature on national myth, which shows how simplified, morally charged historical narratives are used to define national communities, their enemies, and their obligations.

The thesis is structured as follows. Chapter One develops the theoretical framework, exploring the key concepts of memory politics, national myth, the AnOther dynamic, and war merging as tools that illuminate specific aspects of Putin's narrative strategy, not as ends in themselves. Chapter Two sets out the methodology, justifying the selection of primary sources and the analytical procedure. Chapter Three constitutes the empirical core of the thesis, applying qualitative content analysis to the primary texts and observing the evolution of Ukraine's role in Putin's narrative across the period 2014-2026. It also presents the discussion of pre 2022 and post 2022 elements, evaluating what the analysis reveals about the broader relationship between identity, and narratives in contemporary Russia.

# **1. Theoretical Framework**

## **1.1. Constructivism and the Social Construction of Identity**

Before exploring the main concepts of this paper like memory politics and national myth, it is necessary to establish a broader theoretical lens through which this thesis approaches the question of identity construction in International Relations. The Constructivist theory in the framework of International Relations supports the idea of the identities and interests of states as elements that might not be fixed or exist by default, but instead they are products of the social practices, subjective norms, and discursive power. This idea results useful to challenge the assumption that Russia's framing of the Ukraine invasion as a continuation of the Great Patriotic War myth reflects a stable political reality. Instead, it directs the attention to the process by which that reality is built.

Ted Hopf, in his work *The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory*, argues that identities are indispensable to political order because they tell an actor who it is and who others are. "In telling you who you are, identities strongly imply a particular set of interests or preferences with respect to choices of action" (Hopf, 1998, p. 175). The relationship between identity and interest is really important to understand the narrative of Putin. The construction of Russia as the antagonist of the fascism is not only a rhetorical state, it is also a constitutive claim about what Russia is and should do. When the identity of "defender against fascism" is understood as fixed in the central part of the Russian self, the invasion of Ukraine becomes not only possible but predictable.

Hopf also introduces the idea that a state understands others according to the identity it attributes to them, "while simultaneously reproducing its own identity through daily social practice" (Hopf, 1998, p. 175). This situation captures a dynamic that is visible in the narrative of Putin, where there are repeated mentions of the Great Patriotic War: each speech, parade, and commemorative act reinforces the image of Russia as the rightful heir to Soviet sacrifice and shapes the role of Ukraine as the threatening Other. These two processes are necessary for the narrative to exist. Russia cannot build an identity as an "anti-fascist liberator" without having an enemy that fits in the role, and that role is now occupied by Ukraine.

At the same time, constructivist theory also reveals the domestic function of identity construction. Hopf mentions that a state may require the construction of an Other in world politics precisely “to justify its own rule at home” (Hopf, 1998, p. 196). This can be directly linked with the political context of Putin’s Russia, where the mobilization of the Great Patriotic War memory has been used not only as an external means of legitimation for military actions but as an internal mechanism for regime consolidation. Under the image of Russia as the true heir of the anti-fascist heritage, the Kremlin also suppresses domestic dissent and ties political loyalty to the means of its narrative. The constructivist theory allows us to explore the double function of the identity building process and the narratives that emerge from them in a way that other theories like realism or materialism are not able to explain.

Lastly, the constructivist framework provides the foundation to understand Putin’s narrative not only as a distortion of historical events, but instead as an active effort in the construction of a political identity for Russia, shaping the role of Ukraine, and shaping the understanding of the conflict itself. The sections that follow deepen the analysis through the concepts of memory politics and national myth, providing the mechanisms through which identity construction is achieved in practice.

## **1.2. Memory Politics and the Construction of a collective memory**

The answer to the identity problem that Putin’s regime faced was not invented from scratch, it was already existing and was fully formed in the institutional inheritance of the Soviet state. The Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945 was, according to Nina Tumarkin, “both a uniquely traumatic ordeal that took the lives of approximately 30 million people, and the focus of a decades-long myth and cult that celebrated the most glorious achievement of the Soviet era” (Tumarkin, 2003, p. 595). The lived trauma and the already institutionalized narrative were not opposites but deeply rooted between them. The genuine enormity of the loss gave the myth its emotional authority, and that authority survived the collapse of the political system that had cultivated it. By 2000, when Putin came to power, the Victory myth had surpassed the Soviet Union by nearly a decade. The existent structures of the myth like the parades, the eternal flames, the school curricula, the annual ritual of 9 May remained intact.

The concept of memory politics, in simple terms refers to the conscious use of collective memory by political actors to achieve political objectives in the current time (Assmann 2008, p. 50). The views of Aleida Assmann the cultural memory is essential here. Assmann argues that institutions and social groups do not simply possess memory but actively construct it “with the aid of memorial signs such as symbols, texts, images, rites, ceremonies, places, and monuments” (Assmann, 2008, p. 55). The character of collective memory as constructed feature, is central to understanding what Putin is doing. The Great Patriotic War myth is not just a superficial expression of popular grief. It is a deliberate and structured framework that selects certain historical elements, elevates them, and suppresses others in the service of specific political goals. The management of this framework is never politically neutral, and under Putin it has been managed with clear consciousness.

In this sense, the historical view from Tumarkin becomes important to understand how the myth ended on the hands of Putin and has been transformed. As it was previously mentioned in the introductory chapter, the memories of the war under Stalin, were suppressed to some extent. The cause of repression besides the obvious grief and the recent wound that the struggle of the war left in the soviet people were the critics that early losses of 1941 might represent for the party image and the management of Stalin as the leader of the Soviet Union. The construction of the myth as we know it today was a product of a long and extended construction under Brezhnev that also replicated in the following leaders of the Soviet Union. The Brezhnev regime “turned an idealized memory of the Great Patriotic War into the focus of an elaborate cult” (Tumarkin, 2003, p. 595). This new “cult” was supported by public demonstration that aimed to shape a new understanding of the Great Patriotic War internally, by reinstating Victory Day as a public holiday in 1965, constructing a vast commemorative infrastructure of memorials, and eternal flames, and by changing the perception of the war from a traumatic history into sacred founding myth. This systematic use of the myth was later adapted by Putin even after the fall of the Soviet Union as a tool for social cohesion and identity within a Russia suffering the struggles of the Soviet collapse.

The comparative within Yeltsin and Putin periods provides the empirical grounding for this claim. While the presidency of Yeltsin was characterized by relative fragmentation in war commemoration. It became a period in which the myth lost coherence and critical accounts entered the public sphere. On the contrary, the Putin regime systematically reversed this. The post-2000

commemorative narrative became relentlessly triumphalist, centered on “the theme of the heroism of the Russian people who won a triumphant victory, brought freedom to half of Europe, and made the USSR a world superpower” (Malinova, 2017, p. 46), while marginalizing ambivalent or critical readings of the war. The decision of restituting was not merely occasional or nostalgic, it was a political reconstruction of national selfhood, one in which the victory of 1945 was elevated into one of the pillars foundation of Russian identity.

The distinction of Assmann between communicative memory is grounded in the lived experience across two or three generations to serve transgenerational purposes, illuminating what was at stake in this reconstruction. As the last veterans of the Great Patriotic War aged and died, the living memory of the conflict was fading. Putin’s regime has been responding to this by intensifying its institutionalization precisely at the moment when its natural generational basis was disappearing. The transformation Assmann describes, in which events are embedded in “an affectively charged and mobilizing narrative, combined with the use of commemorative rites, monuments, and educational institutions” (Assmann, 2008, p. 58), was being deliberately accelerated under state direction. The Victory Day parade expanded, the Immortal Regiment marches were launched and spread across Russia and occupied territories, school history curricula were brought under tighter central control. Putin was not preserving a memory. He was manufacturing one for a generation that had no direct experience of the war itself.

A further critical dimension of this process is identified by Malinova, as the progressive “Russification” of the Great Patriotic War myth. Despite the fact that the Soviet victory was achieved by a genuinely multi-ethnic force in which Ukraine, Belarus, and the other republics suffered catastrophic losses, the official commemorative narrative under Putin systematically separated the victory from the Soviet multi-national character and started to transform it exclusively into a feature of the Russian national identity (Malinova, 2017). This move has a precise function in the logic of this thesis: it is the narrative precondition for what is later done to Ukraine. Once the 1945 victory is framed as a Russian inheritance rather than a shared Soviet one, Ukraine’s historical role in it can be diminished, rewritten, or erased while Ukraine itself can be repositioned within the myth not as co-victor but as a problem that must be resolved.

The political implications of this memory management are not limited to the domestic sphere. Hopf’s constructivist framework explains why: “identities perform three necessary

functions in a society: they tell you and others who you are, and they tell you who others are” (Hopf, 1998, p. 175). When Putin refers to the Great Patriotic War in presidential speeches and ceremonies, he is simultaneously performing an act of domestic identity construction and an act of international positioning. By establishing Russia as the eternal guardian of “anti-fascist values”, the Kremlin generates both a domestic mandate for action and an international narrative that frames the invasion of Ukraine as a moral obligation rather than an act of aggression. Memory politics is, in this sense, the alive mechanism through which the constructivist identity work is carried out. This can be understood as the process where the Russian state reproduces its self-image, assigns roles to other states, and mobilizes collective affect in support of political goals. What makes Putin’s use of memory politics distinctive is not that he invokes the Great Patriotic War but the specific direction he gives to the myth after 2014 and especially after February 2022. As Preen demonstrates, where the traditional framing cast the Soviet Union as a reactive victim of Nazi aggression, Putin’s post-2022 version reconstructs Russia as a proactive power that has learned what happens when warning signs are ignored and acts accordingly (Preen, 2023).

### **1.3. The National Myth**

While the previous concept of Memory politics describes how collective memory is managed and directed by political actors. National myth describes what that management produces a structured and hierarchically organized narrative that does not merely speaks about the past but tries too the present. Alexia Preen defines national myth as “a temporally extended narrative representing a privileged and valorized version of the nation’s past” (Preen, 2023, p. 3). Where collective memory is contested and going on multiple sources and testimonies, national myth is intentioned, structured, and politically directed. Its function is not to preserve the past but to shape a shared identity to establish who the national community is, what it has overcome, and what it is therefore obligated to do.

National myths are typically top-down impositions of meaning upon history, constructed by political elites to forge national community by locating its members within a shared historical trajectory (David Bell cited in Preen, 2023). This top-down character is clearly visible in the Soviet and post-Soviet Russian context. As mentioned before by Tumarkin the Great Patriotic War myth was never an organic expression of popular memory. It was a consciously constructed state project, redirected and elevated under Brezhnev to serve as the unifying national narrative that

compensated for the exhaustion of revolutionary ideology. In this sense the project of national myth reconstruction of Putin should be understood not as the creation of something new but as the reassembly and reactivation of a pre-existing narrative infrastructure.

The national myth operates across both temporal and spatial dimensions, according to Preen. Temporally, it narrates the nation founding, its main struggles, and its pivotal moments of sacrifice and triumph. Spatially, it establishes the territory of the national Self and marks the boundary between that Self and a threatening Other (Preen, 2023). The use of the Great Patriotic War myth by Putin follows exactly this pattern. Temporally, it constructs a line of national purpose that goes from the Soviet soldiers of 1941 through the present day, making the invasion of Ukraine legible as the continuation of a sacred legacy rather than a political choice. Spatially, it defines the Motherland as a territory perpetually threatened by fascism, a threat that is now located in Ukraine.

One of the most analytically important insights from nationalism studies concerns the role of forgetting in national identity construction. Ernest Renan's famous observation that forgetting is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation (cited in Preen, 2023) applies with particular force to the Great Patriotic War myth under Putin. The myth in the present Russia tends to overfocus in the Soviet heroism, the liberation of Europe, and the collective triumph over absolute evil, while selectively omitting and ignoring elements like the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939, Stalin's catastrophic strategic failures in the war opening phase, his mass deportations and internal repressions, and the contributions of Ukraine, Belarus, and other Soviet republics to the eventual victory. The specific erasure of Ukraine role is not incidental, it is the narrative precondition for repositioning Ukraine as an enemy.

The relationship between the myth and the historical truth is a thin line that becomes an issue in memory studies. According to Assmann what distinguishes cultural memory from ordinary historical knowledge is precisely its normative and formative character, its function is not to represent the past accurately but to "anchor the present in the past and to sanction and stabilize existing norms, values, and self-images" (Assmann, 2008, p. 57). The critical issue then is not if the Great Patriotic War myth is historically accurate, but what political purposes it serves and what it systematically excludes. In the Russian case, the power of the Great Patriotic War myth comes not from historical accuracy but from its emotional resonance and its capacity to mobilize collective identity. This explains why historical critique of the myth does not automatically

dissolve its political efficacy. Malinova mentions that even as more critical historiography became available in Russia during the 1990s, the triumphalist framework re-established its dominance under Putin precisely because it met an institutional and emotional need that critical history could not (Malinova, 2017). Showing that the myth effects are affective before being rational.

#### **1.4. The Self, the Other, and the ‘AnOther’**

The construction of national identity through collective memory necessarily involves the definition of both the national Self and the foreign Other. As mentioned before in previous sections on this paper the national identity is constituted not only by what a nation affirms about itself but also by what it distinguishes itself from (Preen, 2023, p.5). Putin’s narrative brings this relation into the present, positioning Russia as the heir to the liberating mission and Ukraine as the renewal of the fascist threat. But the specific analytical problem this thesis addresses is that Ukraine’s position in the narrative is not simply an enemy, it is more ambiguous than that.

The concept of the “AnOther” by Preen provides the most precise account of this ambiguity. Introduced to describe how Ukraine occupies a dual position in Putin’s identity construction, the concept captures how Ukraine is simultaneously depicted as “another”, people sharing in the Russian national heritage, bound by the same sacred duty to oppose Nazism and as “an Other”, a state that has betrayed that heritage by aligning with Western influence and neo-Nazi political forces (Preen, 2023, p. 6). This dual positioning is not a contradiction in the narrative; it is a feature. It gives Putin’s discourse extraordinary flexibility. When Russian-speaking populations in eastern Ukraine are framed as victims of a neo-Nazi Kyiv government, they are the “another”, the Ukrainian people who still belong to the Russian family and must be protected. However, when the Ukrainian state and its government are framed as the neo-Nazi aggressor, they are “an Other” taking the form of an enemy that has attached its claim to the Ukrainian identity.

This dual positioning is made structurally possible by the Russification of the myth that Malinova mentions. Once the victory of 1945 has been detached from its Soviet, multi-national origins and reattached exclusively to Russian national identity, Ukraine’s relationship to that victory becomes revocable and interchangeable. Ukrainians who embrace the Russian narrative share in its heritage. Ukrainians who reject it have placed themselves outside the heritage and therefore, in the logic of the myth, inside the enemy camp (Malinova, 2017, p. 46). The AnOther

is not an inconsistency in the narrative. It is the mechanism through which a brother nation is progressively transformed into an enemy while the transformation is simultaneously denied.

The AnOther framework also illuminates one of the features of the rhetoric of Putin, which is his persistent insistence that the war is not against the Ukrainian people, only against the Kyiv government and the neo-Nazi forces that have captured it. From a logical point of view, this claim appears to be false by looking at the bombardment of Ukrainian cities, the displacement of millions of Ukrainian civilians, and the documented atrocities committed against Ukrainian populations. However, within the narrative logic of the AnOther, the claim becomes reasonable and starts to create a logical structure. If Ukrainians are simultaneously “another”, members of the broader Russian people, co-heirs of the Soviet victory then the war is in fact on their behalf. It is a war of liberation from a government that does not represent them and forces that have corrupted their national identity. Understanding the AnOther position is essential to understanding why this thesis focuses on the transformation of the Ukraine role across the 2014-2026 period rather than treating it as a fixed category. In this sense, Ukraine occupies both positions simultaneously, its precise placement at any given moment depends on the political requirements of the specific context.

### **1.5. War Merging.**

The concept of war merging, was identified and named by Håvard Bækken in his 2023 study of Russian military patriotic clubs. Bækken documented how these clubs systematically presented the 2022 invasion of Ukraine as a continuation of the Great Patriotic War using symbols, slogans, and visual imagery from 1941-1945 to represent a present conflict, producing what he described as “a striking symbolic mishmash, in which the war in Ukraine is presented as a continuation of the GPW, or indeed as the one and same war, blurring out both the pastness of the past and the presentness of the present” (Bækken, 2023). Bækken identified war merging as the dominant discursive practice through which civil society actors in Russia represented and supported the conflict. This thesis extends his concept to a different level of analysis, rather than examining war merging as it operates in civil society, it examines it as it operates in presidential discourse, between the speeches and written arguments through which Putin himself performs this narrative operation for domestic and international audiences. The extension matters because presidential discourse carries the full weight of state authority and reaches audiences far beyond the committed participants in military patriotic clubs.

War merging, as this thesis uses the term, operates through three interconnected moves that together collapse the temporal distance between 1941-1945 and 2022. The first is the establishment of continuity. Putin's discourse constructs the present Russian nation as the direct heir of the Soviet generation that defeated Nazi Germany, binding the soldiers of 2022 to the memory of those who died in 1941–1945. This frames the invasion as national duty rather than political choice and Putin activates a feeling of continuity that already exists rather than generating it from nothing.

The second move is the updating of the myth's internal logic. The traditional Great Patriotic War narrative framed the Soviet Union as a reactive victim. This narrative justified defensive war but not preemptive invasion. Putin restructures this by reinterpreting the lesson of 1941 as Stalin's failure to act on the warning signs of German military build-up is recast as a mistake that cost 30 million lives and must never be repeated. As Preen demonstrates, "Putin has updated the myth to legitimize his own military aggression" (Preen, 2023, p. 8), converting a narrative of suffering and endurance into a mandate for preemptive offensive action. Assmann's concept of mnemohistory names the mechanism: the past is reconstructed not as it was but as it needs to be (Assmann, 2008, p. 64).

The third move is the repositioning of Ukraine. Rather than a co-victor sharing in the legacy of 1945, Ukraine is cast as the site of resurgent Nazism. The Russification of the myth, documented by Malinova, is the precondition for this. The AnOther structure identified by Preen then provides the operational flexibility. And at last, War merging is the overall discursive architecture that holds all three moves together.

Together, the theoretical frameworks developed in this chapter provide the analytical tools for the empirical analysis that follows. Constructivism establishes why identity construction is central to political authority and why an external Other is necessary to stabilize the national Self. Memory politics explains how the institutional management of collective remembrance produces politically useful narratives. National myth explains the structure of those narratives and their affective durability in the face of empirical challenge. The story Putin tells gives the myth its temporal coherence. The AnOther concept explains how Ukraine can occupy the position of both brother and enemy within a single narrative without contradiction. And war merging names the overall operation through which Putin collapses historical time and converts the memory of 1945 into a justification for the violence of 2022.

The analysis in Chapter Three will trace how each of these operations works in practice across all the fifteen texts. It is important to be precise about what war merging is and what it is not. It is not simply the use of historical analogy. War merging goes further, it collapses the distinction itself, treating the two wars not as comparable but as continuous.

## **2. Research Design and Methodology**

### **2.1. Research Design and Methodological Approach**

The research question driving this is a question about how political meaning is constructed through language. It asks not what happened, but how a particular version of what happened is assembled, presented, and made persuasive. This kind of question cannot be answered by counting variables or measuring frequencies across a large dataset. It requires close, theoretically grounded engagement with specific texts with what is said, how it is framed, to what identity claims it is connected, and what political work it is designed to perform. The method that best fits this requirement is qualitative content analysis.

Qualitative content analysis is defined by Klaus Krippendorff as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). In its qualitative form, it differs from quantitative content analysis in a crucial respect: rather than measuring the frequency of discrete units across a large corpus, it seeks to identify the latent patterns of meaning that organize a text and give it political significance. As Philipp Mayring describes it, qualitative content analysis is “an approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytic rules and step models” (Mayring, 2000, p. 2). For this thesis examining how Putin deploys historical narrative to construct political identity, the combination of rigor and interpretive depth tuns suitable for what the research demands.

Mayring grounds the method in a constructivist understanding of communication: texts do not transmit fixed meanings but produce meanings in active interaction with the social and political contexts of their production and reception (Mayring, 2000, p. 3). This is precisely the premise on which this thesis operates. Putin’s speeches and articles do not merely report a reality; they construct one by selecting historical elements, framing them within a particular narrative, and presenting the result as the natural and morally necessary understanding of the present conflict. The analytical task is to follow how that construction works. Qualitative content analysis provides a methodological path for doing it, and it shares the foundational assumptions of the constructivist and memory studies frameworks established in Chapter Two.

The analysis in this thesis is conducted deductively. Rather than approaching the texts without prior expectations and deriving categories inductively from the data, the thesis applies a set of analytically derived categories, to each document. Those categories are: Temporal Collapse, Identity Foreclosure, Historical Erasure of Ukrainian Agency, the AnOther Positioning of Ukraine, and the Preemptive Mandate. Each category is defined and they are theoretical grounded in the previous chapter as is explained in the following section. Mayring identifies deductive category application as the appropriate procedure when a theoretical framework precedes the analysis, and when the research task is to test and substantiate theoretical propositions through textual evidence rather than to generate new categories from scratch (Mayring, 2000, p. 4). The categories used here are not chosen randomly, on the texts to analyze, they have their basis in the literature reviewed previously in the second chapter and grounded in the specific claims of this thesis.

### **2.1.1. Analytical Categories**

The selection of these five specific categories derived from the theoretical framework which intends to give an explicit justification, both in terms of why each category was included and how the set as a whole is designed to answer the research question. The research question asks: how does Putin's narrative transform Ukraine from a brother nation into an enemy, and what role does the Great Patriotic War myth play in that transformation? This question has two components. The first is about the process it asks about the transformation as a process carried out over time and across documents. The second is relational, it asks specifically about the role of the myth in that process, which means the categories must be sensitive to how the myth's specific content and emotional structure are mobilized in service of the transformation. The five categories were selected precisely because capture both components simultaneously.

1. Temporal Collapse: this category captures moments where the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945 and the present conflict are placed within the same temporal frame, erasing the historical distance between them. Textual indicators include present-tense identification of current soldiers with wartime predecessors, the placement of contemporary and historical battlefields in the same sentence, and explicit framing of the present conflict as a continuation rather than a new event. Grounded in Assmann's work (2008) and Bækken war merging (2023).

2. Identity Foreclosure: This category captures moments where Russian national identity is defined in terms so morally absolute that Ukrainian sovereignty becomes structurally excluded from the range of conceivable political arrangements. Textual indicators include declarations of permanent anti-fascist mission, language of sacred intergenerational obligation, and framing of the post-1991 order as historical aberration. Grounded in Hopf's argument that identities imply interests (1998, p. 175).
3. Historical Erasure of Ukrainian Agency: This category seeks to observe moments where Ukrainian national identity is denied an authentic historical origin and presented as an artificial foreign construction. Textual indicators include claims that Ukraine was created by external actors, attribution of Ukrainian political behavior to foreign manipulation, and the willingness to attack Soviet figures to preserve the primacy of the GPW myth.
4. The AnOther Positioning of Ukraine: This category seeks to observe elements where Ukraine simultaneously occupies the position of brotherly "another" and threatening "Other". The defining feature is the co-presence of both positions without resolution. Textual indicators include fraternal declarations alongside neo-Nazi accusations, and framing of the war as conducted for rather than against Ukrainians. Grounding the category to the in AnOther concept by Preen (2023, p. 6).
5. Preemptive Mandate: This category captures moments where the lesson of Soviet unpreparedness in 1941 is deployed as justification for Russian offensive action in the present, converting a narrative of victimhood into a mandate for preemptive aggression. Textual indicators include characterization of Russian military action as forced or necessary, catalogues of threats structured as warning signs, and invocation of Stalin's 1941 failure as the historical mistake current policy corrects.

The five categories vary in their prominence across the sources, not all are equally present in every document.

## **2.2. Primary Source Selection and Justification**

The primary sources for this thesis is composed by the fifteen documents selected. The reason of their selections is because they are the most direct and authoritative instances of Putin's narrative construction available in the public domain. The first is Putin's article "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians," published in July 2021. Then the Pre-invasion address from 21 Feb 2022 and the remaining texts are his presidential addresses at the Victory Day commemorations on 9 May 2014 to 2026. Krippendorff argues that text selection in content analysis must follow the logic of the research question rather than convenience or availability, and that every document included in the corpus must be explicitly justified by its analytical relevance (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 113). In this sense, the selected documents can fit under the criteria mentioned.

The 2021 article is included because it is the most extended and explicit piece of political argumentation Putin has produced on the question of Russian-Ukrainian identity. It was done seven months before the full-scale invasion and its main purpose is to demonstrate the historical case for treating Russians and Ukrainians as a single people, framing Ukraine's separate national identity as an artificial construction imposed by hostile external forces, and positions Ukrainian statehood as a direct threat to the Russian world. While the Victory Day speeches work under the context of condensed ceremonial symbolisms, the article provides the extended argumentative points that anchor such symbolism. Having a view from both sides (The victory speeches with the strong symbolism present and the deep settlement that the articles represent) allows a more complete account of the discursive architecture of war merging: the article reveals the underlying historical claims, the speeches reveal how those claims are emotionally mobilized for a public audience.

The address of 21 February 2022 was delivered three days before the full-scale invasion started, it is the document in which Putin translates the historical argument of the 2021 article into a political and security justification for military action. Where the Unity article constructs the ideological case for Ukrainian and Russian unity across a historical bond, the February address compresses that argument into an ultimatum: Ukraine is "an inalienable part of our own history, culture and spiritual space" (Putin, 2022), and the NATO military build-up on its territory has made the correction of this historical rupture an urgent necessity. The document is therefore

important to understand the changes between the argumentative register of the 2021 article and the ceremonial register of the Victory Day speeches. It is also where the updating move of war merging reaches its most complete and explicit formulation, with Putin cataloging the alleged military preparations and invoking the lesson of 1941 as the direct justification for acting before the threat consolidates. Including this document allows the analysis to trace not only the content of war merging at ceremonial moments but the argumentative architecture through which that content is legally and historically grounded in the days immediately preceding the invasion itself.

The Victory Day speeches are selected because they represent analytically distinct moments in the evolution of Putin's narrative. Together the speeches form a chronological path through which the thesis can examine not only the content of war merging but its development, testing the theoretical proposition, drawn from Preen and Assmann, that national myths are continuously renegotiated in response to shifting political circumstances (Preen, 2023, p. 4; Assmann, 2008, p. 58).

### **2.3. Ethical Considerations and Limitations**

The decision to center this thesis on some of the official documents produced by the political leadership of a state currently conducting an internationally condemned war of aggression might raise methodological and ethical questions that should be addressed in first place. The first issue to address is the understanding that selecting text from a character like Vladimir Putin might be considered as not serious or academically enough since his speeches might be biased by his political interest. This concern deserves to be taken seriously rather than dismissed, but on careful examination it does not constitute a valid objection to the project of this paper. The analysis that this paper aims to present does not evaluate Putin's historical claims on their merits. The purpose of this paper is not to classify whether the claims of the narrative built by Putin are true or not but understanding, why a demonstrably false narrative achieves and sustains political success and mobilization. As Assmann mentions, the function of the study of memory is to examine what are the purposes in the memory building efforts that serve for the construction of different narratives and what are those who are consciously excluded, instead of only accepting or rejecting the claims in a superficial level (Assmann, 2008, p. 57). The engagement in the analysis of this work with the discourse of Putin becomes an opportunity for the application of critical intellectual tools to

understand the naming, shaping, and the visualization of the mechanisms of memory weaponization.

A practical limitation considered in this paper concerns the use of the Russian state official English translations as the primary textual material rather than the original Russian texts. The first issue to address regarding the use of the translations, the language limitation that reading the speeches and articles in their original language suppose. However, even when there exist language limitations, working with official state translations means working with documents that are themselves political artefacts, produced and edited for specific international audiences. In this sense, reading the translation becomes a great opportunity to analyze in a deeper level the projection of identity built from the state structures towards the outside. Translation is never a neutral act, and the translators under the Russian government may have made choices that shape meaning in ways not fully visible in the target text. The official English translations are themselves authoritative state texts, carrying the full weight of official endorsement and constituting the primary vehicle through which Putin's narratives are projected toward international audiences. Analyzing these documents provides direct access to the international dimension of the war merging strategy, which is among the most politically significant aspects of the discursive project under examination.

A further limitation is the exclusive focus on a single political actor. This is a deliberate choice justified by the research question, which asks specifically what Putin's narrative reveals. A comparative study of competing Russian voices, or of Ukrainian counter-narratives, would require a different design and a different question. The selection of a small, purposive corpus prioritizing analytical depth over breadth is consistent with the logic of qualitative content analysis, in which, as Krippendorff notes, texts are chosen because they are the most analytically direct instances of the phenomenon under investigation (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 113). Finally, the thesis makes no claims about how these narratives are received by Russian or international audiences. The analysis is structural: it concerns what narrative operations are performed in the texts, not what effects those operations produce in actual readers. The question of reception would require survey data or reception studies methodology that are outside the scope of this work. As Mayring insists, qualitative content analysis generates its most defensible contributions when its claims are calibrated to the scope of the evidence from which they are drawn (Mayring, 2000, p. 4).

### **3. Analysis**

The central research question of this thesis is not answered by any single document in the corpus. It is answered by the architecture of the selected documents read together across the years. This chapter applies the five analytical categories established in section 2.1.1 to each primary source in chronological order, tracking on each category and how it develops across the texts and what its development reveals about the transformation under investigation. Three subsidiary questions also guide the analysis. First: through what specific narrative mechanisms does Putin's discourse merge the wars of 1941-1945 and 2022 into a single moral framework? Second: how does Ukraine's role within the Great Patriotic War myth shift across 2014 to 2026, and what does that shift reveal about the evolution of Putin's political identity project? Third: what does war merging reveal about the relationship between historical memory, national identity construction, and the legitimization of authoritarian military aggression? These questions cut across all the sections and find their most complete answers in the synthesis.

#### **3.1. Victory Day Speech, 9 May 2014**

The Victory Day address of 9 May 2014 is the founding document of the transformation this thesis investigates. It is delivered two months after the annexation of Crimea and amid the outbreak of armed conflict in the Donbas, the first occasion on which Russia conducts an active military operation against Ukrainian territory in the post-Soviet period. However, the speech names none of this, Ukraine is not mentioned, Crimea is not mentioned and no enemy is named. The analytical significance of this silence is the starting point for understanding how the research question must be answered. The transformation of Ukraine does not begin with accusation or aggression. It begins with the construction of a Russian identity so complete and so morally assured that the accusation and the aggression will appear to follow naturally from what Russia already is.

Applying the category of Temporal Collapse: the speech opening sentence establishes the foundational temporal logic of war merging. Putin declares that "May 9 was and still is our biggest holiday. It is the day of our national triumph and our people's pride" (Putin, 2014). The present tense "still is" is the first textual indicator of temporal collapse in the text. The victory of 1945 is not being commemorated as a closed historical event belonging to another era. It is being inhabited as a living condition of the present. Russia is not a country that once defeated Nazism; Russia is

the country that defeats Nazism, permanently, as a constitutive feature of its national identity. This temporal structure is the grammatical foundation on which all subsequent war merging will be built. Without it, the claim that soldiers fighting in Donbas in 2022 are doing the same thing as soldiers fighting near Stalingrad in 1942 would be incoherent. The 2014 speech lays the grammar before the sentence is written.

However the dominant category is Identity Foreclosure in the 2014 speech, and it is where the speech makes its most significant contribution to answering the research question. Putin states that “the unbroken link between generations is our immense national treasure and it is here that Russia’s strength and dignity lies” (Putin, 2014). The word “unbroken” is the key textual indicator: it reveals that the chain of moral obligation running from 1941 to the present has never been cut, and therefore that the political decisions of 1991, which recognized Ukrainian sovereignty and established post-Soviet borders, did not alter that obligation. The Soviet collapse may have changed institutional forms, but it did not change what Russia is. In this sense what Russia is implies a relationship to the former Soviet space, including Ukraine, that no independence declaration can override.

This is identity foreclosure in a very clear level as this is not showing a direct claim against Ukraine but the construction of a Russian self-understanding from which the legitimacy of Ukrainian sovereignty is excluded before it can even be raised as a question. The transformation of Ukraine from a brother to an ambiguous figure begins here, not with an accusation but with the silent exclusion of the political possibility that a truly sovereign Ukraine would represent.

The AnOther category and the Preemptive Mandate are absent from the 2014 speech, and their absence might be evident but not affecting the analysis. In 2014, Ukraine has not yet been repositioned as a neo-Nazi state within the mythological framework, and no preemptive security logic has been articulated. Historical Erasure of Ukrainian Agency is also not present: the speech does not engage with Ukrainian history at all. What is present tells us that 2014 is a moment of foundation, not escalation. The grammar is being established. The location of the speech reinforces this: by holding Victory Day on Crimean soil for the first time, Putin performs the legitimacy of the annexation without stating it. This is the myth authorizing the present by retroactive implication the sacred ground of 1941-1945 extended to cover the political act of 2014. What the 2014 speech contributes to the research question is therefore this: the transformation of Ukraine from brother

nation to enemy does not begin with a claim about Ukraine. It begins with a claim about Russia one so totalizing that Ukrainian difference becomes, within its logic, an impossibility rather than a legitimate political fact.

### **3.2. Victory Day Speech, 9 May 2015**

The 2015 Victory Day address marks the 70th anniversary of the Soviet victory, one of the most symbolically charged commemorations since the fall of the Soviet Union, attended by leaders from China, India, and across the Global South in a deliberate assertion of Russia's international standing against Western sanctions following the annexation of Crimea. The speech is significant for what it reveals about the state of the war merging framework one year after its foundational deployment in 2014.

The strongest category on this address is the Temporal Collapse. Here, Putin addresses the parade as a gathering of "grandsons and great-grandsons of the war generation," declaring that "the Great Patriotic War was in fact the battle for the future of the entire humanity" (Putin, 2015). The framing of the war as a battle for future rather than a closed historical event extends its temporal reach beyond 1945, collapsing the distance between the wartime generation and the present. The present parade participants are not commemorating their ancestors; they are continuing their mission.

When applying the category of Identity Foreclosure. Here, Putin is warning that "the history calls again to our wisdom and vigilance" and that "the ideas of racial supremacy and exclusiveness had provoked the bloodiest war ever" (Putin, 2015) positioning Russia as the permanent vigilant actor against a threat that is perpetually returning. This constructs a Russian identity so fundamentally tied to the anti-fascist mission that any policy which accommodates or ignores resurgent fascist tendencies becomes a betrayal of national identity itself. The political space available for a Russia that accepts Western-defined norms, including Ukrainian sovereignty is being progressively foreclosed before Ukraine is included in the discussion.

Regarding the category of Historical Erasure of Ukrainian Agency, while being absent in its Ukraine specific form in 2015. Ukraine is still referenced implicitly as part of the shared Soviet heritage. "Victory Day is our common holiday", which means its wartime contribution has not yet been erased or contested. This absence is analytically significant: it confirms that the Russification

of the myth, which Malinova (2017) identifies as the precondition for repositioning Ukraine as enemy, has not been implemented in the presidential Victory Day discourse.

When it comes to the AnOther category. Here, Ukraine is not named and the AnOther dynamic is entirely absent from the 2015 speech. There is no distinction between a brotherly Ukrainian people and a hostile Ukrainian state. This becomes relevant because it reveals that the AnOther position requires a prior ideological step, the erasure of Ukrainian national legitimacy, that has not yet been performed in the Victory Day pool of speeches. Its absence in 2015 confirms the sequencing of the transformation. For the final category of the Preemptive Mandate. This is also absent from the 2015 speech. The lesson of 1941 is invoked only in its traditional commemorative form, not as a justification for preemptive military action.

### **3.3. Victory Day Speech, 9 May 2016**

The 2016 Victory Day address marks the 71st anniversary and is analytically significant for two developments: the sharpening of the anti-revisionist language and the first appearance of a warning directed at contemporary political actors who are accused of rehabilitating Nazism. Both developments advance the gradual construction of the Preemptive Mandate and Identity Foreclosure categories toward their eventual application against Ukraine, while the other three categories remain in relatively early stages of development.

For the category of Temporal Collapse, this 2016 speech maintains the intergenerational continuity established in previous years. Present soldiers march “in the name of Victory,” and the veterans of the Great Patriotic War stand alongside them “as living witnesses,” reinforcing the temporal identification between 1945 and the present (Putin, 2016). The continuity is performed through the parade itself as a ritual institution of Temporal Collapse.

For the category of Identity Foreclosure, this is the dominant category in the speech and represents a step beyond 2015. Putin warns directly that “those who attempt to belittle this invaluable experience and defile the monuments to the heroes of this war are insulting their own people and spreading enmity and new distrust between countries and peoples” (Putin, 2016). This formulation is important because it introduces Russia as the legitimate authority whose judgment determines what constitutes a crime against the memory of the war. Therefore, a Russia whose

identity is organized around this role cannot accommodate a Ukrainian government that dismantles Soviet monuments without treating that government as an identity-level threat.

The category of Historical Erasure of Ukrainian Agency remains absent from the 2016 speech. The Victory is still framed as a shared Soviet achievement: “we defeated fascism together” (Putin, 2016). Ukraine’s wartime contribution is still present in the background of the narrative rather than erased from it. Which also explains why the category of the AnOther remains absent as well.

Finally, for the Preemptive Mandate category, the 2016 speech contains earliest recognizable form. The warning to unnamed contemporary actors who “are repeating the mistakes of the past” by accommodating nationalist extremism plants the logic that historical errors have identifiable contemporary equivalents and that those equivalents must be confronted (Putin, 2016).

#### **3.4. Victory Day Speech, 9 May 2017**

The 2017 Victory Day address marks the 72nd anniversary and is analytically notable for the explicit geopolitical expansion on the Identity Foreclosure category. While the previous speeches framed Russia anti-fascist mission primarily in historical and ceremonial terms, the 2017 speech begins to explicitly connect it to contemporary international politics, positioning Russia as the defender of the post-war international order against unnamed Western actors who are accused of undermining it through unilateral actions. This development significantly advances the framework’s capacity for operational political use.

On the category of Temporal Collapse the 2017 speech continues the established pattern of intergenerational obligation, declaring that “Russia has always been faithful to the memory of the heroes of the Great Patriotic War” and that the present armed forces stand as the “direct heirs” of those who defeated Nazism (Putin, 2017). The textual indicator is the use of “direct heirs” not merely successors or descendants, but the continuation of the same moral and military lineage. This positions the present Russian military not as a force inspired by historical precedent but as the institutional continuation of the wartime Red Army.

When it comes to the category of Identity Foreclosure, this is where the 2017 speech makes its most significant contribution. Putin states that Russia “will always stand for justice and equal rights for all countries and peoples” and frames Western unilateralism as a violation of the post-war order

that the Soviet victory established (Putin, 2017). This links the commemorative identity of Russia-as-victor to a geopolitical claim about legitimate international behavior. A Russia whose identity is constituted by the victory of 1945 is, by definition, the guardian of the international order that victory produced and any challenge to that order becomes an act against Russia's identity-constituting mission. In that sense, the foreclosure is now operating at the international level, not only the domestic one.

On the category of Historical Erasure of Ukrainian Agency and the category of the AnOther Positioning of Ukraine remain absent in 2017. The wartime sacrifices of the Soviet peoples, including Ukrainians, are still acknowledged without distinction mentioning things like; "every republic of the Soviet Union gave its sons to the defense of the Motherland" (Putin, 2017).

Applying the category of the Preemptive Mandate, the category advances in 2017. The identification of different anonymous actors, "those who ignore the lessons of the past" and promote "exceptionalism and unilateralism" as the modern equivalent of 1930s appeasers develops the Preemptive Mandate logic from a domestic commemorative warning into a framework for international political judgment (Putin, 2017).

### **3.5. Victory Day Speech, 9 May 2018**

The 2018 Victory Day address marks the 73rd anniversary and is delivered immediately following Putin's re-election to a fourth presidential term, a political context that shapes the speech's emphasis on national unity, military strength, and the permanence of Russia's mission. The speech is analytically important for the first explicit link between the commemorative identity of Russia and its contemporary military posture, representing the point at which Identity Foreclosure and the Preemptive Mandate begin to merge into a single operational logic.

For the category of Temporal Collapse, the 2018 speech strengthens the temporal identification between 1945 and the present through the participation of veterans alongside active-duty soldiers, framing their shared presence as evidence that the wartime mission has not ended. Putin declares that "the memory of the Great Patriotic War unites us across generations," and that "the sons and grandsons of veterans who marched across Red Square seventy-three years ago march here today"

(Putin, 2018). The physical presence of generations on Red Square makes Temporal Collapse not merely a narrative claim but a functional institutional event.

When it comes to the category of Identity Foreclosure this speech contains the first explicit connection between commemorative identity and military capability. Putin states that Russia possesses “sufficient strength and willingness to defend itself and its allies from any aggression,” positioning military readiness as the direct institutional expression of the anti-fascist identity established in 1945 (Putin, 2018).

As in the previous speeches, the categories of Historical Erasure of Ukrainian Agency and the AnOther Positioning of Ukraine category are absent in the 2018 speech. The Victory remains a shared Soviet achievement, with references to the sacrifices of all the peoples of the Soviet Union.

The category of the Preemptive Mandate is one of the largest for this speech. Here, Putin warns that “those who forget the lessons of history are condemned to repeat them,” and directly references the contemporary military threat environment as requiring a Russian response (Putin, 2018). The logic is now explicit: the failure to act decisively in the face of a gathering threat, the lesson of 1941 is a mistake Russia will not repeat. However, the warning is still directed at unnamed actors and is not yet connected to Ukraine specifically.

### **3.6. Victory Day Speech, 9 May 2019**

The 2019 Victory Day address marks the 74th anniversary and is notable for the sharpening of the anti-revisionist language into something approaching a formal accusation against unnamed contemporary actors. When applying the category of Temporal Collapse, the 2019 speech continues the established pattern of intergenerational language, placing present soldiers in a line of direct obligation to the 1941-1945 generation. Putin addresses the veterans as “you who saved civilisation,” and the present armed forces as those who “carry on your tradition and are ready to defend the Motherland” (Putin, 2019).

On the category of Identity Foreclosure, this speech is very straightforward. Putin declares that “there is no justification for those who are trying to rehabilitate Nazism and its accomplices, who are erecting monuments to the punishers and collaborators” (Putin, 2019). This formulation creates a moral distinction in which any political actor who contests the Russian historical narrative of

1945 is positioned as an accomplice of Nazism. The “binary” forecloses the political possibility of a legitimate critique of the Soviet war narrative: to question it is to betray the dead. A Ukraine whose government dismantles Soviet monuments falls unambiguously on the wrong side of this binary, even though Ukraine is not yet named.

Regarding the category of Historical Erasure of Ukrainian Agency, this speech makes an advance compared to the previous ones, although still without naming Ukraine directly. The emphasis on those who “erect monuments to collaborators” is a direct reference to policies in Ukraine and some Eastern European states regarding wartime nationalist figures like Bandera (Putin, 2019). By positioning the commemoration of such figures as equivalent to Nazi rehabilitation, the speech begins to construct the genealogical argument that links Ukrainian nationalism to fascism and therefore erases the legitimacy of Ukraine’s own wartime narrative. The Historical Erasure category is being built through negative implication before it is stated as positive claim.

When applying the category of the AnOther Positioning of Ukraine: the “AnOther” becomes visible in the 2019 speech for the first time in the Victory Day corpus. The implicit distinction between the Ukrainian people, still assumed to share the Soviet wartime heritage and the Ukrainian government, which erects monuments to collaborators is emerging without yet being stated explicitly. The logic that the government does not represent the true people it governs will become the AnOther’s operational core in 2022.

By applying the category of the Preemptive Mandate, this speech shows declaration that “attempts to rewrite history are inadmissible” and that those who do so are committing a crime against the wartime generation positions the defense of the historical narrative as an active obligation, not a passive commemoration (Putin, 2019). The logic is now: historical truth requires defense; those who attack it are equivalent to those who attacked the Soviet Union in 1941; Russia therefore has both the right and the obligation to act against them.

### **3.7. Victory Day Speech, 9 May 2020**

The 2020 Victory Day address marks the 75th anniversary represents a middle step between the 70th in 2015 and the 80th in 2025 celebrations, becoming one of the most relevant celebrations

of the Victory Day. The speech was delivered in a ceremony delayed by COVID-19 from May to June and subsequently in a reduced format, yet it represents the moment of maximum institutional consolidation of the war merging framework before the invasion.

On the Temporal Collapse the 2020 speech contains the most explicit example of this category in the pre-invasion time. Putin celebrates the Immortal Regiment movement, in which millions of Russians march carrying portraits of wartime relatives, as evidence that “the generation of victors lives in each of us,” institutionalizing Temporal Collapse at a popular level (Putin, 2020). The statement that the spirit of 1941-1945 “is alive in us” is not merely commemorative rhetoric; it is a claim about present identity. The wartime generation does not merely inspire the present, it lives in it. The Immortal Regiment transforms Temporal Collapse from a political discourse into a lived civic practice.

On the Identity Foreclosure, the speech reaches its most clear formulation in the pre-invasion corpus of texts. Putin warns against those who “try to split the indivisible Victory” and “relativize Nazi crimes,” declaring that Russia will “never allow anyone to encroach on the sacred memory of our people” (Putin, 2020). The language of sacred memory that cannot be encroached upon constructs Russian identity as something that must be actively defended against external challenge.

Regarding the category of Historical Erasure of Ukrainian Agency the 2020 speech contains the most developed examples of this category before the invasion. In references to those who “flirt with Nazis” and “try to rehabilitate their accomplices,” Putin is directing language at Eastern European governments, including Ukraine which the changed official commemoration policies toward Soviet monuments and wartime nationalist figures (Putin, 2020). By equating these policies with Nazi rehabilitation, the speech implicitly erases the legitimacy of Ukraine’s own wartime narrative, its history of victimhood under Soviet collectivization and Nazi occupation alike and repositions Ukraine as a site of fascist sympathies. The erasure is still indirect and unnamed but remains constant.

On the AnOther Positioning of Ukraine, the speech contains some examples of the AnOther. The implicit distinction between the Russian-speaking populations of Ukraine who still honor the Soviet wartime memory and the Ukrainian government that dismantles its monuments is present in the logic of the speech, even without explicit naming. The argument that those who erase Soviet

monuments are “insulting their own people” (Putin, 2020) implies that the Ukrainian people themselves are not responsible for this erasure only the forces that have captured their government are.

When it comes to the category of the Preemptive Mandate, the speech shows the fullest with Putin’s declaration where states “we have a duty to prevent any justification of the genocide of Soviet citizens and other atrocities committed by Nazi criminals”. This positions the prevention of historical falsification as an active, operational obligation, not merely a commemorative stance (Putin, 2020). The word “prevent” is the textual indicator: it transforms the category from retrospective judgment into prospective action. Preventing the rehabilitation of Nazism is not a matter of historical debate; it becomes a mission.

### **3.8. Victory Day Speech, 9 May 2021**

The 2021 Victory Day address marks the 76th anniversary and is the final Victory Day speech before the full-scale invasion. It is delivered in the same year as Putin’s Unity article , the document that provides the argumentative architecture of the invasion and the two texts should be read in conjunction: the article constructs the historical case for Ukraine’s inalienability to Russia; the speech reinforces the identity infrastructure that makes that case politically operational. For the first time in the Victory Day corpus, Ukraine is named as a site requiring Russian protective action, making this speech the moment where all five categories are directed, for the first time, towards Ukraine specifically.

On the Temporal Collapse category, the 2021 speech introduces a new formulation of this category. Putin declares that “the lessons of the past oblige us not to allow any repetition of terrible tragedies,” formulating the historical lesson of 1941-1945 as a present political mandate (Putin, 2021). The shift from “we remember” to “we are obliged” is the textual indicator: memory becomes operational duty. The soldiers marching in the parade are not commemorating the wartime generation; they are fulfilling its mandate.

Regarding the category of Identity Foreclosure, the 2021 Victory Day speech contains the first direct deployment of Identity Foreclosure against Ukrainian cultural policy. Here, Putin warns against “those who are trying to rewrite and falsify history, deny the heroic feats of our soldiers,”

and while Ukraine is not named by name, the political context of 2021, in which Ukrainian law required the dismantling of Soviet monuments, makes the reference unambiguous (Putin, 2021). A Russia whose identity is constituted by the inviolability of the wartime legacy cannot accommodate a Ukrainian government that treats that legacy as a foreign imposition. Identity Foreclosure here begins to function as an accusation rather than merely a self-definition.

When it comes to the category of Historical Erasure of Ukrainian Agency: this Victory Day speech initiates the direct deployment against Ukraine. The denunciation of those who “glorify Nazi accomplices and make them into national heroes” is a direct reference to Ukrainian state policy regarding figures like Stepan Bandera, whose wartime collaboration with Nazi Germany is well-documented (Putin, 2021). By framing the commemoration of such figures as equivalent to erasing the Soviet victory, the speech begins to strip Ukraine’s own wartime narrative of legitimacy, removing the historical ground on which Ukraine could claim to share in the victory of 1945 on its own terms.

Applying the category of the AnOther Positioning of Ukraine, the AnOther makes its first explicit appearance in the Victory Day corpus in 2021. Putin states the need to “protect people in Donbas” (Putin, 2021), establishing the distinction between the Ukrainian people, those in Donbas who are framed as requiring Russian protection, and the Ukrainian state, which is implicitly the force from which they need protecting. This is the AnOther in its first form but most essential: the people are “another,” to be liberated; the government is “an Other,” to be confronted. The war merging framework has found its target.

Finally, on the category of the Preemptive Mandate: The declaration that Russia will “firmly defend the truth about the war,” and that this defense requires active rather than merely discursive measures, positions the invasion. When it comes as both a security preemption and a historical defense (Putin, 2021). The five categories are now all active and all simultaneously directed at Ukraine. The foundational grammar established in 2014, the gradual reinforcement across 2015–2020, and the argumentative architecture of the July 2021 Unity article converge in the 2021 Victory Day speech: the war merging framework is complete and its target is identified.

### **3.9. “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians,” July 2021**

The Unity article of July 2021 is the only document in the pool of texts that operates using a clear extended historical argument rather than ceremonial invocation. This article was published simultaneously in three languages: Russian, Ukrainian, and English, seven months before the full-scale invasion. It was also made mandatory reading for the Russian military, it is the document in which the ideological architecture of the invasion is most explicitly and systematically constructed. While the previous speech established the identity that shutdowns Ukrainian legitimacy, the 2021 article takes the next necessary step. This article, attempts to erase the historical ground on which Ukrainian national identity stands, removing the very basis from which Ukraine could claim to be a genuine equal. By analyzing and applying the five analytical categories, the 2021 article become one most dense document among the texts in the pool of the evidence, and the one that most directly answers the question of how the transformation of Ukraine from brother nation to enemy is made structurally possible.

When applying the category of Historical Erasure of Ukrainian Agency the article allows to see this category as the dominant in the article and the one that most directly advances the research question. The central claim is stated at the outset: “Russians and Ukrainians were one people, a single whole” (Putin, 2021).

The argument that follows organizes eleven centuries of East Slavic history around a single interpretive principle. The existence of a genuine Ukrainian-Russian unity is the historical baseline, and every deviation from it is the product of external interference (Polish, Austro-Hungarian, Bolshevik, or Western). The most interesting and revealing instance of this erasure is the attack of Putin on Lenin. He argues that “modern Ukraine is entirely the product of the Soviet era” and that the Bolsheviks planted “the most dangerous time bomb” in the foundations of the Russian state by establishing Ukraine as a distinct union republic (Putin, 2021). Lenin is blamed for creating the problem that the invasion will be sent to correct. This will to sacrifice a clear “untouchable” Soviet figure is itself a textual indicator of the category. This issue demonstrates that the GPW myth has superseded Soviet ideology entirely as the organizing principle of Russian political identity. The myth does not need Lenin. It needs only the victory of 1945, and everything that complicates that victory, including one of the founders of the Soviet past and important figure, is available for rewriting. Historical Erasure of Ukrainian Agency operates here at both the level

of historical argument. On one hand, Ukraine has no authentic national origin and the level of ideological hierarchy. The GPW myth overrides all other Soviet legacies when they conflict with the narrative. This is analytically important for the research question because it reveals a hierarchy within the myth itself. Once historical facts and events about Soviet origins would complicate the claim that Ukraine is Russian or part of it, honesty is abandoned. The myth's political function takes priority over its historical content.

Regarding the AnOther category, the article allows to understand the positioning and construction of where Ukraine stands. In this article is where this category is developed most systematically among the texts in the corpus. The same document that erases the historical basis of Ukrainian nationhood insists, in its closing lines, that "Russia has never been and will never be 'anti-Ukraine'" (Putin, 2021). Brotherhood and erasure coexist in the same text without resolution. This co-presence is not a contradiction but the operational logic of the AnOther. On hand Ukraine is represented as a people, who is sharing Russian roots, sharing Orthodox heritage, sharing the memory of 1945 and this Ukraine remains "another," inseparable from the Russian Self. On the other hand, Ukraine is also represented as a state, pursuing Western integration, dismantling Soviet monuments, legislating against the Russian language, has now become "an Other," captured by foreign forces hostile to the shared heritage. In this sense, the 2021 article's multi-audience character makes this dual positioning analytically visible in a way no other document does.

At the same time, the text addresses Ukrainian citizens as lost outcome, the Ukrainian government as a hostile puppet regime, and the Russian domestic audience as the preparation for what is coming. This triple address is only possible because the AnOther structure allows Ukraine to occupy multiple positions at once. The article also reveals a deeper function of the AnOther for the research question, by separating the Ukrainian people from the Ukrainian state it pre-empted the most obvious objection to the invasion that it targets a people, not just a government. The narrative of liberation is built into the structure of the AnOther from the beginning.

When it comes to apply the category of Temporal Collapse, the GPW appears in the article not as its centerpiece but as structural architecture. Putin notes that the Nazis, "abetted by collaborators from the OUN-UPA, did not need Ukraine, but a living space and slaves for Aryan overlords" (Putin, 2021). The reference to the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists introduces, for the first time in the pool of texts, the historical connection between Ukrainian nationalism and

Nazi collaboration. This is temporal collapse operating at the level of historical genealogy rather than direct temporal identification. In this sense, the article does not claim that today's Ukraine is the same as 1941–1945, but it establishes the genealogical line from which the 2022 identification will follow. The OUN-UPA are planted here as historical predecessors of the present Ukrainian government which seeds to be activated in 2022. Identity shutdown is also present in the article's closing warning that Ukraine's statehood has been turned into "an anti-Russia". The article presents a framing that forecloses any political arrangement in which a genuinely sovereign Ukraine could coexist with Russia without constituting an existential threat. The Preemptive Mandate is still underdeveloped here; the security argument will be made fully in the later addresses and speeches. Finally, what the 2021 article contributes to the research question is its central structural mechanism. This article draws a clear path regarding the transformation of Ukraine from brother nation to enemy does not require treating Ukrainians as enemies. It only requires treating Ukrainian statehood as the artificial product of foreign manipulation that denies what Ukrainians authentically are. This is what makes the invasion internally coherent as liberation rather than aggression. Russia does not attack a people. It corrects a historical "mistake" made by Lenin and exploited by the West.

### **3.10. Address of 21 February 2022**

The address of 21 February 2022 is the most revealing document of the entire pool of texts. It was delivered three days before the full-scale invasion began, it is the speech in which the historical argument of the 2021 article is translated into an immediate justification for military action, where ideological preparation becomes operational decision. It is also the document in which the Preemptive Mandate category reaches its fullest development, and where the AnOther achieves its sharpest single-word expression. Reading it through the five categories reveals how the logical chain that makes the invasion appear necessary is finally completed.

By applying the category of the AnOther Positioning of Ukraine, the speech opens with a declaration that concentrates the AnOther into a single word. "Ukraine is not just a neighboring country for us. It is an inalienable part of our own history, culture and spiritual space" (Putin, 2022). The word "inalienable" is the most precise textual indicator of the AnOther in the entire

texts. It is a legal and philosophical term meaning incapable of being surrendered, transferred, or separated. Its deployment here is not rhetorical ornament; it is a categorical claim. If Ukraine is inalienable from Russia, not only historically connected but literally inseparable at the level of identity, then the Ukrainian state claim to represent a genuinely separate political entity is, by definition, false. Ukraine is “another” in the most radical sense: not a separate other nation but a displaced part of the Russian self. And the forces governing it are “an Other” precisely because they deny what cannot, by this logic, be legitimately denied. The AnOther is also the direct answer to the central research puzzle. The question of how a war fought with Ukraine can justify a war against Ukraine is answered by inalienability because, within this logic, the war is not against Ukraine. It is against the forces that have “unlawfully” seized and weaponized a part of Russia itself. The transformation from brother to enemy is not a reversal of the brotherly relationship it is the reframing of that relationship as one of occupation and liberation.

When it comes to apply the category of Historical Erasure of Ukrainian Agency, this category reaches a new intensity in the February 2022 address. While the 2021 article argued across eleven centuries that Ukrainian national identity has no authentic origin, this speech delivers the verdict in a single sentence: “modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russia or, to be more precise, by Bolshevik, Communist Russia” (Putin, 2022). The erasure of Ukrainian agency is here stated as a historical fact rather than an argument to be demonstrated.

The speech also reveals the strategic function of this erasure for the research question: once Ukrainian statehood is framed as a Bolshevik administrative artefact rather than the expression of a genuine national identity, the invasion is reframed as correction rather than as an aggression. This correction of the artificial borders that Lenin drew are meant to be not an attack on a sovereign people but a reinterpretation on the legitimacy of Ukraine as a sovereign country. Ukrainian statehood leads to Ukrainian nationalism, nationalism leads to Russophobia, Russophobia leads to neo-Nazism, neo-Nazism threatens Russia. This chain is the mechanism through which transformation from brother to enemy is logically completed without treating Ukrainians as inherently hostile: they became enemies not because of what they are but because of what the separation from Russia produced in them.

On the other hand, when applying the category of Preemptive Mandate to this is the speech in which the updating move of war merging reaches its fullest argumentative form. Putin repasses

the NATO build-up in extraordinary detail looking at the foreign advisors, upgraded airfields, weapons deliveries, the Maritime Operations Centre at Ochakov, declared ambitions to acquire nuclear weapons. Each item in this frame functions, within the speech rhetorical logic, as the warning sign that Stalin fatally ignored in 1941. The speech does not need to make this parallel explicit, it is structurally present in the logic of accumulation. Russia in 2022 will not pay the price the Soviet Union paid in June 1941 for failing to act when warning signs were visible and the threat was still preventable. While the later Victory Day speech will state it ceremonially as “a forced, timely and the only correct decision,” the February address argues it through evidence.

Finally, by applying the category of Temporal Collapse, the GPW enters the speech not through emotional invocation but through structural reference. The wartime territorial decisions are invoked to delegitimize post-war borders, and the 1941 lesson is invoked to mandate 2022 action. What the February 2022 address contributes to the research question is the completion of the argumentative structure. After this speech, the narrative space available for a political settlement that begins from the premise of Ukrainian sovereignty has been closed. In this sense, the identity that was meant to shape alternatives was built in 2014. The historical ground of Ukrainian nationhood was erased in 2021. And lastly, the immediate justification is now in place. What remains, and what the later texts will demonstrate and accomplish is to perform that transformation not argumentatively but emotionally, at the level of the nation’s most sacred collective memory.

### **3.11. Victory Day Speech, 9 May 2022**

The Victory Day address of 9 May 2022 is one of the core parts of this thesis. This text becomes relevant since it is the one in which all five categories are simultaneously present at maximum intensity, and in which the transformation investigated by the research question is most completely and explicitly performed. The prior documents built the argument across three different registers and genres. First, the ceremonial grammar of 2014, the extended historical argument of 2021, the operational logic of February 2022. This speech presents it ceremonially, in the register of collective myth, on the most sacred day of the Russian commemorative calendar, before millions watching on state television. The presentation mode matters (With a great parade and a national event) for the analytical purposes. This speech does not attempt to persuade through evidence. It attempts to mobilize through feeling, through shared grief, shared pride, and the sacred

obligation that the most important story in Russian national memory generates. What makes it part of the analytical center of the thesis is not simply that all five categories converge here, but that they converge in a form that is emotionally irreversible. Once the myth is activated at this level of collective feeling, no historical counter-argument can easily dismiss it.

When applying the category of Temporal Collapse, this category reaches its peak expression in this speech with a compression and syntactic precision that no other document achieves. Putin invokes the great battles of Russian military history (the Borodino field, the outskirts of Moscow and Leningrad, Kyiv and Minsk, Stalingrad and Kursk, Sevastopol and Kharkov) and then places Donbas in the same sequence, as if these battles form one unbroken line of national struggle spanning two centuries (Putin, 2022). This list is the most concentrated instance of Temporal Collapse in the entire pool of texts, and its analytical significance goes beyond the war merging operation it performs. Here, Kyiv appears in the list as a city where Soviet soldiers fought the Nazis in 1941–1945 which is one of the sacred battlefields of the Great Patriotic War. However, in 2022, Kyiv is also the seat of the government to whom Putin has declared “neo-Nazi government”. The same city occupies two opposite moral positions simultaneously, in the same sentence, in the same breath. This is Temporal Collapse and the AnOther converging at the same level. While the geographic list does not merely place Donbas alongside Stalingrad, it splits Kyiv’s identity between past co-victor and present enemy, and the myth holds both without breaking. The sentence that follows makes the temporal identification explicit: “Today, as in the past, you are fighting for our people in Donbass, for the security of our Motherland, for Russia” (Putin, 2022). The phrase “as in the past” is not a comparison but an identification, the present soldiers are not like the soldiers of 1941 they are performing the same act in the same moral universe. The temporal distance of eighty years might be collapsed into four words.

Regarding the category of Preemptive Mandate it allows to see in this speech how it delivers the updating move in its most explicit and ceremonially authoritative form. Putin declares that “Russia launched a pre-emptive strike at the aggression. It was a forced, timely and the only correct decision” (Putin, 2022). The word “pre-emptive” is the decisive textual indicator: it signals the completed inversion of the GPW myth’s internal logic. The traditional Soviet narrative positioned the USSR as a reactive victim which was attacked without warning in June 1941, forced to defend itself at catastrophic cost. That narrative generated moral authority but authorized only

defensive war. Putin's updating resolves this limitation through a single interpretive inversion: the lesson of 1941 is no longer "the Soviet people endured and prevailed" but "do not wait for the enemy to strike first." Stalin's failure becomes the political mistake that cost thirty million lives, and Russia in 2022 will not repeat it. The speech catalogs the evidence: "hundreds of foreign advisors starting work, regular supplies of cutting-edge weaponry, threats right on our borders" (Putin, 2022). Each item functions as the warning sign that 1941 showed must not be ignored. What is analytically significant for the research question is the asymmetry this creates: the Soviet Union's unpreparedness in 1941 is deployed as a justification for Russia's offensiveness in 2022. Victimhood becomes a mandate for aggression. The myth's most painful episode, represented by the catastrophic early defeats and the millions lost before the tide turned, is now converted from a source of grief into a source of authority for preemptive military action. The GPW myth is here most explicitly weaponized.

When it comes to apply the category of the AnOther Positioning of Ukraine. The speech is where the AnOther reaches its fullest ceremonial deployment. Putin names "neo-Nazis and Banderites backed by the United States" as the forces Russia is fighting (Putin, 2022). The invocation of Bandera locates the present enemy in the specific historical lineage first introduced in the 2021 article: the OUN-UPA collaborators of 1941–1945 are the historical predecessors of the current Ukrainian government. The AnOther is fully operational: the Donbas fighters who identify with Russia are the "another" which are protected, addressed directly, positioned as the continuation of the wartime generation. The government in Kyiv is "an Other", the one who is to be defeated, de-Nazified and replaced. Putin addresses the Donbas militia directly: "You are defending today what your fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers fought for" (Putin, 2022). The AnOther here does more than position Ukraine dually; it divides the Ukrainian population itself into those who are still "another", the Russian-identifying Donbas residents who remain within the family and those who have become "an Other" by aligning with the neo-Nazi state. The war can therefore be framed as "civil" and "liberatory" simultaneously.

Finally by applying the categories of Historical Erasure of Ukrainian Agency and Identity Foreclosure, both are present in condensed, ceremonial form. Historical Erasure operates through the Russification of 1945 where throughout the speech, the Soviet war effort is framed as "our" victory, "our" sacrifice, "our" people which is a specifically Russian inheritance from which

Ukraine's genuine wartime contribution has been erased. The battle list itself performs this erasure: Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Odesa appear as sites of Russian sacrifice, not as Ukrainian cities where millions of Ukrainians died. Identity Foreclosure is present in the language of the sacred duty by mentioning: "it is our duty to preserve the memory of those who defeated Nazism and entrusted us with being vigilant" (Putin, 2022). To refuse the war would be to betray that entrustment. The moment that most completely answers the central research question occurs near the end of the speech. Putin bows his head to "the memory of the Odessa martyrs who were burned alive in the House of Trade Unions in May 2014" in the same act of mourning as his bow to the dead of the Great Patriotic War (Putin, 2022).

This is all five categories converging in a single ritual moment. Temporal Collapse dissolves the boundary between 1942 and 2014, Historical Erasure places the Odessa dead in the Russian sacrifice tradition, Identity Foreclosure makes mourning them an obligatory national duty, the AnOther identifies them as the "another" who chose the right side and the Preemptive Mandate implies that acting before more such deaths occur is what 1941 demands. The war fought with Ukraine in 1941 and the war against Ukraine in 2022 are the same war within this logic. Ukraine is not on the wrong side because Russia chose to make it so. It is on the wrong side because, within the myth's framework, Ukrainian nationalism always was.

### **3.12. Victory Day Speech, 9 May 2023**

The 2023 Victory Day address marks the 78th anniversary and is delivered more than a year into the full-scale invasion. The speech is analytically important for what it reveals about the durability and adaptation of the war merging framework under the conditions of an ongoing, difficult, and costly military conflict. The rapid victory Putin's military planners had expected did not materialize; the Russian forces had been repelled from Kyiv and suffered significant losses.

On the category of Temporal Collapse, Putin explicitly frames the participants of the "special military operation" as serving their nation "as part of the great patriotic war," dissolving the distinction between 1941-1945 and 2022-2023 entirely (Putin, 2023). The speech also invokes historical figures spanning centuries Dmitry Donskoy, alongside the 1941-1945 generation, extending the temporal frame of the Russian national struggle from the medieval period to the

present. This extended temporal collapse positions the war in Ukraine not as a modern military conflict but as the latest episode in an eternal of national defense.

For the category of Identity Foreclosure, the 2023 speech declares that Russia “will never betray the memory of those who fell for the freedom of the Motherland” and that the present military operation is the direct fulfilment of that obligation (Putin, 2023). The framing positions any political settlement short of Russian objectives as a betrayal of the wartime generation, which means Identity Foreclosure now operates as an argument against ceasefire as much as an argument for war.

Regarding the Historical Erasure of Ukrainian Agency, the speech maintains this category but in a modified form. The neo-Nazi framing of Ukraine is still present, the conflict is described as a struggle against “Nazism in its modern form” but the direct naming of Banderites, which was prominent in the 2022 speech, is less explicit (Putin, 2023). Instead, the wartime sacrifice of Ukrainians is absorbed entirely into the Russian national narrative, with no acknowledgment of a distinct Ukrainian wartime experience. The co-victor position Ukraine once occupied has been fully forgotten.

When applying the category of the AnOther Positioning of Ukraine, shows The Donbas fighters, the “another” pole are still addressed directly as the continuation of the wartime generation. But the broader Ukrainian population, which in 2022 was positioned as a people to be liberated from neo-Nazi governance, is less prominently addressed in 2023. The AnOther’s “Other” pole begins to expand: the threat is increasingly attributed to the “collective West” that backs Ukraine rather than exclusively to the Ukrainian government.

For the Preemptive Mandate category, this speech sustains the Preemptive Mandate but shifts its emphasis from security preemption to moral inevitability. Putin states that “the world is at a turning point” and that a “real war has been unleashed against our Motherland,” positioning Russia as a reactive defender of an ongoing aggression rather than a state that acted preemptively (Putin, 2023). This represents a tactical recalibration: with the war ongoing and the preemptive logic already established, the 2023 speech emphasizes the justice of continued resistance rather than the necessity of the initial strike. The Preemptive Mandate has been now converted from a justification for beginning the war into a justification for continuing it.

### 3.13. Victory Day Speech, 9 May 2024

The 2024 Victory Day address marks the 79th anniversary and is delivered in the context of continued military operations, significant Western weapons supplies to Ukraine, and the approach of the symbolically crucial 80th anniversary. The speech is important for two developments: the explicit link of Russophobia to Nazism and antisemitism within a single formulation, and the clearest pre-2025 statement of the dimension of the Preemptive Mandate.

On the first category of Temporal Collapse, the 2024 speech declares “Victory Days unites all generations. We are going forwards relying on our centuries-old traditions” (Putin, 2024). The formulation “going forwards” is important because, it reframes Temporal Collapse from a backward-looking commemoration into a forward-looking orientation. Russia is not returning to the values of 1945; it is carrying them into the future. The continuity is not nostalgic but directional. Present military action is not an imitation of the wartime past but its natural next chapter.

On the category of Identity Foreclosure, reveals that “Russia has been and will continue to be an indestructible obstacle to Nazism, Russophobia and antisemitism”, linking Russophobia directly to Nazism and antisemitism in the same phrase (Putin, 2024). This formulation performs Identity Foreclosure at a high level where any critique of Russia is equated with fascism and antisemitism, the two most morally discredited positions in the post-war international order.

For the Historical Erasure of Ukrainian Agency, the speech continues the erasure through omission rather than explicit argument. Ukrainian wartime contributions are entirely absent from a speech that celebrates the Soviet victory as an exclusively Russian national achievement. The battle list (Moscow, Leningrad, Stalingrad, Kursk) positions all the defining engagements of the Great Patriotic War as sites of Russian sacrifice, with no acknowledgment that Ukrainians died at and in many of these same locations. The erasure has become structural rather than argumentative: it no longer needs to be stated because it has been institutionally adopted.

When it refer to the category of the AnOther Positioning of Ukraine. the AnOther continues its 2023 recalibration in the 2024 speech. Ukraine is not named directly as the enemy; the adversarial frame remains focused on the “collective West” and those who “support neo-Nazism.”

The AnOther's flexibility is visible in this gradual widening: as Ukrainian resistance proves more durable than expected, the narrative shifts to position the entire Western order not only Ukraine's government as the "Other" that the anti-fascist mission must confront.

For the category of the Preemptive Mandate, Putin states explicitly that "the West would love to forget the lessons of World War II, but we remember", framing Russia's historical memory as a geopolitical asset and Western historical revisionism as an act of aggression (Putin, 2024). The Preemptive Mandate has now expanded fully into its epistemological form: Russia fights not only because the security threat required preemption in 2022 but because the truth of 1945 must be defended against those who seek to erase it. The war's justification has expanded from territorial security to narrative sovereignty.

### **3.14. Victory Day Speech, 9 May 2025**

The Victory Day address of 9 May 2025 poses a different analytical challenge from the earlier documents. The transformation of Ukraine from brother to enemy was completed, in argumentative form by February 2022 and in mythological form by May 2022. Three years later, with the war ongoing, no military resolution in sight, and significant Ukrainian resistance, the question the 2025 speech must answer for the purposes of this thesis is not how the transformation was made but how it is sustained. The five categories, applied to this speech, reveal a significant recalibration: some categories have stabilized, others have evolved, and one which is the Preemptive Mandate, has expanded into a new dimension that the earlier documents did not anticipate. This recalibration is itself an answer to the second subsidiary question: how Ukraine's role shifts across the period, and what that reveals about the evolution of Putin's political identity project.

By applying the category of Temporal Collapse: this category takes a markedly different form in 2025. Where the 2022 speech used direct, urgent present-tense identification, "today, as in the past, you are fighting". The 2025 speech works through the language of intergenerational inheritance: "Our fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers defended the Homeland. They entrusted us with protecting our country, standing united, and firmly upholding our national interests, our thousand-year history, our culture, and traditional values" (Putin, 2025). The textual indicator shifts from present-tense identification to the language. The collapse of temporal distance

between 1941 and the present is no longer performed through urgent equivalence but through the transfer of obligation across generations. The war is no longer an emergency requiring the collapse of historical time; it is a duty that has been handed down like property. This shift answers the second subsidiary question: by 2025, Temporal Collapse has moved from a tool of mobilization to a mode of institutionalization. The distance between 1941 and the present is not collapsed urgently because it no longer needs to be, it has already been institutionally dissolved through three years of continued ceremonial repetition.

Applying the category of Identity Foreclosure: this remains the most consistent category across the corpus, present in every document from 2014 to 2025, and the 2025 speech is no exception. Putin's declaration that Russia "has always stood and will always stand as a barrier against Nazism, Russophobia, and antisemitism" (Putin, 2025) is Identity Foreclosure in its most institutionalized form. The anti-fascist mission is declared permanent and unconditional. A Russia whose identity is constituted this way cannot, within its own logic, cease the war without ceasing to be Russia which is precisely what makes the category analytically important for the third subsidiary question about the relationship between memory, identity, and authoritarian aggression. Identity Foreclosure reveals that the war is not merely justified by the myth; the myth has made the war necessary to the identity. To abandon the war would be to concede the narrative that defines what Russia is.

When it comes to applying the category of Preemptive Mandate: this category undergoes its most significant evolution in the 2025 speech, and it is here that the 2025 document makes its most important contribution to the research question. Putin declares that Russia will "never accept attempts to rewrite the history of the Second World War or justify the executioners while slandering the true victors" (Putin, 2025). This is no longer the security-based preemptive logic of 2022, in which the lesson of 1941 mandated action against a gathering military threat. It is an epistemological claim: the assertion of the exclusive right to determine what the Second World War means, who its heroes were, and who its villains were. The Preemptive Mandate has expanded from a justification for military action to a justification for narrative authority. By 2025, Russia does not only fight for Donbas or for the security of its borders, it fights for the right to determine what history says. Anyone who challenges the Russian historical narrative, either the Western governments, international institutions or Ukrainian cultural policy, is engaged in an act of

historical violence equivalent to the original fascist aggression. War merging has expanded from a tool for justifying invasion to a framework for defending the myth itself. This is the self-referential closure that the 2025 speech uniquely reveals: the myth is now defending its own authority, and the war is partly its instrument.

Finally by applying the category of the AnOther Positioning of Ukraine: this is the category that shows the most visible modulation in 2025. The explicit neo-Nazi framing is largely absent from the 2025 speech. Ukraine is not named as the enemy directly. The adversarial frame has become broader and less specific: the speech identifies as threats those who promote “Russophobia and antisemitism” and those who rewrite wartime history, a formulation capacious enough to encompass Western governments and international institutions without requiring Ukraine to be named explicitly. The AnOther has been recalibrated rather than abandoned. Three years of Ukrainian military resistance have complicated the claim that the Ukrainian population is simply a victim of its own neo-Nazi government. The response is not to abandon the AnOther structure but to shift its primary referent outward, from the specific case of Ukraine to the broader Western order that supports it. Historical Erasure of Ukrainian Agency is similarly muted: the speech does not repeat the historical arguments of the 2021 article or the February 2022 address, because those arguments have been established and no longer need constant restatement. What the 2025 speech contributes to the research question is the evidence that the transformation of Ukraine, once performed, becomes a “self-sustaining matter”. The myth no longer needs to actively reposition Ukraine as the enemy because that repositioning has been consolidated into the background assumptions of Russian political culture. Ukraine is implied as Other by the structure of the discourse, not stated which is the final stage of any successful political transformation.

### **3.15. Victory Day Speech, 9 May 2026**

The 2026 Victory Day address marks the 81st anniversary of the Soviet victory and is the most recent primary source available for this analysis. It is delivered in a politically distinctive context. The war is in its fifth year, a brief ceasefire had been declared over the Victory Day period at the initiative of the United States. North Korean troops had fought alongside Russian forces in the Kursk region, and the parade format had been reduced due to Ukrainian drone threats in the preceding days. Despite these pressures, the speech reveals the war merging framework in a state of confident institutionalization.

The category of Temporal Collapse, shows how the 2026 speech opens by explicitly noting that “this year marks 85 years since the beginning of the Great Patriotic War,” embedding the present moment within the wartime timeline as a direct continuation rather than an anniversary (Putin, 2026). The most analytically significant instance of Temporal Collapse in this speech is the direct address to soldiers participating in the “special military operation” within the same ceremonial breath as the tribute to those who “fell in battle” and “died of hunger in besieged Leningrad” (Putin, 2026). The dead of 1941-1945 and the living soldiers of 2026 are mourned and addressed as a single moral community. Furthermore, the participation of North Korean troops in the parade (noted in the event record) is itself an act of Temporal Collapse at the institutional level, the Soviet wartime anti-fascist coalition is being performatively reconstructed around new partnerships, extending the myth’s temporal logic into the present geopolitical order.

For the category of Identity Foreclosure, Putin declares that “devotion to our Fatherland unites our entire country, all the people of Russia, and preserving the memory of the Great Patriotic War, its true history and its real heroes is a matter of honor for us” (Putin, 2026). The framing of memory preservation as a matter of honor, not merely history or politics, elevates the commitment to the mythological framework to the level of personal and national identity. A Russia that abandons this commitment would cease to be Russia in any meaningful sense. Identity Foreclosure is here at its most total: the war, the myth, and Russian identity have become indistinguishable. Any political path that does not involve the continuation of the military operation, including the ceasefire that the United States was simultaneously promoting is foreclosed not by strategic calculation but by identity obligation.

Applying the category of Historical Erasure of Ukrainian Agency to the 2026 speech performs this category through a striking rhetorical move that is new in the corpus. Putin states that the Soviet people “restored sovereignty to the nations that had capitulated to Nazi Germany and become obedient accomplices to its crimes” (Putin, 2026). The formulation is precise, it portrays the Soviet Union as the liberator of nations that had collaborated with Nazism. Applied to the present, this maps directly onto Ukraine, whose government Putin has consistently framed as the heir of wartime collaborators. By invoking the category of nations that “became obedient accomplices,” the speech implicitly places Ukraine in the position of a liberated collaborator nation, erasing its wartime co-victor status and replacing it with a wartime perpetrator identity that

requires correction rather than commemoration. This is Historical Erasure at its most structurally embedded.

Regarding the AnOther Positioning of Ukraine, The address to “soldiers and commanders participating in the special military operation” alongside veterans of the Great Patriotic War maintains the “another” pole, the Donbas and front-line fighters who align with Russia remain brothers in the anti-fascist mission. The reference to confronting “an aggressive force armed and supported by the entire NATO bloc” (Putin, 2026) performs the “Other” pole’s displacement from Ukraine specifically to the Western order that sustains it. By 2026, Ukraine as a named enemy has been absorbed into the broader adversarial frame of NATO aggression. The AnOther has reached its most advanced recalibration: the brotherly Ukrainian people remain implicitly present as those who could be liberated, while the “Other” is now the entire Western alliance. This widening confirms Preen’s observation that the AnOther’s dual positioning is flexible and continuously renegotiated (Preen, 2023, p. 4).

Finally, applying the category of the Preemptive Mandate the 2026 speech reveals The Preemptive Mandate has by 2026 completed its transformation from a security justification into a civilizational claim. Putin declares that “our cause is just” and that “victory has always been and will always be ours”, a formulation that frames the war not as a response to a specific threat but as the fulfillment of a permanent historical destiny (Putin, 2026). The comparison of the current war with the 1941 invasion, “the Nazis treacherously attacked the Soviet Union... To achieve these criminal aims, forces were assembled from across Europe” (Putin, 2026) and the framing of NATO as the contemporary equivalent of that European force completes the Preemptive Mandate’s expansion. The speech also reveals a new dimension in the Preemptive Mandate: the inclusion of North Korean troops in the parade, framed as an expression of “military brotherhood” forged during the Second World War, performs a reconstruction of the wartime anti-fascist coalition on new terms. The mandate is no longer merely defensive or preemptive, it is constructive, building a new international alignment on the foundation of the 1945 legacy.

## 4. Final Insights

The analysis of fifteen primary sources, through the five analytical categories generates a body of evidence that goes beyond to answer the research question driving this thesis. The attempts to answer the research question are not by a single speech or a single category but by what the corpus as a whole reveals. The transformation of Ukraine and the transformation of the myth are the same process, viewed from two different angles. This section draws a structured discussion of what changed before and after February 2022 across each of the five categories, demonstrating that the invasion did not create the narrative it completed it, and then set it on a new trajectory.

The most important finding from the pre 2022 corpus is that the war merging framework was not assembled quickly or opportunistically in response to the decision to invade. It was built across a whole tradition of repeated ceremonial deployment, and the five categories developed at different rates, in a specific sequence, each one preparing the ground for the next. This sequencing is itself an answer to the research question. The transformation of Ukraine from brother nation to enemy required not a single rhetorical act but a sustained programme of identity construction, historical revision, and narrative repositioning where the cumulative effects were to make the invasion appear, by 2022, as the natural consequence of what Russia already was.

Temporal Collapse was the first category to be fully developed and the most consistently present across the pre 2022 corpus. From the 2014 speech every Victory Day address uses the temporal identification between the wartime generation and the present, through intergenerational inheritance, present-tense commemoration, and the framing of the Great Patriotic War as a living condition of Russian identity rather than a closed historical event. By 2015, the description of the war as “the battle for the future of the entire humanity” extends its temporal reach beyond 1945 into a permanent moral present. By 2020, the Immortal Regiment movement had institutionalized Temporal Collapse at the mass level, with millions of Russians marching with portraits of wartime relatives. The significance of this pre-2022 use is foundational, without a temporal framework that makes the present continuous with 1941-1945, the claim that soldiers fighting in Donbas are doing the same thing as soldiers fighting near Stalingrad would be incoherent. Temporal Collapse was built first because it is the precondition for everything that follows.

Identity Foreclosure was developed alongside Temporal Collapse and became progressively more expansive across the pre 2022 period. In the early speeches 2014 to 2017 it operated as self-definition. Here, Russia was declared the permanent anti-fascist force, the guardian of the post-war order. By 2016, it had acquired an accusatory dimension, and by 2018 it was explicitly linked to Russian military capability. What this progression reveals about the research question is the mechanism through which the transformation of Ukraine begins not with an accusation but with a Russian self-definition so complete that Ukrainian political difference becomes illegible within it. Identity Foreclosure does not initially name Ukraine as the enemy; it constructs the Russian identity from which that naming will eventually follow as a logical consequence.

The development of Historical Erasure of Ukrainian Agency, the AnOther Positioning of Ukraine, and the Preemptive Mandate were slower and more directly dependent on specific political events. Historical Erasure is absent from the Victory Day corpus until 2019-2020, when the denunciation of those who “erect monuments to collaborators” begins to implicitly contest the legitimacy of Ukrainian commemoration. It reaches its fullest pre-invasion development in the July 2021 Unity article, where the claim that Ukrainian national identity has no authentic historical origin is argued explicitly.

The AnOther is absent until 2021, when the first reference to “protecting people in Donbas” establishes the distinction between a brotherly Ukrainian people and a hostile Ukrainian government. The Preemptive Mandate develops from 2016, an implicit warning about repeating historical mistakes, through 2018 and 2019, where the logic of announced warning signs is progressively constructed, to 2021, where the obligation to prevent the repetition of 1941 begins to be stated with operational intent. The sequencing of these three categories reveals important finding. On hand The transformation of Ukraine (From brother to enemy) requires, as structural preconditions, both the erasure of its historical legitimacy and the construction of the dual positioning the AnOther provides. None of them can be activated before sufficient Identity Foreclosure has been established. The pre 2022 corpus shows these preconditions being assembled, in sequence, across eight years.

The post-2022 corpus reveals a war merging framework that is not the same as the one built across 2014-2021. The invasion marks a qualitative transformation in the framework’s function.

For instance, what was previously a programme of identity construction and narrative preparation becomes an operational system of political legitimation for an ongoing war. The five categories are all present across the post-2022 corpus, but their specific calibration and political function shift significantly in response to the changing circumstances of the conflict. What changed after 2022 is not simply intensification but adaptation, evolution, and the emergence of new dimensions within the existing categories.

The most dramatic shift between the pre and post 2022 pool is visible in the Preemptive Mandate category. Before 2022, this category operates primarily in the register of warning and preparation identifying the lesson of 1941, constructing the logic of unheeded warning signs, and positioning Russia as the state that will not repeat Stalin's mistake. In the February 2022 pre-invasion address, the category makes its operational warning. The invasion is declared "a forced, timely and the only correct decision." In the May 2022 Victory Day speech, it is performed ceremonially as established fact. What changes after 2022 is that the Preemptive Mandate acquires a new dimension that did not exist in the pre-invasion corpus. From 2023, Putin's speeches increasingly frame the war not only as a preemptive response to military threat but as a defense of the narrative itself, the right to determine what the Second World War means.

By 2025, Russia's declaration that it will "never accept attempts to rewrite the history of the Second World War" has become a central organising claim. And most recently in 2026, the mandate has expanded further into a civilizational claim: Russia fulfills a permanent historical destiny of confronting the European anti-Russian coalitions, now embodied by NATO. This evolution answers one of the side questions of the thesis directly. What war merging reveals about the relationship between historical memory and authoritarian aggression is that the myth does not merely justify aggression, it generates the political need to sustain the aggression in order to defend the myth. The war and the narrative have become mutually dependent.

The AnOther category shows the most visible recalibration across the pre and post 2022 divide. Before 2022, the category is very basic present only in its earliest form in the 2021 Victory Day speech's reference to protecting people in Donbas. In the May 2022 speech, it reaches peak intensity where Ukraine is simultaneously the brotherly people to be liberated and the neo-Nazi

state to be defeated, with Banderites named directly and the Odessa victims mourned alongside the Great Patriotic War dead.

After 2022, the AnOther shows how the recalibration is driven by the political reality of Ukrainian military resistance. The claim that Ukraine's population is simply a victim of its own neo-Nazi government becomes harder to sustain credibly as that population fights with increasing effectiveness. The response in the 2023, 2024, 2025, and 2026 speeches is not to abandon the AnOther structure but to widen its frame: the "Other" pole shifts from the Ukrainian government specifically to "the collective West" and the "NATO bloc." Ukraine remains an implied Other by structural implication, but the primary adversarial framing has been displaced outward. This recalibration is relevant for the research question because it reveals the flexibility of the AnOther structure. The transformation of Ukraine from brother to enemy does not need to be constantly restated once established. It can become a background assumption, while the foreground is occupied by the broader adversarial framing that encompasses the entire Western order.

Historical Erasure of Ukrainian Agency shows a different path across the pre and post 2022 divide. Before 2022, it builds gradually from absence in 2015 through indirect implication in 2019-2020 to its fullest explicit development in the July 2021 Unity article. After 2022, the direct argumentative form of Historical Erasure largely disappears from the Victory Day speeches. The 2023, 2024, 2025, and 2026 speeches do not repeat the sustained arguments of the Unity article. Instead, Historical Erasure operates through omission and structural embedding. Ukrainian wartime contributions are simply absent from the commemorative narrative, and the victory is celebrated as a specifically Russian national achievement. By 2023, Ukraine's erasure was institutionalized sufficiently that it operates as a background assumption rather than a contested claim.

Temporal Collapse and Identity Foreclosure show the greatest continuity across the pre- and post 2022 divide. These were the earliest categories to be fully developed, and they remain consistently strong across all fourteen documents. What changes after 2022 is not their presence but their function. Before 2022, Temporal Collapse prepared the ground for war merging by making the present continuous with 1941-1945. After 2022, it sustains and legitimizes an ongoing war by placing its soldiers in a direct line of sacred obligation to the wartime generation, the

category shifts from preparatory to justificatory. In a similar way, Identity Foreclosure before 2022 constructed the Russian self-understanding that excluded Ukrainian sovereignty; after 2022, it constructs the Russian self-understanding that excludes ceasefire, compromise, or any political settlement that would require conceding the narrative. The identity that once foreclosed the possibility of accepting Ukrainian statehood now forecloses the possibility of accepting any outcome that does not vindicate the decision to invade.

The discussion of what changed before and after 2022 across the five categories makes it possible to answer the central research question with precision. The analysis reveals that Ukraine's transformation is not a single rhetorical act but a process of cumulative category activation across fifteen documents and twelve years. Temporal Collapse is established first, making the permanent anti-fascist moral framework the operating context of Russian political identity. Identity Foreclosure is next, constructing a Russian identity so complete that Ukrainian political difference becomes an opposite tension. Historical Erasure removes the historical ground on which Ukraine could claim a legitimate role in the shared Soviet victory. The AnOther then provides the structural logic that allows the transformation to be performed without contradiction, Ukraine is simultaneously brother and enemy, in a dual positioning that makes the war appear as liberation rather than aggression. Finally, the Preemptive Mandate converts the historical trauma of 1941 into a mandate for contemporary offensive action.

## Conclusion

Finally, it is important to understand what kind of myth the Great Patriotic War actually is. It is not a myth of origin. It does not tell Russians where they came from, who founded their civilization, or what made them a people in the first place. These are the questions that founding myths answer. What it answers instead is a different and in some ways more powerful question, whether the people will survive. The Great Patriotic War myth is a myth of survival and continuity, a story organized not around creation but around endurance. The moral weight of this narrative derives not from the triumph alone but from the scale of the suffering that preceded it. In this sense, the importance of its nature relies in how it can be used. While a myth of origin refers to a past that is over and settled, a myth of survival is permanently renewable. The existential threat can always return. The nation can always be told that its continued existence requires one more act of collective endurance.

This is what makes the Great Patriotic War myth so uniquely suited to the political uses Putin made of it. The decades of Soviet and post-Soviet institutional commemoration like the parades, the monuments, the school curricula, the Immortal Regiment marches had embedded the survival narrative so deeply in Russian collective identity that by 2000, when Putin came to power in the aftermath of the identity vacuum left by the Soviet collapse, the myth was ready to be activated rather than constructed. Putin did not invent it. What he did, systematically across the years this thesis analyses, was direct it. He gave the survival myth a new enemy, a new threat, and a new preemptive logic. The lesson of June 1941 was gradually reinterpreted across his Victory Day addresses from a source of grief into a mandate for action. The myth that said “we survived because we fought” was reread as “we must fight to survive.” And Ukraine was progressively repositioned within it from co-survivor to obstacle to threat to enemy until February 2022 the invasion could be presented not as a political choice but as the correction of a historical injustice that the survival of the Russian nation required.

The transformation of Ukraine in this narrative was made possible by a specific structural feature of the myth, which is the flexibility about who counts as the enemy. A survival myth does not fix its adversary permanently. It fixes the role, the force of absolute evil that threatens the nation’s existence and leaves the casting open. In Putin’s narrative from 2022 onward, it is filled

by the neo-Nazi Ukrainian government, its Western backers, and the broader NATO alliance. The transition is made possible by what this thesis has called the AnOther positioning of Ukraine: the simultaneous framing of the Ukrainian people as brothers who belong to the Russian family and of the Ukrainian state as the hostile force that has captured them. This dual positioning means the war can always be presented as a war of liberation rather than aggression.

What the post 2022 corpus adds to this picture is perhaps the most important finding of the thesis. The transformation of Ukraine is not the endpoint of the process but its midpoint. The framework that was built to make the invasion possible has, in the years since the invasion began, been rebuilt into a framework that makes its continuation necessary. By 2026, the war merging apparatus does not merely justify the military operation, it also sustains the political identity of the Russian state itself. A state whose identity is constituted by the survival myth cannot understand that the invasion was wrong without changing the narrative that justified it, and cannot change the narrative without conceding the identity it constitutes.

Ukraine was transformed from brother nation to enemy not by a single act of political decision but by the sustained use of a survival myth whose structure made that transformation both possible. The Great Patriotic War myth did not merely accompany the invasion of Ukraine it constituted the conditions under which the invasion could appear. Understanding this is not only an academic contribution. It is a starting point for visualizing why the war is so difficult to end, why the narrative that sustains it is so resistant to empirical challenge, and why the political cost of abandoning it, for the regime that built it, is experienced not as a strategic concession but as an existential threat. Myths of survival do not surrender to counter arguments, they surrender only when the identity they constitute is replaced by something else. What that something else might look like remains an open question. But it begins with understanding precisely what has been built and this thesis has tried to show, in full, how the building was done.

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