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Holy War! The Russian Orthodox Church's Discourse of Legitimization of Russia's Military  
Intervention in Syria

MA thesis

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### *Authorship Declaration*

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## **Abstract**

In late September 2015, Russia officially declared the deployment of military assets to Syria within the frame of a military intervention by invitation in support of the struggling Assad government. Leading up and parallel during the continuation of the intervention, analysts have observed another actor entering the political stage, both domestically in Russia and internationally on various bilateral and multilateral platforms: The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). The Church has significantly engaged in efforts of legitimizing the Russian activities in Syria. On the one hand, these efforts have exceeded any previous public engagement of the post-Soviet Church during times of Russian military activities abroad. During the 2008 Russo-Georgian War and the 2014-continuous Russo-Ukrainian military conflict, the ROC showed self-inflicted restraints on speaking extensively in favor of Russian military action, nor much less to legitimize domestically or internationally to the extent as in the Syrian case. The Church in these situations wanted to avoid spill-over effects of politico-military conflicts into its ecclesiastical-canonical sphere of supervision. The Syrian case, Russia's first major military engagement outside the post-Soviet space laid bare a strong conflation within the Russian state-church-nexus. Church officials have presented a new, complex political discourse under the frame of *Holy War*, ought to legitimize the Russian intervention. This study is set out to analyze how the ROC has constructed this new discourse of *Holy War* and attempts to unravel what it curtails. Paul Chilton's approach of mapping the ontology of political discourse delivers the bases by explaining how political actors construct discourses in construal operations of space metaphors. This approach has been further developed by Piotr Cap for the specific study of discourse space in crisis situations and the subsequent legitimation of political action. In what he calls Proximization, a political actor employs proximization strategies to elicit support for her political action from the target audience by discursively narrowing the space between the threat (Other) and the center (Self). Attempting to map this new discourse, this study conducts a synchronic critical discourse analysis of the political discourse of the ROC in the time from 2015-2021. The textual corpus for the data consists of collected content from the ROC (e.g., press releases, statements, interviews etc.). The corpus is divided by context respectively by the target audience, which is either domestic or international. The data analysis mode relies on a framework developed by Cap: Macro themes, referring to the topical frame of the text, and microstructures, referring to the lexico-grammatical structures holding the linguistics of proximization strategies in spatial, temporal, and axiological terms.

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## Introduction

The conflict in Syria had already been going on for over four years when in summer of 2015 President Bashar al-Assad and the Syrian government faced a dire situation. The government had lost a major proportion of its control over the Syrian territory to multiple combatant groups and seemed to be facing a total loss. While the Russian government had supported the Syrian government already for decades prior to the conflict, it was during the conflict when Kremlin ramped up its effort to keep the Assad government in power: In late summer of 2015, Russia declared that it would intervene militarily in the Syrian conflict by a so-called intervention by invitation from President al-Assad.

While Russian politics stepped up, speaking on justifying their country's engagement in Syria, scholars and political analysts alike have noticed that another actor entered the scene: The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). The ROC, prior to the Russian military intervention and over the course of the intervention, has presented itself as a political actor, both on the domestic political scene, as well as on the international parquet. Though the role of a political actor is not a new one for the ROC, it is the context and the content that have raised interest from the scholarship.

Russia's military intervention is the first significant, large-scale military operation of post-Soviet Russia that is occurring outside the post-Soviet space. During Russia's military conflict with Georgia (2008) and the (continuous) Russo-Ukrainian military conflict since 2014, the ROC has engaged both domestically and internationally by speaking on the matter (Heemskerck 2017; Halbach 2019). However, as Davis (2019), Halbach (2019), and Simons (2016) have elaborated in their research, the ROC, in both cases, limited its expressive support for the military action in Kremlin's favor. That is not to say that the Church did not publicly provide legitimization for the state's endeavors, much rather, the ROC, in both cases, faced *personal* conflicts of interest: It is argued that this apparent self-constraint was due to the fear of spill-over effects from the political conflict into the religious sphere in the ROC's canonical territory (Ibid.), hinting towards a smaller degree of conflation within the state-church-nexus, than assumed by a large share of the scholarship. In the first case, the Russo-Georgian war in 2008, the ROC attempted to champion at least two, somewhat contradictory, narratives. On the one hand, the Church, then under the leadership of Patriarch Alexy II, sided with the official Russian state side and proclaimed that the Georgian government was to blame for the commencement of the hostilities and the subsequent endangerment of Abkhazians and South Ossetians and that the Russian military was in the right to conduct its military operations as a means of servicing

as a protector to the people in the two regions (Heemskerk 2017, p. 2). On the other hand, the ROC's leadership condemned the fratricidal war between two Eastern Orthodox nations and called, in partnership with the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC)<sup>1</sup> for an end to the bloodshedding (Kishkovsky 2008). The Russo-Georgian war had been the first large-scale post-Soviet conflict between two majority-Orthodox nations and both, the ROC and the GOC, were confronted with spill-over effects from the politico-military conflict between two states into the religious-ecclesiastical sphere. The relationship between the ROC and GOC had been based on amicable terms until then, further adding to the conflict of interest of both churches. In fact, instead of aggravating the spill-over effects, the ROC refrained from excessively supporting the war. Much rather, the Church attempted to diffuse the complex situation which had clustered into a politico-military-religious conflict: The ROC, in efforts to keep its relations with the GOC, did not the support and "[...] refused to recognise the attempt at independence of the Abkhazian Orthodox Church" (Simons 2016, p. 6); which in 2008 was still – administratively – under the control of the GOC. Further, the ROC functioned as an ecclesiastical communication channel for indirect contact between Russian and Georgian state after officials due to a break-off of all bilateral diplomatic contact during the conflict (Conroy 2015, pp. 621-622).

In the second case, the continuous conflict in Ukraine since 2014, the ROC has faced a similar spill-over effect of politics into its own sphere of influence. The Maidan-protests in Kyiv symbolizing political change in Ukraine, the Russian annexation of Crimea, and a military conflict in the Donbas, put the Church on the spot and led to several overlapping conflicting interests. On the one hand, the Church, under the patriarch Kirill I, opposed the "pro-Western" political movements which – from the Church's perspective – would entail Ukraine as a whole embracing liberal values, and which would vice-versa mean a departure from the traditional, conservative Orthodox values enshrined in the Church's religious-civilizational understanding of the *Holy Rus* "project" (Davis 2019; Elliott 2022). On the other hand, the Church's stance against the political movement within Ukraine had been accompanied by a fear of "alienating" the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) (Elliott 2022, p. 33); one of three major Orthodox churches in Ukraine at that point in time, and which has held a status of a "self-governing church with rights of wide autonomy" (under the ROC) (ROC 2017, X.1.). The UOC-MP on numerous occasions declared to not wanting to get involved in Ukrainian politics, assumed out of fear of being linked to the aggressor, the Russian state, and

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<sup>1</sup> The GOC is an autocephalous Eastern Orthodox Church.

the Kremlin-supporting Moscow Patriarchate (Shestopalets 2018, pp. 46-51). The UOC-MP however, deviated from its position and criticized the conflict and demanded a quick resolution (Ibid.). The ROC, especially under the chairman of the Department for External Church relations and Patriarch Kirill I. , facing this ambidexterity culminated in a somewhat ambivalent discourse about the situation in Ukraine. Siding with the Russian state, the ROC supported and legitimized the conflict and subsequently Russian military action by constructing an image of a “possessed” Ukraine under Western influence which has attempted to oust Orthodox Christianity from one country of the *Holy Rus* (Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia) (Suslov 2016, pp. 150-151). Appealing to the UOC-MP, and facing the challenges of ecclesiastical Realpolitik, the Church further adopted a conciliatory position on top that condemned the fratricidal conflict between two Orthodox nations of the Holy Rus (Elliot 2020, p. 33-35); and called for a peaceful resolution.

These two brief case descriptions entail two initial subsumptions: First, the ROC has been confronted with encroachment of (geo)political-military matters, in particular conflicts of the Russian state, into its spheres of influence. Second, the ROC has not shied away but rather embraced a political role of supporting the Russian state in its military endeavors by providing legitimization for the cause while attempting to balance its own interests.

This study’s Syrian case deviates from the Georgian and Ukrainian cases in its contextual setting. Syria is not an Orthodox stronghold, with Christianity solely accounting for around 10 per cent of the population in 2010. Further, the ROC does not have canonical oversight within Syria, implying virtually no stakes for the Church per se in the country and reducing the potential of conflict of interest for the ROC in politically getting involved around the Syrian conflict. Subsequently, Adamsky (2019, 2020), Kadri & Akhmetova (2020), and Kyzy (2020) point to the extensive efforts of the Church<sup>2</sup> to support Kremlin’s military intervention in Syria by providing a discourse of legitimization, both at home and abroad; exceeding efforts of the Church as in the Georgian and Ukrainian cases. Most famously, it was Patriarch Kirill I. of the ROC, who in 2015 went public and claimed that Russia is fighting a *Holy War* in Syria (The Times 2015, 01 October). The ROC’s discourse of *Holy War* has been a new and unfolding discourse that has amassed a large output of textual data over the course of the Russian military intervention in Syria. Despite the contemporary literature recognizing the extensive efforts of the Church, there has been a consistent gap that encapsulates the yet mostly unexplored *Holy War* discourse, leaving the large output of textual data mostly untouched. It poses a peculiar

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this study, *Church* refers to the ROC.

research object since the Church purposefully targets two different addressees with its legitimization for the Russian military intervention – a domestic, and an international audience – all while contextualized in a setting that deviates from cases like Georgia and Ukraine. Thus, I derive at the following research question that I am intending to answer in this study: *How does the Russian Orthodox Church construct its discourse of legitimation for the Russian military intervention in Syria domestically and internationally?*

The research objects of this study are not just limited to analyzing to what is being said by the ROC but much rather to map the discursive configuration as a whole.

This study is significant in that it contributes to a deeper understanding of the post-Soviet state-church-nexus. As Petro (2018), as well as Shakhanova and Kratochvil (2020) point out, the contemporary scholarship on the ROC is struggling with pinpointing the current state and developments within the nexus – in particular as to how to articulate the of role the post-Soviet church. Further, concurring with Blitt’s (2021) argumentation, it is necessary to understand the ROC conceptualizations of reality in their constructive power into political discourse. The ROC has engaged with and has been engaged significantly by the public at home and abroad, therefore one ought to understand what the Church is expressing.

In order to approach the research question systematically, this study follows a qualitative, explorative research design in form of a synchronic, critical discourse analysis of the political discourse of the ROC, domestically and abroad, analyzing large corpora of text produced by Church officials.

This thesis comprises the following chapters. Following this introduction, chapter 1 presents the theoretical framework, divided into two parts. Part one elaborates on the main tenets of political discourse theory as well as proximization theory and the respective key concepts. This part lays out, how political actors strategically employ language in order to construct argumentative structures to legitimate<sup>3</sup> political action. Part two takes a look at the actor in focus of this thesis and provides a comprehensive state-of-the-art that identifies and locates the political role of the ROC within the post-Soviet state-church-nexus and curtails the extent of the political agency of the ROC. First, the key findings of the contemporary scholarship on the Church and its political role are summed up. Following this, I present how the Russian state’s extensive treatment of the ROC as a legit *primus inter pares* in post-Soviet Russia enables the Church’s political role enactment in the domestic and international sphere. And lastly, I take a

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<sup>3</sup> In this study, the verbal forms ”to legitimate“, ”to legitimize“, and ”to justify“ are used synonymously and refer to the common understanding of the intransitive version of the verb: “to show that something is right, reasonable, legal, or acceptable”.

look into the Church's own conceptualization and understanding of its political role in post-Soviet Russia, building on the Church's *Social Concept* of 2001.

Chapter 2 defines the methodological framework of my study. I first lay out the research design, followed by the suitability of critical discourse analysis for the goals of my study. After I explain the process of the data selection and the chosen data set. Lastly, I present how the chosen data is analyzed.

Chapter 3 comprises the discourse analysis, divided into two parts. First, I focus on the domestic level of the ROC's discursive legitimization efforts that can be traced to take place in a domestic setting and targeting the domestic audience(s). After that, I analyze the Church's discursive legitimization efforts in identified international settings, targeting the non-domestic audience(s). In a final step, I attempt to present my key findings and draw eventual comparisons between the domestic and the international level.

## 1. Theoretical framework

The study of political discourses of legitimation for military action, in particular preemptive and interventionist military action, has amassed a significant body of literature. One thing that stands out from the majority of studies is the focus on identifying singular discursive legitimation strategies and their effectiveness, rather than going beyond and attempting to holistically map the discourse. This section provides the main theoretical tenets needed to map political discourses of legitimation.

### 1.1. Political discourse

This study is concerned with unraveling the structuring of ROC's political discourses of legitimation of the Russian military intervention in Syria. The concept of discourse in its most basic understanding is defined as a "[...] continuous stretch of [...] especially spoken language larger than a sentence; [...] it is a set of utterances which constitute any recognizable speech event" (Crystal 2006, p. 148). Further, Amaglobeli (2017) describes discourse as "[...] a socially determined entity and specific principles of a speech system according to which the reality is being classified and represented during certain periods of time" (p. 18). The stream of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), around Fairclough (2013, Van Dijk (1993), and Wodak (2004) describes discourse as *social practice*. As such the CDA stream builds upon the Foucauldian (1972) conceptualization of discourse as a historical contingent social system through which meaning, and knowledge are produced as well as organized. This makes discourse in effect material (Adams 2017); productive. Power relations play a critical role in the conceptualization of discourse. As discourse *fixes* meaning and knowledge, discourse represents power relations being exercised (Foucault 1981, p. 53). As Amaglobeli (2017) further puts it bluntly, the fixed meaning: "[...] represents a specific type of social boundary that determines what can be said and what cannot be said regarding certain issues" (p. 17).

What is political discourse and how does the concept extend beyond the base understanding of discourse? The scholarship has been attempting to encircle political discourse to differing degrees. The attempts have thus far struggled to encapsulate the ambiguous nature of the term political discourse (Wilson 2001, p. 398). Holzscheiter (2014) argues the shifting "[...] boundaries of what is considered political discourse [...]" enable potentially infinite considerations for what falls within the understanding of political discourse (pp. 156-157).

This however might lead to an overgeneralization of the concept of political discourse and would entail consequences to the study of discourse as a whole by politicizing any discourse analyses. A less overarching approach is based on delimitation of the subject matter of political discourse (Wilson 2001, pp. 389-390). To delimit in that sense means that when one speaks of political discourse, one is concerned with the following: “[...] formal/informal political contexts and political actors; with, that is, inter alia, politicians, political institutions, governments, political media, and political supporters operating in political environments to achieve political goals” (Ibid., p. 389). This delimitation goes in line with the Habermas’ian (1981) understanding of discourse which can be described as a collection of utterances on important issues of politics and other areas of public interest. While delimitation helps in a general sense to attempt to pinpoint political discourse, it may also entail the issue of depoliticizing and/or excluding discourse which does not fall within the lines laid out but bears to may be political. The most relevant example to underline this notion is given by Liebes & Riebak (1991) who argue in their understanding of political discourse that one may also include informal political engagement within a family and among its members in the broader definition.

Wilson (2001) and Van Dijk (2001) suggest that albeit the scholarship has yet to deliver a clear-cut definition of what it understands to be political discourse, a case-by-case specific delimitation of political discourse is encouraged. In that sense, the researcher is tasked with stating the confines of her study as to what she is concerned with. In the confines of this study, “[...] political discourse refers to a genre that involves political actors speaking publicly” (Reyes 2011, p. 783), both verbally and in written form. Speaking is understood as a speech event by the political actor that is commonly made in public fora in order to attempt to convey her political message to its target audience. The speech event in political discourse is marked by its legitimized character. Legitimation in turn “[...] validates the truth or credibility of the political message (which is the political author’s interpretation of the events)” (Ibid., p. 784). Rojo and Van Dijk (1997) state that this legitimization of the speech event can be traced back to two elements “[...] its authoritative source and formal context” (p. 530). In that sense, the political discourse is embedded in a specific setting. The former element, authoritative source, refers to the political actor’s embedment in society from which a position of power can be derived. This position of power is instilled legally, institutionally, ideologically, or discursively via authorization (Ibid., pp. 530-531). The latter element, formal context, refers to the description of the speech event being situated publicly, in non-informal setting (Ibid.). The effectiveness of the speech event in political discourse is thus reliant on being situated by the

utterance of an authoritative political actor on the one hand, and the formality of the context in which the utterance is taken place. As Rojo and Van Dijk state, the two elements “[...] define the authority of this [political] discourse” (pp. 530-531).

The characteristic of authority of political discourse is the base-understanding and condition of political discourse, and it leads to the concurrence that is shared by many scholars: political discourse is *strategic*. Invoking the previous notion that in political discourse, the political actor conveys her message to the target audience, political discourse is strategic, as in that it shall persuade and influence others. In this sense, political discourse must be seen as strategic as political actors’ interests distort the use of speech events (Chilton 2004, p. 45). In this communicative event or act, the actor gives meaning(s) to facts in a [...] manipulative linguistic strategy which serves concrete (ideological) goals” (Ameglobeli 2017, p. 19). These goals are in a broad sense attempting to rally political support from the target audience for the political endeavor verbalized by the political actor in the speech event. According to Cap (2016) in a reference to Habermas: “[...] political discourse [...] has the continual goal of maximizing the number of shared visions, that is, common conceptions of current reality as well as its desired developments” (p. 2 ). The goal of maximizing *shared visions* among the audience forms the strategic character of political discourse. The political actor builds upon and harnesses the validating authority – stemming from the situated speech event (see above) – to *elicit* the audience’s support for political goals (Reyes 2011, p. 784). Most commonly, the political actor’s latent use of language, in practical terms, is determined to justify political action; or at the bare minimum explain a certain course of political action. That language, or utterance (in Habermas’ terms), in political discourse inherits a claim for overall validity by the political actor. This validity based on 1) speaking understandably, 2) truth, 3) speaking in truth, and 4) normative rightness (Chilton 2004, p. 43) adds to the political actor’s understanding and need for speaking with authority and reveals the strategic assertiveness of political discourse.

Further, the strategic element of political discourse entails strategic functions that appear as markers of persuasive-strategic speech events in political discourse (Chilton & Schäffner 1997, pp. 211-15): These strategic functions are understood as 1) coercion, 2) legitimization and delegitimization, and 3) representation and misrepresentation (Chilton 2004, pp.45-46). They are observable both socially as well as linguistic features. Albeit listed as individual functions, most often they *go to work* intertwined and are often interconnect in practice. Their deployment in political discourse aims to serve a double function: To sustain and support the political actor’s validated authority on the one hand, and to underscore the political message of the speech event.

1) Coercion can be observed in various forms. Most obviously via speech acts that are entailed by sanctioning consequences (e.g. laws, demands), or via control of access to the speech events settings, or most harshly through controlling the language of what is allowed to be said by others and what is forbidden. Less overtly, political actors act coercively through the application of language by agenda and- topic-setting, and presenting assumptions and presuppositions to the hearer/reader that form the political actor's conceptualization of reality that must be accepted – at least temporarily – in order to follow the speech event and gain access to the political discourse (Chilton & Schäffner 1997; Chilton 2004, pp. 45-46).

2) Legitimization and delegitimization can be found on opposite sides of a scale. Legitimization serves the political actor (speaker/Self) on two levels. The Self is invoked as *the* right authoritative persona for the political matter on hand via depiction of positive authority. The political course of action of the Self is underscored with linguistic argumentation that appeals positively to the audience by depictions of benefit. Delegitimization on the hand works in favor of the Self by depiction of the opposing political actor (Other) as negative, including e.g., blame, scape-goating, marginalization, exclusion etc. (Chilton 2004, p. 46; Cap 2017, p. 3).

3) Representation and misrepresentation as strategic function(s) in political discourse refer to *control of information*. Political discourse represents the conception of the political actor and thus information conveyed via language becomes the critical resource. The political actor holds decisive power about information in political discourse on both, a quantitative and qualitative level; meaning the actor weighs in how much (quantitative) of revealed (truthful) information serves the purpose of persuading the audience. Chilton refers to “being economical with the truth” (Chilton 2004, p. 46). On a qualitative level, the actor's conception of reality manifests itself on the level of how truthful information is uttered (Ibid., Cap 2017, pp. 3-4).

Having outlined in the above the tenets of the strategic character of political discourses, I here lay out the working conceptualization of the legitimization subgenre of political discourses. As this study is concerned with a political discourse of legitimization for a political course of action – the Russian state's decision to intervene militarily in the Syrian conflict – by another conceptualized political actor, I extracted two further elements that shape the concept – in addition to the strategic character. First, political discourses of legitimization are based on the premise that: “Legitimacy is a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed systems of norms, values, beliefs and definitions” (Suchman 1995, p. 574). This entails that legitimization is “created subjectively” (p. 574), based on the conceptualization of the rightfulness-perception of a

political actor. Second, following the tenet of subjectivity, “[...] legitimation is accomplished by persuasive or manipulative discourse” (Dorskaya 2002, p. 74).

## 1.2. Political Discourse Ontology: Discourse Space Theory

This thesis' research objective is to attempt to unravel the construction of the ROC's domestic and international discourse of legitimation for the Russian state's military intervention; thus unraveling the ontology of said discourses. As the basic theoretic foundation, David Chilton's (2004) guide to analyzing political discourses informs this attempt. In his influential work, he delivers the key understandings, necessary to approach unraveling the structural layout of political discourses.

In the guide of *Analyzing Political Discourse*, Chilton presents his theoretical concept of *Discourse Space*<sup>4</sup> (DS) which is also referred to as *Discourse Space Theory* (DST). At the very starting point of Chilton's DST, a foundational theory, lays a cognitive understanding of political discourse. The cognitive approach is built upon pragmatics, a sub-discipline in linguistics, which curtails that the process of making sense or giving meaning to an entity is contextualized. This differentiates it from semantics in linguistics where a meaning of an entity is de-contextualized.

The cognitive approach of understanding political discourse in its essence refers to the definition of political discourse "[...] as necessarily a product of individual and collective processes." (Chilton 2004, p. 51); and as such in political discourse, knowledge is stored and generated. When talking about knowledge (be it long-term or short-term), the cognitive approach refers to the outcome of a productive process that takes places in humans, both individually and collectively: The process of generating representations, defined as in making sense or giving meaning to an entity, enabled by the cognitive capability of humans to conceptualize her perception of reality. This process is embedded in a social environment, representing an interplay of the individual and the collective:

"Individuals are matching logical forms, derived interpretively from utterances produced by others, to their mental representation of reality derived via perception, and limited or coloured by their cognitive apparatus. Such mental representations are not arrived at individualistically, either. Collective, intersubjective cross-checking via linguistic and other interaction among individuals contributes to whatever representations are entertained, and circulated, by individuals" (Chilton 2004, p. 50).

This knowledge in form of generated representations (= given meaning) is ultimately expressed linguistically, thus giving what we language a sense of structuring (p. 55). This is best shown and represented by the cognitively generation of frames, metaphors, structural meaning given

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<sup>4</sup> Interchangeably, the term is sometimes coined as *Discourse World*.

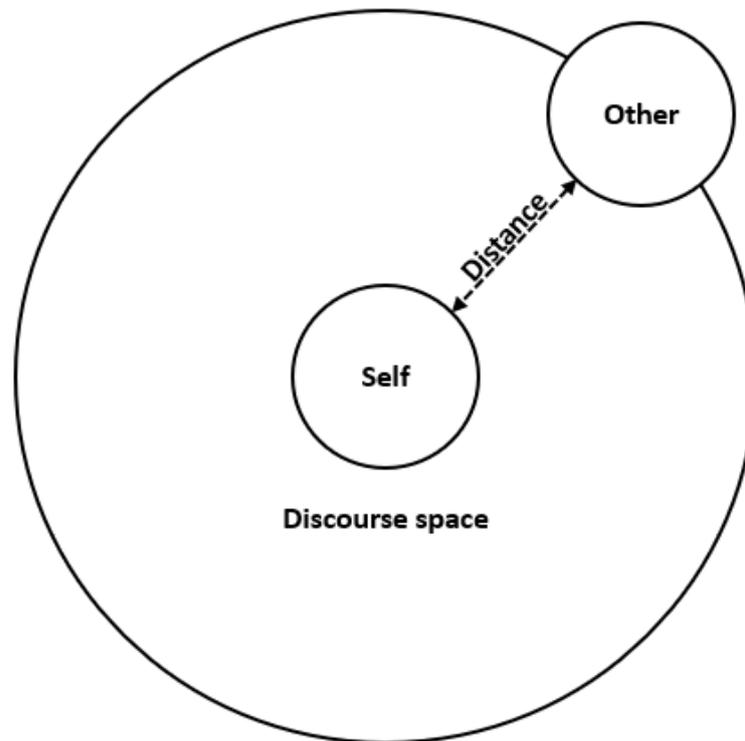
to actors and events.

At this point it useful to reiterate the previously (see 1.1.) introduced key characteristic of political discourse being inherently strategic, in that the political actor aims to maximize the number of shared visions of her conceptualization of reality linguistically. Adding, the understanding of knowledge, the political actor attempts to maximize the number of shared visions, linguistically, and coercively about her generated knowledge.

Subsequently, the cognitive approach leads to an understanding of political discourse as an interplay between cognition and linguistics (Ryan 2015). Humans have the inherent capability of generating knowledge, as in generating conceptualizations of reality on the one hand, and the inherent capability of evoking this knowledge linguistically. In political discourse, the product of this interplay appears in a structured manner.

DST further conceptualizes discourse space, or discourse worlds. According to Chilton (2004) “Discourse consists of coherent chains of propositions which establish a ‘discourse’ ‘world’, or ‘discourse ontology’ – in effect, the ‘reality that is entertained by the speaker [...]” (p. 54). These propositions in political discourse ontology refer in its most basic form to the prototype sentence in the form of subject-verb-object, or as in who-does-what-to-whom (Ibid.). In this sense, propositions invoke roles and referential structures between actors. Most commonly, humans tend to invoke these propositions in terms of space; linguistically, social and, or political relationship become conceptualized via metaphors of space. The emphasize on space in this system of conceptualizing one’s reality finds its roots based in three tenets: 1) a deep territorial instinct of humans, discovered in anthropology, 2) a sophisticatedly developed perception of space in human psychology, and 3) the human linguistic tendency to and choice of presenting ideas, social positions, and social relations in spatial terms (Ryan 2015, p. 9). Thus, DST posits that the speaker establishes the ontology of the discourse by linguistically forming propositions about her conception of reality via the employment of spatial conceptualizations.

Within DST, Chilton developed his *Discourse Space Model* (DSM) which describes the fundamental role of spatial and conceptual representation in political discourse: “Language-in-use [...] consists of utterances generated and interpreted to the situation in which the utterer(s) and interpreter(s) are positioned” (Chilton 2004, p. 56). The DSM is therefore to be understood from a *speaker-centric* perspective. Figure 1 (*Discourse space*) supports the description of the DSM:



**Fig. 1:** *Discourse space* (Cap, 2017, p. 5)<sup>5</sup>

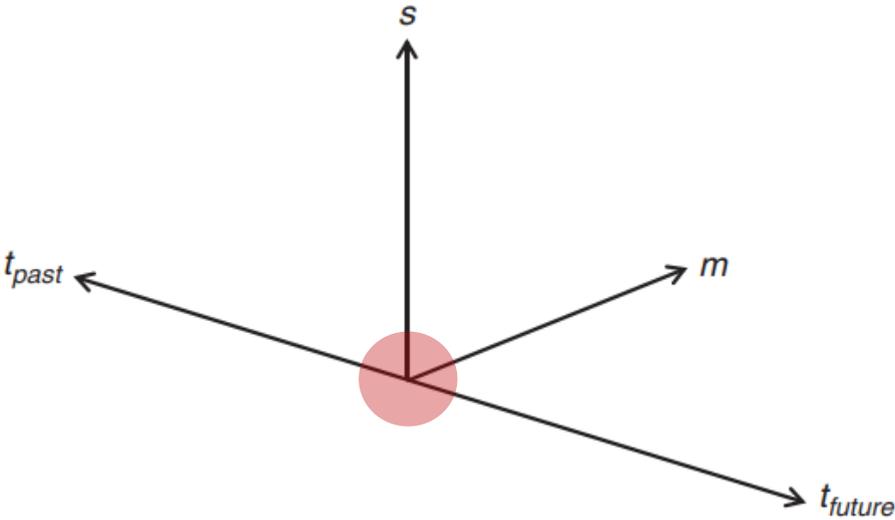
The DSM must be understood as a referential, dichotomous structure based on the notion of a spatial metaphor. At the center of the discourse space of a political discourse, the speaker and/or her hearer are positioned (Self). Speech events, or in linguistic terms *utterances*, spoken, or in linguistic terms *uttered*, conceptualize the *Self*. The *Self* is positioned in the deictic<sup>6</sup> center of the discourse space. In order to centralize or anchor the *Self* in the discourse space, indexical expressions or deictic expression are employed “[...] to perform deixis – that is, to prompt the interpreter to relate the uttered indexical expression to various situational features” (Chilton 2004, p. 56). In essence, this performance of anchoring the *Self* in the center takes place linguistically via propositions of relation. Chilton describes this performance as taking place on

<sup>5</sup> The figure was replicated and simplified by the author.

<sup>6</sup> The term stems from pragmatic linguistics and in the context of the DSM refers to an anchored point in the discourse space to which references are being construed.

three levels: 1) the physical location, 2) the point in time of the speech event, and 3) modal position. The three levels will be referred back to in the next paragraph. Before, one must briefly, once again, transfer the previously established knowledge about the strategic nature of political discourse and what it entails for the understanding of the ontology of political discourse. Chilton (2004) and Cap (2017) argue that the ontology of political discourse is, at minimum, dichotomously structured, creating a referential structure. This refers back to the understanding that in political discourse, the political actor aims at convincing her hearer of her political course of action. The referential structure consists of the Self in the deictic center, and an Other, at distance to the centralized Self. In practical terms, the political actor and her hearer are thus put in the center, in opposition against an opposing non-centralized, peripheral *Other*. One can thus describe the Other as a referential entity, conceptualized by the Self. In linguistical terms, the political actor relies heavily on space metaphors to perform deixis – invoking positioning of the Self and the Other.

DST and the concept of the DSM within ought to provide a systemic approach of analyzing political discourse by mapping the structural layout of the discourse space. As mentioned above, performative acts of deixis via space metaphors take place on three levels: physical, temporal, and modal. This creates a three-axis-model:



**Fig. 2:** *Dimension of deixis* (Chilton, 2004, p. 58; Cap, 2017, p. 6)

The three-axis-model helps to map the discourse referents and their conceptualizations of reality. It must, again, be understood from the political actor’s, the speaker’s point of view. Thus, at the intersection, centrally positioned, the Self is located at the deictic center – the

discourse space's ontology radiates from the center along the axes of space, time, and modality. Reiterating the importance of space in human's cognitive conceptualizations of reality, the three-axis-model follows a simple conceptual rule for mapping: similarity is proximity, and difference is remoteness. This refers to Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor; the more you and I are alike, the closer I will position you to me at the center via performed deixis, and vice-versa, the more you and I are different, the more remote I will position you to me at the center via performed deixis. Deixis is performed through linguistic means in form of deictic words and phrases. In political discourse, the speaker's goal of maximizing the number of her shared conceptualization of reality is challenged with performing deixis that resonates with the hearer's cognitive capabilities. That is, positioning in the discourse space, and in political discourse space in particular, ought to be performed via resonating deictic functions (Chilton 2004, p. 56).

These deictic functions in political discourse space can be *observed* along the three axes of three-axis-model, labeled and referring to space (s), time (t), and modality (m), as well as the center at the intersection of all three axes.

*Space (s)*. The s-axis describes proximity and remoteness to and from the deictic center. The axis closer to the deictic center a positioning along the s-axis is performed, the bigger the proximity. Vice-versa, the farther away from the deictic center, the bigger the remoteness. Most overtly, along the spatial axis, along the spatial axis, "[...] spatial indexical relate to political or geopolitical space" (Chilton 2003, p. 56).<sup>7</sup>

*Time (t)*. The t-axis moves along time, past to future and vice-versa at the end points. Contradictory to intuition, time in the DSM "[...] has a conceptualisation in terms of motions through space, relative distance to or from Self [...]", in practical terms speaking "[...] events, which carry a time of happening as part of their conceptualisation, can be located as 'near' or 'distant' [...]" to or from the Self (Chilton 2003, pp. 57, 59).<sup>8</sup> Vice-versa, the deixis can also be performed in form of the Self moving towards or from a timely event (Lakoff & Johnson 1980).<sup>9</sup> The temporal deixis is marked by political significance of the timely event that resonates, in that it is understandable for the hearer.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> E.g., *here in Russia/in the Middle East/the Western world*.

<sup>8</sup> E.g., *the beginning of a new time is coming*.

<sup>9</sup> E.g., *we are approaching times of difficulty*.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., *after the so-called Arab Spring/before the revolution*

*Modality (m)*<sup>11</sup>. Describes in essence an evaluation of the entities within discourse space along right and wrong, and/or true and false on a scale. The Self at the deictic center is expressed as the being right, and/or true. Deictic functions are performed through the following expressions:

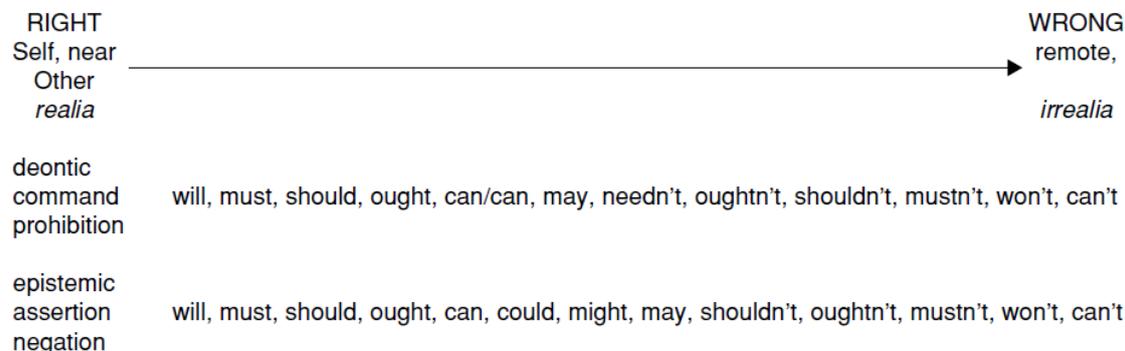


Fig. 3: *The rightness-wrongness scale (Chilton 2004, p. 60)*

More practically, the positioning on the m-axis should be understood in moral, ideological, and normative terms. The conceptualizations of the Self at the deictic center inform the positioning of entities by the speaker via deictic expressions.

*Deictic Center (0 / Self)*. The 0-point at the intersection – referring to the Self (speaker and hearer) – of all three axes is performed in terms of deictic functions, that are, social indexicals. It represents an anchored social center represented by nouns that cognitively resonate and refer to social structures, in combination with pronouns, such as *we/us/our*.<sup>12</sup> Since it is the 0 point and point of reference for all three axes, the deictic center implies the following deictic functions: spatial – *here*; time – *now*; modal – *right*.

Naturally, it must be noted, that obviously the mapping of the ontological structure, or configuration of the political discourse via identification of positions through deictic expressions does not imply virtual forms of measurements. Much rather, however, it is possible to relatively identify as many expressions as possible and compare intradiscursively. Thus, the level of precision of the mapping process rises with the intensity of the analytical process. In sum, Chilton's DST posits that one can map the ontological structure, or configuration, of a political discourse by analyzing the conceptualized representations within the discourse space. The political discourse space is constructed via spatial metaphors in reference to the Self in the deictic center; it is a structure of proximity-remoteness, or center-periphery. The Other, and/or

<sup>11</sup> At this point it must be noted that linguistics differentiates between epistemic modality and deontic modality. For the purpose here it suffices to subsume both under the abovementioned frame.

<sup>12</sup> E.g., *we as a society/us a nation/our world*.

other entities, is positioned by deictic functions in reference to the deictic center along the three dimensions of space, time, and modality.

Political discourse's ontological structure of proximity-remoteness, or center-periphery, is thus the discursive representation of the strategic character of political discourse. The Other, the oppositional political entity, is positioned as remotely as possible while simultaneously the Self, the political actor and her hearer, forms the deictic center. Invoking remoteness to and from the Other, serves to maximize the number of shared visions for a political course of action (Chilton 2004, 2014)

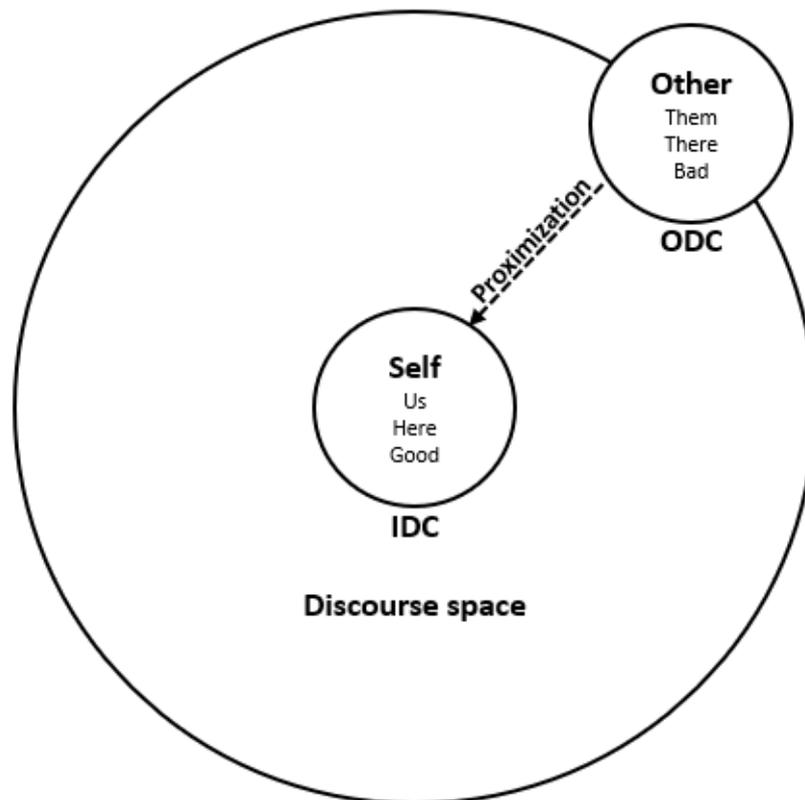
### 1.3. Proximization Theory

The field of study focusing on political discourses of legitimization for political courses of action, has been constantly further developed and theorized. Piotr Cap developed what he calls *Proximization Theory* (PT) which presents a particular construal operation with discourse space. As such, he builds extensively on Chilton's approach of structuring political discourses systematically in order to map political discourses of legitimization. His theoretical approach has thus far found application in the analysis of political discourses on health policies in light of disease spread (Cap 2017; Riaz 2020), environmental policies in the frame of climate change (Cap 2017), cybersecurity policies (Cap2017), immigration and anti-migration policies implemented in the face of refugee movement(s) (Cap 2017), international trade sanctioning (Chen et. al. 2020), global governance (Wang 2019), and lastly political discourses on military action focusing mainly on the Third Gulf War (Cap 2017), Afghanistan and the *War on Terror*.

PT share the essential baseline of Chilton's DST as it also builds upon a cognitive-pragmatic model in the linguistical study of political discourses (Wang 2019, p. 1132). Thus, the focus of Cap's theoretical approach lies on construal operations, a concept originating in cognitive linguistics. This concept of construal operations "[...] aims to showcase how people have different ways of expressing the same event" (Ibid., p. 1333). As outlined above (*see 1.2.*), Chilton's DST and the concept of discourse space is concerned with mapping the configurational structure of a political discourse via unraveling deictic functions and representations that position entities in discourse space. Cap (2017) notes, however, that Chilton's approach of analyzing political discourse, results in a rather static construction of political discourse that lacks the inclusion of the *discursive construal of movement* (p. 16). In that sense, while DST helps in mapping a general outline, a further development is needed. This

need is best represented by political discourses of legitimization that aim to maximize the number of shared visions for political preventive, interventionist, or reactive action in light of *threats*.

Proximization theory posits a configuration of political discourse of legitimization that follows Chilton’s logic of proximity-remoteness, or center-periphery. The Self, comprising the political actor/speaker and the hearer, are described as the inside-deictic-center (IDC). At the remote end, or the periphery, of the discourse space, the Other, *the source-of-threat(s) entity* is positioned, described as the outside-deictic-center (ODC) (Cap 2006, 2008, 2017, 2020). The further development of DST in Proximization theory thus consists of accounting for the discursive construal of movement (Ryan 2015, p. 6) in political discourses of legitimization in light of crisis under conceptualized threats.



**Fig. 4:** *Proximization in discourse space* (Cap, 2017, p. 18)<sup>13</sup>

The discursive remoteness between the IDC and ODC is overcome via proximization (*Fig. 4*). Proximization in PT in its basic understanding can be simply labeled as *bringing closer*, or

<sup>13</sup> The figure was replicated and modified by the author.

“[...] a forced construal operation meant to evoke closeness of the external threat, to solicit legitimization of preventive (or reactive<sup>14</sup>) (political<sup>15</sup>) measures” (Cap 2020, p. 4). In that light, PT concurs with this study’s key premise of the strategic nature of political discourses.

Thus, proximization is to be understood as a discursive strategy: the ODC, source-of-threat entity, which is peripherally positioned in terms of physical distance, temporal distance, and adversarial ideology, is conceptualized as encroaching to the IDC, which holds both, the political speaker seeking legitimization and the hearer. The goal of seeking legitimization from the hearer is attempted by discursively constructing that the encroachment of the ODC towards the IDC, will result in the invasion of the IDC’s space, unless the political speaker’s course of action is implemented. Therein lies the construal operation of negative and personal consequences for the hearer in the IDC eventually caused by the ODC (Cap 2017). “[...] threatening visions and anticipations appeal to the public as long as they are considered *personally* consequential” (Cap 2017, p. 1).

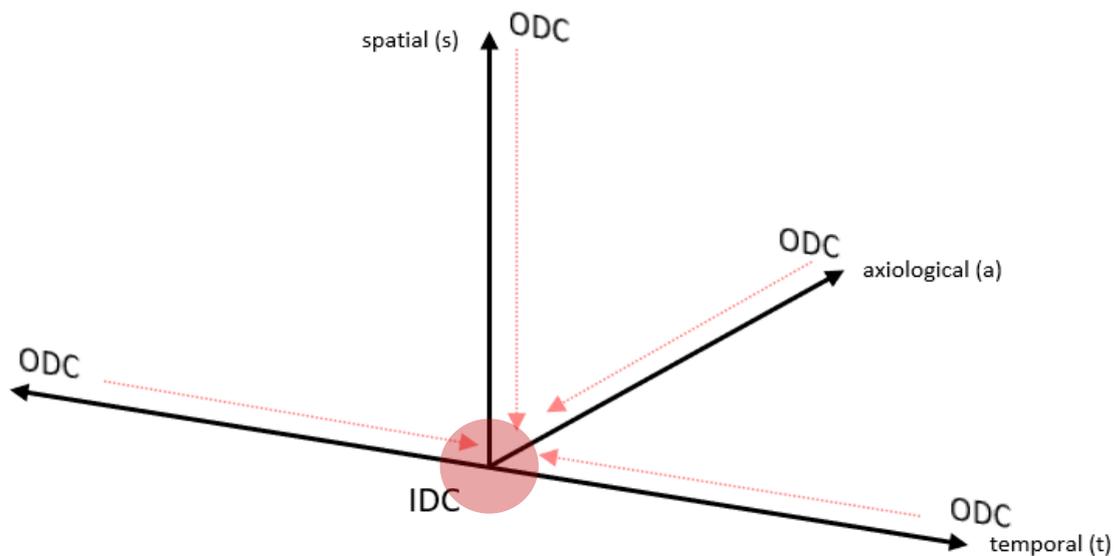
Cap (2010) defines three modes of proximization, that are employed by the speaker to manipulate positioning within the discourse space: spatial, temporal, and axiological proximization (p. 393). In order to track and *measure* modes, a model is proposed, which is called the STA<sup>16</sup> model. The model is in essence a reference to Chilton’s three-axes-model (Fig. 4). The model is a tool for mapping and tracing proximization strategies, both on a macro-topical and micro-lexical level.

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<sup>14</sup> Added by the author.

<sup>15</sup> Added by the author.

<sup>16</sup> S (spatial), T (temporal), A (axiological).



**Fig. 5.:** *STA model* (in reference to Cap 2008, p. 36)<sup>17</sup>

The political speaker, in pursuance of his political goal of gaining approval from the hearer for a political, preemptive, interventionist, or reactive course of action, manipulates the conceptualizations of positioning of the ODC<sup>18</sup> linguistically – via lexical and grammatical deictic choices (Cap 2017, p. 17) – to overcome the remoteness of the ODC. Which choices are made are case-specific, and dependent on constant reevaluation by the speaker regarding their effectiveness of resonance within the hearer. Not all modes must be present simultaneously, as the previously mentioned case studies have shown (*see above*).

Spatial proximization mode can be identified via deictic functions that mark a physical, geographical encroachment of the ODC entity towards the IDC. Spatial proximization is naturally diachronic (Wang 2019, p. 1335).

Temporal proximization mode, of synchronic nature (Wang 2019, p. 1335), conceptualizes that the threat – via deictic functions - of the ODC’s encroachment towards the IDC is “[...] not only imminent, but also momentous, historic, and thus needing immediate response and unique preventive (or interventionist or reactive<sup>19</sup>) measures” (Cap 2010, p. 17)

<sup>17</sup> The figure was replicated and modified by the author.

<sup>18</sup> Naturally, if the speaker recognizes the necessity to manipulate the conceptualization of positioning of the IDC within the discourse space, the IDC can be moved via deictic functions as well.

<sup>19</sup> Added by the author.

Axiological proximization mode, or also called ideological proximization, “[...] involves a construal of a gathering ideological clash between the ‘home values’ of the DS central entities (IDCs) and the alien, antagonistic (ODC) values” (Cap 2017, p. 17). The focus of axiological proximization lays on pointing to the IDC entities that the values of the ODC, once in contact, with the IDC’s space, bear the threat of materializing and negatively, directly influencing the IDC entities.

In sum, one can subsume that PT models a discursive mode of cognitive, construal crisis conceptualization (Cap 2017, p. xi), explaining how discursive manipulation in discourses of legitimization conceptualize remote threats as encroaching and endangering to the audience in order to gain approval for a political course of action.

There are two caveats that should be addressed as a final remark to conclude this section. First, PT (and to a certain extent DST) focuses – at the current stage of its development – solely on discourse production and subsequently neglects the reception and perception of discourse, proximization-marked, products (Kowalski 2018, p. 129). The theoretical framework has not yet been extended sufficiently in order to allow for the study of the recipient of the discourse. This limitation on the focus on the productive level has to be kept in mind.

Second, following the first caveat, there is an increased potential rise in the analyst’s bias by *excluding* the reception of discursive proximization moves. Often, as in this study’s case, the researcher is not a member of the speaker’s target audiences. This can “[...] entail unfamiliarity with the discourse space depicted in the text[s] analyzed, and in turn can result in misunderstanding the text’s content, in particular in terms of presuppositions, metaphors and other implicit meaningful elements (p. 130). Therefore, the analyst’s perception is the only point of view taken into account. Cap (2006) himself addresses furthermore the permanent potential for the analyst’s bias in her interpretation of the speaker’s employment of language, which he sees stemming in the analyst’s own distance to the events the speaker is referring to; the analyst’s interpretation is thus often “[...] occurring in the geopolitical background, often fragmentary or culturally overdetermined in its own right [...] (p. viii).

Subsequently, the task for the analyst is to attempt mitigation of potential biases based on her own positioning (Chilton 2004, p. 40). This requires the analyst to engage extra-carefully meta-discursively with the text(s) to be analyzed by activating “[...] field-specific academic expertise [...]” (Kowalski 2018, p. 130): The more field-specific knowledge the analyst can activate, the more likely she can circumvent bias in her interpretation of the text(s). In essence, this demands

from the analyst to profoundly study the speaker and all that it entails. The following subchapters are this study's analyst's attempt to go beyond his own positioning, geopolitical background, and cultural views.

#### 1.4. The political post-Soviet

The first part of this chapter presented the theoretical tenets of political discourses of legitimation of foreign policy activities by political actors. As laid out, political agency of participation in the political discourses is not just limited to closed group of the state's polity. Instead, it was shown that legitimacy in a state's polity can extend to several other actors. This part takes the key actor of this thesis into the focus and provides a comprehensive state-of-the-art that identifies and locates the political role of the ROC within the post-Soviet state-church-nexus and its views and curtails the extent of the legitimate political agency of the ROC. Understanding the degree of the Church's political capital provides a basis for the degree of credibility that one can ascribe to the Church's *Holy War* discourse.

##### 1.4.1. Contemporary scholarship on the political role of the ROC

The body of literature on the political role of the post-Soviet ROC has been constantly added to by scholars, revealing a growing complexity of the topic. The scholarship here focuses on both, the domestic political role of the Church as well as its political role internationally. In the process of mapping the contemporary literature, it first became clear that scholars struggle from the onset to classify the Church organizational character within the post-Soviet state-church-nexus. There are three prevalent positions, each arguing for a different classification of the Church.

First, Evans (2002) argues that despite the ROC formally enjoying religious freedom, in fact, the Church's intense partnership and cooperation with the state turns the Church into a "semigovernmental organization" (p. 34). He bases his argumentation onto two key points. Evans first points to the ambiguous constellation of post-Soviet Russia's democracy and the activities of governance which complicates drawing clear lines between actors (p. 33). Even though formally separated from the state on the basis of secularity, the Church serves as a de-facto political body of Kremlin. On top, Evans secondly addresses the past of the Church, both under the Soviet rule and during Tsarist Russian times. In the former, the ROC had become infiltrated by Soviet political ideology and turned into political body of the governing regime (p. 33). In the latter, the Tsarist elite took away the Church's autonomy and placed it under its thumb (pp. 33-34). Thus, centuries of subordination and subjugation under the respective ruling system are inherited into the traditions of the Church. This, so Evans, prohibits a classification of the Church as a non-state actor.

Second, Laruelle (2017) classifies the ROC as a *parastate actor* (p. 93). Such actors “[...] operate in the gray zone of the Kremlin’s administration. They support the regime in many respects and develop under its umbrella, but they also dispose of their own autonomy and ideological niche” (p. 92). While some of these parastate actors ought to be located closer to Kremlin than others, for the Church, the latter applies. Laruelle argues that the Church’s ideological agenda does indeed resemble the state’s, but it does not overlap (p. 93). She provides evidence that indicates that the Church does support the regime politically, yet not with a full ideological blank check: When the Kremlin’s activities have threatened to obstruct ecclesiastical activities in the Church’s canonical space, for example during Russian activities in Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (since 2014), the Church revealed its ideological differences with Kremlin (p. 93).

Third, Papkova (2013) refutes the abovementioned classifications and recommends scholars and analysts alike not to overemphasize the significance of the political role of the Church insofar that it would justify classifying the Church as a state actor. It becomes easy to fall into the trap of overestimating the political importance of the ROC in Russia’s political life (Bacon 2013, p. 65). Papkova bases her point on two key arguments. On the one hand, formally, the ROC is not a state church. It does not hold a legal position that would grant it extensive privileges in the public, socio-political life of Russia, a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional country. Thus, per se it does not hold legal advantages above other religions. On the other hand, her research about the Church’s political activities revealed that, in fact, the Church’s activities lack political resonance outside the Orthodox political community in Russia (Papkova 2013, p. 200). Moreover, Papkova points to the “[...] relatively marginal nature of the church to most politicians (in Russia)” (Bacon, p. 65). This leads her to classify the ROC as a non-state organization in post-Soviet Russia with expenditure of political energy.

Evidently, the diverse attempts to pinpoint a political role of the ROC by defining its organizational status in Russia hints to a continuous dissonance among contemporary scholars. Thus, one needs to look beyond these attempts and approach the Church’s role from various angles.

#### 1.4.2. The Russian state’s position on the political role of the ROC

In this section, I elaborate on the Russian state’s position on the political role of the ROC. As presented above, ecclesiastical actors’ political activities’ outreach depends on the enablement via the governing regime.

Officially, Article 14 of the Russian constitution defines the Russian Federation as a secular state:

“1. The Russian Federation is a secular state. No religion may be established as a state or obligatory one (Российская Федерация - светское государство. Никакая религия не может устанавливаться в качестве государственной или обязательной).

2. Religious associations shall be separated from the State and shall be equal before the law (Религиозные объединения отделены от государства и равны перед законом)” (The Constitution of the Russian Federation, 1993).

The wording of the constitution does not give away any hint that the ROC is dedicated to enjoying any specific privileges. Much rather, in this original wording, the Church is intended to appear to be confined to an ecclesiastical role in post-Soviet Russia which is coined by multiethnicity and multiconfessionalism (Papkova 2013). Thus, officially the ROC does not stand above the other main religions in Russia, which are recognized as Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism. This stance has been reiterated by the state on many occasions.

Despite this official line the ROC in post-Soviet Russia can be described as *primus inter pares* (first among equals), in everything except the constitutional foundation of 1993. There has been continuously growing evidence that supports this description which in effect grants the Church a semi-disclosed political agency in Russian domestic and foreign affairs by the Russian state. This evidence can be traced back to at least four fields; to some degree more overt in some cases than in others: (1) Embedment of the ROC in the institutions of the Russian state, (2) Financial support of the Russian state to the ROC, (3) Codification of the ROC as *primus inter pares* in official and legal documents, and (4) Ideological overlap between the Russian state and the ROC.

#### *(1) Embedment of the ROC in the institutions of the Russian state*

The ROC has for many years already enjoyed the privilege of embedment in and close cooperation with several institutions of the Russian state. The most overt cases can be observed in the following:

The first case is the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). In 2003, a joint working group between the MFA and the ROC was established per an agreement (Soroka 2022, p. 17). The working group has the task to coordinate the Church’s foreign actions abroad in accordance with Russia’s foreign policy activities (Blitt 2012, p. 108). Notably, such joint working groups

solely exists between the MFA and the ROC and none of the other larger religions represented in Russia. The cooperation between the two actors has resulted in Church becoming a “diplomatic back-channel” for the official Russian diplomacy (Curanović 2012, p. 20).

Another case that has been gaining particular attention is the cooperation between the Russian Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the Church. Symbolically, the extent of this cooperation has most recently seen its visual culmination in the construction of the Main Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces which opened in 2020 in Moscow (The Guardian 2020, October 20). Kolov (2021) describes the cathedral as a symbol for ongoing “mutual legitimation” processes between the Russian state and the ROC in the framework of military-ecclesiastical cooperation (p. 2); whereas the Church deems the State’s armed forces as vital to defend Orthodoxy and vice-versa the State acknowledges the Church’s representation of Russia’s traditional, civilizational, Orthodox values. This cooperation has in the long run resulted in the formation of a “nexus” between the Church and the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (Adamsky 2019 p. 199; Adamsky 2020). In fact, Adamsky (2019) has thoroughly described how the ROC has been deeply embedded in the complex of the Russian military in form of introduction of “military clergy” within the Russian armed forces in 2009 (p. 97).

In the field of education, there is cooperation between the state and the Church. Shakhanova and Kratochvil (2020) describe how both actors work together in the education of Russia’s youth, agreeing on policies such as the introduction of “Orthodox curricula” in schools (p. 5-6, p. 11). Pertaining to policies in a broader sense, Richters (2013) notes that “In 2009, the Orthodox hierarchy was officially granted the right to preview and comment on legislation that was under consideration in the Duma” (p. 1). Lastly, on the federal level, in the field of culture, the head of the Moscow Patriarchate has been designated to head the Russian Literature and Language Society (Kremlin 2016, May 26). The society was set up by Ministry of Culture “[...] to preserve the leading role of Russian language and literature [...]” (Ibid.)

And lastly, moving down from the ministerial level, the Church has become deeply embedded within the Russian World Foundation (RWF). The RWF, founded in 2007 by a presidential decree by President Putin, embodies the institutionalization of the “Russian World concept” (Kudors 2010, p. 4). The foundation can be described as a “quasi-governmental entity”, which “[...] exhibits close ties to the ROC [...]” (Soroka 2022, p. 17). The Church joined the RWF officially in 2009 (Bremer 2015, p. 43).

## *(2) Financial privileging of the ROC*

Although the ROC in the most recent times laid open its severe, financial status (Chapnin 2020), it has not gone unnoticed that the Church's economic status has proven stable in post-Soviet times. The Russian Federation has never introduced a federal state income-church-tax as is the case in several European countries like Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, and Sweden. On numeral occasions, the Church has demanded for an introduction of such a tax system in Russia to secure and stabilize a permanent inflow of revenue. Officially, the Church, generates income through ecclesiastical retail in form of sales of candles, icons, and literature, as well as well local donations (Kuchma 2016). What value the revenue inflows amount to for the ROC is among the disclosed information about the Church, followed by the unofficial reports about major assets of the Church that generate income – in form of ownership in real estate, hotels, media houses, manufacturing, and mining businesses.

Nevertheless, it has been traced that the Russian state has been financially privileging the ROC in several ways that cannot be accounted for in the state's treatment of other religious institutions. First, via means of direct financial transactions, the Russian state has continuously assisted the Church, with annual financial assistance to the ROC being accounted for in the Russian state budget (Kuchma 2016). Second, although the Church is officially under tax-paying duty in the Russian Federation, the State has carved out tax-relieving *holes* for the Church under which significant tax-paying duties have been lifted, e.g., taxes on buildings, lands that are used by the Church, as well as taxes on any retail generated revenue by the Church (e.g., via the sale of candles, icons, and literature) (Solodovnik 2014, p. 42). And lastly, in 2010, the Russian Federal Assembly passed its Federal Law No. 327-FZ: *On the Transfer to Religious Organizations of Property for Religious Purposes in State or Municipal Ownership* (RG 2010). The law is an approach of post-Russia to come to terms with the Soviet past in which properties and land of the Church were confiscated (Köllner 2018, p. 1087). The new regulation constitutes a restitution of the Church's properties and lands if the Church states its claims. The ROC has extensively taken the opportunity to regain its assets. The law itself was heavily criticized for taking away "public heritage" – as the properties had been repurposed for museums and other cultural institutions - and turning it over to the hands of the Church (Kishkovsky 2010). As a result of the law, the ROC found itself "back" in a position of ownership of major assets. On top, the Russian state assisted to a great extent, financially, with the restauration and continuous maintenance of the properties.

It has been subsumed that the Russian state's financial privileging of the ROC above the other main religious institutions serves as further evidence of the Russian state's view on the ROC as

a strategic ally. Financially carrot-feeding benefits the state in two ways: On the one hand it ensures the Church's operationality, and on the other hand, it lays bare to the Church the advantageous element of operating in close alliance with the state (Köllner 2018).

### *(3) Codification of the ROC as primus inter pares in official and legal documents*

In several of his works, Blitt (2011, 2012, 2021) points to several developments in post-Soviet Russia that describe a blatant, purposeful collapse of the Russia state's constitutional obligation of secularism and state-church separation. In some cases this has taken place more overtly than in others, yet as a results the ROC has been elevated above the other main religions in Russia.

The first key development was the *1997 Law (Закон 1997 года)*, the *Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations (Закон О свободе совести и о религиозных объединениях)*. The law, in essence, is a redefinition of the 1990 law on *Freedom of Worship* which opened up a short period of religious freedom in Russia (Payne 2014, p. 714). As a result of the 1990 law, the *religious market* was liberalized and allowed for the influx of foreign missionary activities in Russia. The ROC reacted to this development by stating its concerns, fearing that Russia was losing its cultural identity as an Orthodox nation to “spiritual colonizers” (p. 714). What followed was a strong lobbying campaign targeting the Yeltsin government led by the ROC. At the core of the campaign was a focus on threats to Russia's *spiritual security*. It was the first time in post-Soviet Russia that the concept of *spiritual security* had been employed politically by the ROC (p. 714-715). Despite the Yeltsin governments continuous lack of support, the law was passed, resulting in significant restrictions for foreign missionary activities in favour for the ROC.

In 2016, two federal bills were adopted in Russia (374-FZ and 375-FZ), often also referred to as the *Yarovaya Law (Закон Яровой)*, named colloquially after one of their main proponents and creator, Irina Yarovaya, Deputy Chairman of the Russian State Duma. The *Yarovaya Law* is in principle a package of laws that amend and extent previous regulations in the sphere of counterterrorism/extremism and public safety measures. While the main proportion of the federal bills is concerned with amending penal provisions regarding terrorist activities as well as amending (mass) surveillance provisions regarding the storage of metadata in Russia, a third major amendment has since gained particular attention. The bills also include anti-evangelism provisions which “[...] present a number of severe restrictions to religious freedom, essentially banning preaching, praying, proselytizing, and disseminating religious materials outside of

officially-designated locations” (Clark 2016). Observers, such as Clark (2016) point to a further conflation of national security and spirituality, built on the same line of argumentation as during the process of the political discussion of the *1997 Law* and other subsequent laws regulating religious activities. The *Yarovaya* federal bills target especially target everyone and every other organization involved in missionary activities, while simultaneously favoring “the hierarchies of faiths well established in Russia (Fagan, 2016); the ROC as well as state-approved Muslim activities in officially approved churches and mosques. In fact, the bills exempt the ROC (Patterson 2016) and despite initial doubts about the feasibility about their translation into the reality of Russia’s *religious market* are viewed as a serious attempt to block the missionary activities, evangelization activities, of non-ROC personnel (and officially recognized representatives of the Islamic faith) (Zylstra 2016).

A third noteworthy development took place in July of 2020 with the ratification of the amendments of the Russian constitution. The commentary on these constitutional changes tends to pay marginal attention to what serves as further evidence on the strengthening of the ROC’s political position in post-Soviet Russia. Both Stoeckl (2020) and Blitt (2021) come to the conclusion that the constitutional amendments of 2020, more or less overtly, have ushered the state-church-nexus into a new dimension of political cooperation. This becomes directly visible by the acceptance and inclusion of a “ROC-wishlist” (Stoeckl 2020) of changes that the Church desired to be taken into the wording of the constitutional text. After intense lobbying and virtually no resistance from Russian lawmakers, the ROC’s proposals found their way into the text presented for approval; at four specific points in particular as Stoeckl (2020) argued thoroughly: In short, the ROC managed to convince lawmakers to include: 1) the mentioning of *God* (Art. 67.1 II) which was proposed by Kirill II (Interfax 2020, February 2), 2) the specification that the Russian language is the langue of the state-forming people of the Russian Federation (Art. 68) introduced by the Head of the Patriarchal Commission for Family Affairs, Archpriest Smirnov (Interfax 2020, February 9); 3) the definition of marriage as a union between man and woman (Art. 72 I w) as publicly demanded by Vice-President of the World Russian People’s Council and member of the ROC, Konstantin Malofeev (Interfax 2020, January 30); and 4) the addition that the government of the Russian Federation shall ensure the preservation of traditional family values (Art. 114 I b) another proposal by the press officer of the ROC, Vladimir Legoyda (RIA 2020, February 14).

While this obviously traceable ROC serves as a strong indicator for the Russian state’s efforts to accommodate the ROC politically, one has to take a look at the amended constitution of 2020

for a second time and spot the less overt passages that point to the ROC's further elevation as a political actor in Russia. In fact, the new passages in the constitution do not per se speak about the ROC as it would entail an intra-constitutional conundrum regarding Russia's secularity. Much rather, the amendments pave the way to *enable* a closer, political state-church cooperation under the cloak of constitutional blessing. Thus, the authors of the amendments have entrenched provisions that stand for "a muscular vision of state sovereignty, a state-sanctioned historical truth, the obligation to protect Russian compatriot rights abroad, and traditional values as a core component of Russian national identity" (Blitt 2021, p. 2). These provisions as such stand out specifically as state-church political cooperation concerning these fields has already taken place. It is here, where one can observe an overlap of views between state and church.

#### *(4) Ideological overlap between the Russian state and the ROC*

Lastly, a fourth area to take into consideration is the ideological overlap<sup>20</sup> between the Russian state and the ROC. This ideological overlap within the state-church-nexus functions as an enabling element for a significant political role of the ROC.

Post-Soviet Russia's politics and ideological drivers have been marked by a strong sense for conservatism. This *conservative turn* in Russian internal as well as external politics is dated to the year 2012 (Robinson 2020), early 2010s. Symbolically, the turn was represented by Putin's reelection to the Russian presidency for his third term. *Content-wise*, the turn was marked by an ideological (conservative) infusion of post-Soviet Russian politics. Albeit political conservatism is attributed different characteristics due to states' individual contexts, in reference to post-Soviet Russia, Ilyin (2016) points to a particular "post-empire nostalgia" (p. 106). This nostalgia in Russia focuses on the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, and is re-awakening a strong emphasis on special elements, or uniqueness of these two *projects* (pp. 104-106). Putin's third term was driven by the concept of the *conservative turn* and the Kremlin has still kept it as a driver for contemporary Russian foreign policies (and domestic). Authors acclaim a pool of reasons that induced the focus on conservatism in the early 2010s, ranging from domestic pressure questioning the legitimacy of the regime (e.g., *Bolotnaya protest wave* 2011 - 2012) (Robinson 2020), to external factors in form of the culminating enmity between

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<sup>20</sup> I purposefully refer to an ideological overlap rather than ideological convergence. Convergence implies that one can tell with certainty that one or another actor (or both) ideologically approximates the other ideologically. However, as of now, there is a lack of empirical evidence that would support this argument of an active process.

Russia and the *West* (Robinson 2020; Curanović 2018). The *conservative turn* comprises a complex set of values and views that encapsulate and inscribe what Russia represents. Notably, these values and views are conceptualized and expressed in direct opposition to an “external Other”, comprised of “the West” (Makarychev & Yatsyk 2014, p. 6). In a broader sense and relating to international relations, the West is ascribed and connected to unipolarity in the international world order, as well as a notion of imperialistic violations of state’s sovereignty. Further, the West represents liberal ideology, best noticed in “hostile” secularity (Haft 2021, p. 963). This has resulted in a West that has rejected its traditional, spiritual, and moral roots (Makarychev & Yatsyk 2014, p. 2). In contrast to this, Russia opposes unipolarity and speaks of a multipolar world, one in which the sovereignty of other state’s is to be respected (Blitt 2021, p. 2). Russia strongly rejects the breaking with traditional roots and instead embraces them, especially regarding spirituality and morality.

Pertaining to the field for foreign policy, and against the backdrop of the conservative, ideological turn, the Russian state and the ROC share an image of Russia’s role in the world that is marked by what Engström (2014) names “messianism” and what Curanović (2018) conceptualizes as a “sense of mission” (p. 254). Both actors associate to Russia a status of an exceptional, Christian nation which entails the moral duty to act internationally when injustice is observed (pp. 254-246). The culmination of this “spiritual-moral” linkage is Russia’s “securitization” (Østbø 2016) per an actual codification of the keyword “spiritual” within Russia’s Russian National Security Strategy(ies) and Russian Foreign Policy Doctrine(s) (Blitt 2011, p. 367). It is especially this shared ideological overlap regarding Russia’s role in the world, that can be observed within the post-Soviet state-church-nexus since the early 2010s, that can be described as enabling a broader political role of the ROC, especially internationally. Blitt (2021) describes that the ROC has long be uttering notions of the ideological overlap in the international sphere that relate to Russia’s exceptional role in the world (pp. 5-6).

#### 1.4.3. The ROC’s own position on its political role

While most assessments of the political role of the ROC within the state-church-nexus in Russia are undertaken from a state-centric perspective, scholars tend to overlook the value of an inquiry into ROC’s own understanding about its role in post-Soviet Russia. A document that can be described as the guiding charter of the post-Soviet ROC can serve as an entry point for understanding the ROC’s self-positioning. It has the name *Bases of the Social Concept of*

*Russian Orthodox Church (Основы социальной концепции Русской Православной Церкви)* (hereafter: Social Concept).

Contrary to what one might assume, the development of the Social Concept was not put in motion by a specific resolution of the ROC's authority – the *Holy Synod (Священный синод Русской православной церкви)*. In fact, the Holy Synod did not partake in putting together and writing the text. Much rather, the Social Concept “[...] is the product of an ad hoc working group of the Moscow Patriarchate” (Hoppe-Kondrikova et. al. 2013, p. 203). It was led by Kirill who was at that point the metropolitan of Smolensk and the head of the External Relations Department of the Moscow Patriarchate.<sup>21</sup> Kirill is credited to be the chief author of this document (Stoeckl 2014, p. 53). As he would later on, in 2009, be elected as the Patriarch following his predecessor, Patriarch Alexey II., the Social Concept is regarded to be the guiding document for the post-Soviet ROC under Patriarchate Kirill.

After the Social Concept had been articulated for and proposed to the Holy Synod in 2000, it was eventually adopted and published in 2001. Despite a rather unofficial, unorthodox working process behind the articulation of the text, the final adoption by the Holy Synod underscored the document's official status. West (2002) describes the Social Concept as being spoken with the voice of the ROC (p. 2), thus being “[...] an authoritative document, reflecting the official position of the Moscow Patriarchate (on relations with state and society)” (p. 4). As a Christian social doctrine (Hoppe-Kondrikova et. al. 2013), it is directed at three respective addressees. Firstly, it speaks directly to the ROC itself and serves a guidance regarding for all synodal institutions<sup>22</sup> (Knox 2003, p. 579; Stoeckl 2014, p. 53). Secondly, it addresses the Russian society including all non-governmental entities. Thirdly, the Social Concept speaks to the Russian state and its entities.

As such, the Social Concept is telling its addressees *who* the post-Soviet ROC is and *how* it positions itself in a secular, post-Soviet Russian state (DECR, 2001), building upon both, historical and theological argumentation structures. It is the section III, labelled *Church and state (Церковь и государство)* that gained particular attention. Here, the ROC “[...] provides a thorough description of the Patriarchate's stance on contemporary church-state relations” (Knox 2003, p. 580). This description is dominantly built upon the concept of *symphonia (симфония)*. Symphonia describes an ideal relationship between the church and the state. Its

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<sup>21</sup> Secular birth name: Vladimir Mikhailovich Gundyayev.

<sup>22</sup> Including all dioceses, monasteries, parishes, clergy, and laity falling under the authority of the ROC within its canonical space.

origins date back to the Byzantine empire, where it was formulated by Emperor Justinian in the sixth century as a legal code that laid out the desired extent of the relationship between church and state (Hoppe-Kondrikova et. al. 2013, p. 204). In its most essential form, *symphonia*, comprises a division of labor (*Funktionsaufteilung*) where the state deals with the worldly sphere (*imperium*) and the church deals with the spiritual sphere (*sacerdotium*); the state protects the church, the church takes up the role of the conscience of state (p. 204; Kostyuk 2005, p. 232). The division of labor, expressed in the concept of *symphonia*, is perpetuated in the Calvinistic description about relationship between the state and the church - *sphere sovereignty*, state and church ought not to intervene in the other's sovereign sphere of competences (Van der Vyver 2001) as they already compose a harmonious symphony (*symphonia*). Thus, in a functioning model under *symphonia*, state and church *together* govern a theocratic, unified sphere.

In the Social Concept the ROC clearly acknowledges that the Church has had been striving for *symphonia* throughout its history in state-church relations.

“The Orthodox tradition has developed an explicit ideal of church-state relations. Since church-state relations are two-way traffic, the above-mentioned ideal could emerge in history only in a state that recognises the Orthodox Church as the greatest people's shrine, in other words, only in an Orthodox state.” (Social Concept 2001, III.4.)

Yet, simultaneously, the Church admits, that all previous attempts had failed and left the ecclesiastical side in a role where it was subordinated and subjugated to the state and became interfered with (Social Concept; III.3-4). This erosion from the concept of *symphonia* was most visible during the time of Tsarist ruling, just to be followed by an ever-dire situation under the Communist rule.

In light of a history of failed attempts to reach the ideal situation of *symphonia*, that left the ROC suffering in a minor role, alongside the frame of secularity in post-Soviet times, the ROC positions itself strategically differently in its Social Concept (Hoppe-Kondrikova et. al. 2013, p. 205). The Church acknowledges that a secular Russia prohibits the status of the ROC as a national church as it would require the Russian state's commitment to be a single-confessional, Orthodox state. (Social Concept 2001, III.4). Since this is formally not the case, the ROC is forced to take another position – in spite of the desired ideal of *symphonia*.

The leading scholarship argues that the Social Concept presents a new political agenda of the ROC in which the Church positions itself as independent from the state (Hoppe-Kondrikova et.

al. 2013, p. 205; Knox 2003, p. 508; Stoeckl 2014, p. 54). Richters (2013) states that the Church's Social Concept "[...] sent a clear signal that the Moscow Patriarchate sought to free itself from the fetters of Orthodox tradition as well as its subordination to the state" (pp. 34-35). Confirmation on this stance was given by Kirill in 2000:

"We are not striving to resurrect the role which the Orthodox Church exercised in the Russian empire. Well before the 1917 Revolution, the Church's best representatives were aware of how the Church's dependence upon the state, the subjugation of her life to the interests of the state, is so detrimental to the Church's own mission. In this sense, the separation of church and state – regardless of which political system is in effect – is unquestionably favourable to the Church, and we will always insist on this fundamental principle."

This commitment to separation and independence from the Russian state could initially lead to the hasty conclusion that the Church decided in 2000 to withdraw itself entirely from Russian politics and solely commit to ecclesiastical activities. However, the Social Concept mitigates and explains that "[...] although Russian Orthodoxy should not be a state religion, it should play a prominent social and political role" (Knox 2003, p. 581):

"The principle of the secular state cannot be understood as implying that religion should be radically forced out of all the spheres of the people's life, that religious associations should be debarred from decision-making on socially significant problems and deprived of the right to evaluate the actions of the authorities. This principle presupposes only a certain division of domains between church and state and their non-interference into each other's affairs" (Social Concept 2001, III.3).

Subsumed under this guiding understanding of the ROC about church-state relations, the Church holds the reservation that it ought to play a political role. This is translated into a list of societal fields where church and state can seek to cooperate:

"The areas of church-state co-operation in the present historical period are as follows:

- a) peacemaking on international, inter-ethnic and civic levels and promoting mutual understanding and co-operation among people, nations and states;
- b) concern for the preservation of morality in society;
- c) spiritual, cultural, moral and patriotic education and formation;
- d) charity and the development of joint social programs;
- e) preservation, restoration and development of the historical and cultural heritage, including concern for the preservation of historical and cultural monuments;
- f) dialogue with governmental bodies of all branches and levels on issues important for the Church and society, including the development of appropriate laws, by-laws, instructions and decisions;

- g) care of the military and law-enforcement workers and their spiritual and moral education;
- h) efforts to prevent crime and care of prisoners;
- i) science and research;
- j) healthcare;
- k) culture and arts;
- l) work of ecclesiastical and secular mass media;
- m) preservation of the environment;
- n) economic activity for the benefit of the Church, state and society;
- o) support for the institution of family, for motherhood and childhood;
- p) opposition to the work of pseudo-religious structures presenting a threat to the individual and society.” (Social Concept 2001, III.8.)

Noteworthy, this extensive list is purposefully followed by the remark that “Church-state cooperation is also possible in some other areas if it contributes to the fulfilment of the tasks enumerated above” (Social Concept 2001, III.8.). These tasks are described as for the benefit of “[...] the Church herself as well as the individual and society” (Social Concept 2001, III.8.). It must also be mentioned that the ROC mentions political struggles, civil war, or aggressive external war, as well as intelligence activities, as fields where the Church cannot support the state. There are two key findings that are to be mentioned about this list: First, the Church transgresses into nearly all fields of the competences of a secular state (Knox 2003, p. 582). And second, the Church’s deliberate choice of vague language allows for an ambiguous extension of the list.

For example, and of particular interest for this thesis’ matter – an analysis of the ROC’s discourse of legitimization for the Russian military intervention in Syria – is the subsequent Chapter VIII. *War and peace* of the Social Concept. In this chapter, the Church details its views on *conflict*, derived from a theological-historical line of argumentation, and lays out its agency pertaining to conflicts. The ROC acknowledges the continuous appearance of war throughout human history and condemns it as “fratricidal hatred” and “evil” (Social Concept, VIII.1.). And although, hostilities shall be avoided, “[...] Christians involuntarily come to face the vital need to take part in various battles”, when “security of their neighbours” is at stake or justice has been “trampled” (Social Concept, VIII.2.). In that sense, the Church believes, both in the means to avoid (sinful) participation in hostilities as a status quo, and the Christian responsibility/duty to protect, not only of oneself but also of one’s “neighbour”. Derived from this Christian duty of protection, the Church refers to the St. Augustinian concept from the fifth century of the *justum bellum*, Just War. The concept outlines under which circumstances the conduct of war is justified. Although developed in the Western Christian theological school in Rome, the ROC concurs that the conceptualization is applicable also to the ROC and evidently it shapes the

Church's approach to war and how actors in modern international relations should engage (Social Concept, VIII.3.): The Church rejects aggressive war and, in reference to the Christian duty of protection, she particularly stresses the defensive war:

“She identifies with the victims of aggression and illegitimate and morally unjustifiable political pressure from outside. The use of military force is believed by the Church to be the last resort in defence against armed aggression from other states. This defence can also be carried out on the basis of assistance by a state which is not an immediate object of attack at the one attacked.” (Social Concept, XV.1.)

Furthermore, pertaining to the subject of war, the Church subsumes for itself three functions. First, the authority to publicly speak on the matter of war and judge on the rightfulness of engaging in a war (Social Concept, VIII.1.-VIII.3.). Second, the Church engages actively in the role of a) peacemaker by seeking “[...] to carry out her peace service both on national and international scale, trying to help resolve various contradictions and bring nations, ethnic groups, governments and political forces to harmony”, and b) by assuming the role of a peacekeeper by averting “propaganda of war and violence” (Social Concept, VIII.5.). And third, the Church takes up the function of a pastoral and spiritual patronage for the armed forces of the military: “Orthodox pastors, both those who perform special service in the army and those who serve in monasteries and parishes, are called to nourish the military strenuously, taking care of their moral condition” (Social Concept, VIII.4.). This care for the military stems of the Church's “profound respect” for its Orthodox “Christ-loving soldiers” who protect the “Holy Church”, “their land”, and “their friends”, and “their neighbours” (Social Concept, VIII.2.).

In sum, the ROC's Social Concept reveals that the Church has developed a clear understanding of its position in contemporary Russia. This position is the result of the Church's understanding of ecclesiastical responsibilities, a history of traumatic dependence and subordination to secular authorities throughout church-state relations, and lastly the challenges of secularity that prohibit the Church to be the nation's church and disable the full achievement of *symphonia*. This does not translate however into the Church's departure from politics and its sense of responsibility to play an important role in society. In fact, the ROC seeks to integrate itself into politics on its own terms, thus bridging the gap to the secular authorities created by secularity (Knox 2003, p. 582): cooperation without subordination. This stance, as laid out in the Social Concept at the beginning of the 2000s, represents the prevalence of traditionalist ecclesiastical forces within the ROC. Contrary to the fundamentalist forces, that seek an intensification of church-state relations, and contrary to liberal strands within the church, that desire a further distancing of the Church from the state, the traditional middle ground path has dominated. The commitment

to this positioning has been up until now – at minimum verbally – vocalized consistently by the Church authorities in public (Petrenko 2012, p. 6; Halbach 2019, p. 7). Most notably, the main author of the Social Concept and important figure of the Church, Patriarch Kirill delivers constant reminders to that the ROC is political on its own merits and by its own choice for the benefit of the Church, the nation, the society, and the individual.

## 2. Methodology

Reiterating this study's guiding research questions: How does the Russian Orthodox Church construct its discourse(s) of legitimation for the Russian military intervention in Syria domestically and internationally; a corresponding research design was developed that goes in line with a) attempting to answer the research question, and b) meet the research aim of unraveling the ontological structure(s) of stated discourse(s). Thus, this study is designed as an qualitative, explorative single-case study, divided into two parts, analyzing the political discourses of the ROC. The discourse analysis focuses on the discourses from a synchronic point of view, meaning that development and change over time, referring to a diachronic design, are not attempted to be observed. Much rather, in reference to abovementioned research question and research aims, the textual corpora – domestic and international – are taken as static in order to map to unravel the ontology of the discourse(s).

### 2.1. Data selection and data set

Identifying and retrieving a meaningful data set for this study's analysis requires a well-defined and systematic approach with clearly defined parameters. Since this study is concerned with the official discourse of the ROC, I identified two main sources from where the data has been retrieved: 1) The online archive embedded in the website *Russian Orthodox Church – Official website of the Moscow Patriarchate* (*Русская Православная Церковь - Официальный сайт Московского Патриархата*), and 2) the online archive embedded in the website *Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate* (*Отдел внешних церковных связей Московского Патриархата*).<sup>23</sup>

The post-Soviet ROC is an institutionalized organization, resembling any other public, state-affiliated institution in Russia. As a result of the institutional character, the ROC's organigram reflects the logic of hierarchy (Curanović, 2019, p. 256). This hierarchical design shapes the ROC's approach to its public appearance: only dedicated spokespersons, representing their respective department, engage in addressing the public on subjects in accordance with the official positions of the Holy Synod. Excessive lone wolf behavior pertaining to the field of public relations has, in the past, been strictly penalized by the ROC. The most remarkable case is the case of Vsevolod Chaplin, former chairman of the synodal department for relations

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<sup>23</sup> The websites are available in several language versions. Based on my language competences, I retrieved the data published in German, English, and Russian language.

between the Church and society, who was released from all of his positions in 2015 after his public statements went against the official public relations pretexts of the ROC (Delovaya Gazeta, 2015).

In Critical Discourse Studies, the reliance on Corpus Linguistics' approaches to the systematic collection data and pre-analysis of same data has proven its worth for the study of discourses (Haider, 2019). The compiled data is simply referred to as corpus. Corpus can be defined as “a collection of naturally occurring examples of language, consisting of anything from a few sentences to a set of written texts [...], which have been collected for linguistic study” (Ibid., p. 92; Hunston, 2002, p. 2).

The compilation of the corpus here followed the hereafter stated process:

First, a case-adequate time frame for the data was delimited. The period chosen for the data selection corresponds, approximately, with the time frame of the Russian military intervention in Syria. The official declaration about the beginning of military operations in Syria within the framework of an “intervention by invitation” went public on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2015 (Roth, Murphy & Ryan, 2015). However, experts and journalists observed a significant military build-up prior to the official declaration. As a matter of course, efforts of justification for particularly large-scale military operations can be historically observed in the time before the actual event. Derived from the existing literature and previous studies, I opted to follow the scholars' recommendations to extend the analysis' period; to the beginning of the year 2015. This step ensures that my study maximizes the approximation of full coverage of the ROC's discourses pertaining to the Russian military intervention in Syria. Thus, the chosen period is 01.01.2015 – 31.12.2021.

Second, in a first step, an initial corpus was obtained. The online archives that I stated above allow for individual search commands. Entering the time frame and the key word *Syria*<sup>24</sup>, resulted in a total of 755 elements. The elements obtained in this initial corpus comprise the following, published by the ROC's public relations departments: press releases, speech protocols, interview transcriptions, and opinion pieces. The elements were downloaded and put together in a single file. A second step required the reduction of the corpus for two reasons: First, feasibility within the constraints of a master's thesis, and second, exclusion of text

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<sup>24</sup> Respectively, I entered the key word *Сирия* for results in Russian language, and *Syrien* for results in German language. Cross-checking, by changing the key word and trying combinations, was done but did not lead to the discovery of new materials. The built-in search engine of the websites did not allow for the usage of Boolean-type search operators.

elements that can be identified as non-informing to answer the research question (Reisigl & Wodak, 2017, p. 96). Not every text that was obtained during the initial text collection process necessarily holds significant content. For example, a lot of documents that were picked up in the initial text collection round include the entered key words, yet do not thematically speak on the Russian military intervention, directly or indirectly. For a systematic reduction of the initial corpus, I employed a tool text mining tool: *WordStat9*. The software enables a sophisticated pre-analysis of a textual corpus by automatically highlighting text passages that pertain to the research topic (inserted manually). The reduction resulted in a significantly more comprised, yet content-worthy corpus.

In a third and final step, the corpus was divided into two corpora, pertaining to the research design; a *domestic corpus* and an *international corpus*. As categorization criterium, the context of the speech event was chosen; e.g., an interview given by an official of the Church on a Russian national TV-channel targeting a domestic audience would inform the decision to add the interview transcript text to the *domestic corpus*. Vice-versa, a speech held by an official of the Church at an international organization's forum would inform the decision to add the speech's transcript text to the *international corpus*. When it comes to the categorization of the data into the categories *domestic* and *international*, one point that needs to be addressed is the challenge of drawing a clear line between *domestic* and *international* discourse. These discourses are not restricted to specific audiences, even though political actors target on a normal basis predetermined audiences who they want to convince. Nevertheless, domestic audiences can access, perceive, and be informed by the international discourse, vice-versa, international audiences can access, perceive, and be informed by the domestic discourse (Bērziņa, 2015, p. 3). While this access to the discourses is to be acknowledged, it does not diminish the reasoning behind the categorization decision for research design in this study. The full list of selected textual data that I have analyzed can be retrieved from *Annex 1: Selected textual data (domestic)*, and *Annex 2: Selected textual data (international)*.

## 2.2. Data analysis mode

The stream of political discourse analysis that falls under the broader umbrella of Critical Discourse Analysis has produced an extensive number of studies in which a diverse range of method approaches has been applied for analyzing the discourse(s) of interest. As it is, CDA has come under criticism for a lack of guidance for researchers on how to work with

accumulated corpora of text to study, leaving a general caveat in terms of reliability. However, the pretense of any research project should be the traceability of any step throughout the analysis. In that sense, anyone aiming to replicate this study should be able to approximate similar results as much closely as possible. In order to account for this pretense, I rely in this study on Cap's (2013; 2017) proposed mode for data analysis – with singular adjustment. In addition to Cap's focus on the analysis on the so-called micro-level, referring to lexico-grammatical features of the corpora, I will also take into consideration the macro-level.

Levels of discourse pertain to different focal points in CDA. Van Dijk (2008) introduced a scheme for analysis that looks at the superstructures, macrostructures, and microstructures of the discourse of interest. While superstructures refer to how the structure of a discourse's text schemes, macrostructures pertain to topic's and thematic of the discourse's text, and microstructures are formed by the lexico-grammatical elements of discourse's text (Huda et. al. 2020, P. 153).

Cap's mode for data analysis is focused on the microstructures of the textual corpora of a political discourse of interest. In order to identify the patterns and structure of the time-spatial-axes (T/S), the lexico-grammatical analysis takes particular focus on the following:

- “(1) Noun phrases (NPs) conceptualized as elements of deictic center (IDCs);
  - (2) NPs conceptualized as elements outside the deictic center (OCDs);
  - (3) Verb phrases (VPs) of motion and directionality conceptualized together as indicators of movement of ODCs towards the deictic center and vice versa;
  - (4) VPs of action conceptualized as indicators of contact between ODCs and IDCs;
  - (5) NPs expressing abstract notions conceptualized as anticipations of potential contact between ODCs and IDCs;
  - (6) NPs expressing abstract notions conceptualized as effects of actual contact between ODCs and IDCs” (Cap 2010, pp. 122-123);
- (1)-(6) takes into focus both entire phrases as well as lemmata (sg.: lemma<sup>25</sup>) (Cap 2010, pp. 122-123)

In order to identify the patterns and structure of the axiological (A), the lexico-grammatical analysis takes particular focus on the following:

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<sup>25</sup> Lemma: The canonical form of an inflected word; e.g., the form of the word as it is commonly known (headword)

“(1) Noun phrases (NPs) expressing abstract notions conceptualized as values and/or value sets/ideologies of IDCs;

(2) Noun phrases (NPs) expressing abstract notions conceptualized as values and/or value sets/ideologies of ODCs;

(3) NPs expressing abstract notions conceptualized as effects of IDC-ODC physical contact (conflict)” (Cap 2010, p. 133);

(1)-(3) takes into focus both entire phrases as well as lemmata.

Visibly, the focus on micro-level is on identifying deictic functions that serve as markers for the three modes of proximization.

In addition, I supplement Cap’s data analysis mode by additionally taking into consideration macrostructures, that is the general topic or theme of the text(s) analyzed. This addition adds to contextualize the analysis of the proximization strategies.

### 3. Analysis

The following chapter comprises the analysis of the ROC's official domestic discourse and international discourse.

The ROC in the time frame from 01.01.2015 until 31.12.2021 spoke on a series of occasions within a domestic setting on the events pertaining to Syria. The two most vocal voices linked to the Church were those of Patriarch Kirill I of the Moscow Patriarchate and all Rus' followed by Metropolitan of Volokolamsk Hilarion, the Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate. On several occasions, a third voice stood out, Vladimir Legoyda, the Acting Head of the Press Service of the Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus' (e.g., Patriarchia.ru 2015, December 29; 2016, February 20; 2016, March 11). Other figures briefly spoke publicly, e.g., Bishop Tikhon of Yegoyevsk (Patriarchia.ru 2016, February 19)<sup>26</sup>, yet it has been this *troika* of spokespersons that expressed the Church's discourse: Kirill, Hilarion, and Legoyda.

The vast majority of speech events of the ROC is embedded in press statements and press releases by the DECR. Additionally, speech events of the Church comprise speech transcripts of either the Patriarch Kirill I, or Metropolitan Hilarion. The latter has further contributed to the expression of the Church in either written (or spoken) form in position papers (read out). The most expressive speech events of the Church took place in of interviews with either one of the two. These interviews were aired on the Russian channels "Rossiya-1", "Rossiya-24", "Soyuz", and took place on important, religious days, such as Orthodox Christmas (e.g., Patriarchia.ru 2015, January 7; 2016, January 7; 2017, January 7).

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<sup>26</sup> Another public figure of that spoke on numerous occasions on behalf of the ROC was Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin who held the post of the Head of the Synodal Department for relations between the Church and Society from 2009 until 2015. In late December of 2015 he was, however, removed from his position (Lenta.ru 2015, December 24).

### 3.1. Domestic expression of the *Holy War* discourse

#### Macro-level and micro-level empirics (1)

<p>ODC-1 (threat): “<b>terrorism</b>”          Derived from macro themes (examples):          “The Russian military operation in Syria is designed to stop extremists who are ready to destroy innocent people and, first of all, Middle Eastern Christians” (Patriarchia.ru 2018, April 23)          “Russia's preventive actions in Syria are needed, including so that we do not have to fight in Sevastopol and Kaliningrad” (Patriarchia.ru 2020, February 21);          “Today, it will not be possible to hide from international terror behind the talk that we do not need to participate in certain events that take place far from our borders. Today, world processes will affect every person if the legitimate government that he has elected does not participate in these processes. It is impossible today to say that this or that side, even as large as Russia or other countries of the Orthodox world, will be safe if they hide behind a palisade of state borders, economic or political models” (Patriarchia.ru 2015, October 30);</p>	
<b>Spatial-temporal proximization</b>	
Category	Lemma & phrases
1. Noun phrases conceptualized as elements of the IDC	<p><b>Compartment-1</b>          “Syria” / “Middle East” / “North Africa and Middle East” / “Levant” / “Iraq” / “Yemen” / “Libya” / “Tunisia” / “Egypt”</p> <p><b>Compartment-2</b>          “Christians” / “our Christian brothers and sisters” / “our brothers and sisters” / “innocents” / “believers” / “civilization”</p> <p><b>Compartment-4</b>          “Russia” / “Russian Federation” / “our home” / “Caucasus” / “Eurasia” / “our neighbours” / “our neighborhood”</p> <p><b>Compartment-5</b>          “Russia” / “Russian state” / “Russian officials” / “Russian government” / “President Vladimir Putin” / “Minister for Foreign Affairs” / “Russian armed forces” / “Russian military” / “Russian aviation forces”</p>
2. Noun phrases conceptualized as elements of the ODC	“ISIS” / “IS” / “Daesh” / “Islamic terrorist” / “terrorist” / “ideologist” / “extremist” / “fundamentalist” / “persecutor” / “killer” / “bandit” / “criminal”
3. Verb phrases of motion and directionality as indicators of movement of ODC towards IDC and vice versa	<p><b>ODC-1 -&gt; Compartment-1 &amp; Compartment-2</b>          “has encroach/encroached/encroaches” / “has overrun/overran/overruns” / “has invaded/invaded/invades” / “has spread into/to/spread into/to/spreads into/to” / “has reach/reached” / “has come/came” / “has arrived/arrived”</p> <p><b>ODC-1 -&gt; Compartment-4</b></p>

	<p>“might come” / “will spread” / “will invade” / “could reach” / “can sweep into”</p> <p><b>Compartment-5 -&gt; ODC-1</b>  “force out” / “expel” / “push out” / “remove”</p>
4. Verb phrases of action conceptualized as indicators of contact between ODC IDC	<p><b>ODC-1 -&gt; Compartment-1 &amp; Compartment-2</b>  “destroy” / “kill” / “expel” / “persecute” / “erase” / “eradicate” / “fight” / “clash”</p> <p><b>ODC-1 -&gt; Compartment-4</b>  “could lead to” “harm” / “threaten” / “attack”</p> <p><b>Compartment-5 -&gt; ODC-1</b>  “fight” / “combat” / “destroy” / “remove” / “confront”</p>
5. Noun phrases expressing abstract notions conceptualized as anticipations of potential contact between ODC and IDC	<p><b>ODC-1 -&gt; Compartment-1 &amp; Compartment-2</b>  Non applicable</p> <p><b>ODC-1 -&gt; Compartment-4</b>  “threat” / “danger” / “endangerment”</p> <p><b>Compartment-5 -&gt; ODC-1</b>  “removal” / “riddance” / “destruction”</p>
6. Noun phrases expressing abstract notions conceptualized as effects of actual contact between ODC and IDC	<p><b>ODC-1 -&gt; Compartment-1 &amp; Compartment-2</b>  “genocide” / “death” / “terror” / “mass atrocities” / “destruction” / “persecution” / “eradication” / “exodus” / “horror” / “fear” / “violence” / “crimes” / “tragedy of historic proportions” / “monstrous execution” / “violation of fundamental rights”</p> <p><b>ODC-1 -&gt; Compartment-4</b>  “death” / “violence” / “fear” / “terror” / “infection with a disease” / “plague-like spread of extremism”</p> <p><b>Compartment-5 -&gt; ODC-1</b>  “removal” / “riddance” / “destruction”</p>
ODC (threat): “ <b>terrorism</b> ”	
<b>Axiological proximization</b>	
Category	Lemma & phrases
1. Noun phrases expressing abstract notions conceptualized as values and/or value sets/ideologies of IDC	<p><b>Compartment-1</b>  “cradle of Christianity” / “peace” / “faith” / “civilization” / “family” / “historic roots” / “freedom”</p> <p><b>Compartment-2</b>  “peaceful people” / “faithful people” / “innocence” / “ancient traditions”</p> <p><b>Compartment-4</b></p>

	<p>“Christianity” / “morality” / “civilization” / “unity” / neighborhood”</p> <p><b>Compartment-5</b>  “duty” / “mission” / “protection” / “morality” / “responsibility” / “the good” / “love”</p>
<p>2. Noun phrases expressing abstract notions conceptualized as values and/or value sets/ideologies of ODC</p>	<p>“terrorism” / “evil” / “hatred” / “fundamentalism” / “extremism” / “phobia” / “Christianophobia” / “black plague” / “absolutism”</p>
<p>3. NPs expressing abstract notions conceptualized as effects of IDC-ODC physical contact (conflict)</p>	<p><b>ODC-1 -&gt; Compartment-1 &amp; Compartment-2</b>  “genocide” / “death” / “terror” / “mass atrocities” / “destruction” / “persecution” / “eradication” / “exodus” / “horror” / “fear” / “violence” / “crimes” / “tragedy of historic proportions” / “monstrous execution” / “violation of fundamental rights”</p> <p><b>ODC-1 -&gt; Compartment-4</b>  “fear” / “terror” / “infection with a disease” / “plague-like spread of extremism”</p> <p><b>Compartment-5 -&gt; ODC-1</b>  “fight for good” / “fight against evil” / “justice” / “end to war” / “return of peace” /</p>

## Macro-level and micro-level empirics (2)

<p>ODC-2 (threat): “<b>Arab Spring / Destabilization</b>”          Derived from macro theme (examples):          “The leaders of these countries were declared dictators, then with the help of external force they were overthrown”, “Did a government then come to power, which, as you say, “keeps the balance”? Nothing like this. These countries are in chaos [...] and the leaders of the Christian Churches in Syria - they all unanimously say that, firstly, all their hope is now in Russia, and besides her, they do not see any other force capable of keeping them from the final fall into the abyss. (Patriarchia.ru 2016, November 10);          “The Deputy Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations recalled that the result of the "Arab Spring" in the Middle East was not the democratization of society at all, but the destruction of states and rampant crime” (Patriarchia.ru 2016, December 8);          “It was the Russian military who managed to extinguish the conflict that was unleashed, including as a result of the actions of the United States of America” (Patriarchia.ru 2019, November 8)</p>	
<p><b>Spatial-temporal proximization</b></p>	
Category	Lemma & phrases
1. Noun phrases conceptualized as elements of the IDC	<p><b>Compartment-1</b>          “Syria” / “Middle East” / “North Africa and Middle East” / “Levant” / “Iraq” / “Yemen” / “Libya” / “Tunisia” / “Egypt”</p>
2. Noun phrases conceptualized as elements of the ODC	<p>“government change” / “regime change” / “illegitimate people” / “so-called opposition” / “these people” / “different names” / “different organizations” / “so-called Syrian Liberation Army” / “protestors” /          – linked to –          “the West” / “Western countries” / “the United States” / “NATO”</p>
3. Verb phrases of motion and directionality as indicators of movement of ODC towards IDC and vice versa	<p><b>ODC-2 -&gt; Compartment-1</b>          “has swept into/to/swept in to” / “has come/came over” / “has pushed into/pushed into” / “has left behind/left behind”</p>
4. Verb phrases of action conceptualized as indicators of contact between ODC IDC	<p><b>ODC-2 -&gt; Compartment-1</b>          “has caused/caused” / “has ousted/ousted” / “has overthrown/overthrew”          – linked to –          “has incited/incited” / “has supported/supported” / “has facilitated/facilitated”</p>
5. Noun phrases expressing abstract notions conceptualized as anticipations of potential contact between ODC and IDC	<p><b>Compartment-1</b>          Not applicable</p>
6. Noun phrases expressing abstract notions conceptualized as effects of	<p><b>ODC-2 -&gt; Compartment-1</b>          “disarray” / “chaos” / “deterioration” / “persecution”</p>

ODC (threat): <b>“Arab Spring / Destabilization”</b>	
<b>Axiological proximization</b>	
Category	Lemma & phrases
1. Noun phrases expressing abstract notions conceptualized as values and/or value sets/ideologies of IDC	<b>Compartment-1</b> “legitimacy” / “sovereignty” / “stability” / “free choice” / “freedom” / “safety” / “future” / “home” / “haven”
2. Noun phrases expressing abstract notions conceptualized as values and/or value sets/ideologies of ODC	“illegitimacy” / “extremism” / “so-called freedom” – linked to – “lack of understanding” / “so-called democracy” / “imperialism” / “colonialism” / “arrogance”
3. NPs expressing abstract notions conceptualized as effects of IDC-ODC physical contact (conflict)	<b>ODC-2 -&gt; Compartment-1</b> “disarray” / “chaos” / “deterioration” / “persecution” / “regime change” / “turmoil” / “splitting” / “insecurity” / “instability”
actual contact between ODC and IDC	“regime change” / “turmoil” / “splitting” / “insecurity” / “instability” / “conflict”

### Macro-level and micro-level empirics (3)

<p>ODC-3 (threat):  <b>“Christianophobia” / “Western secular liberalism</b>          Derived from macro theme (example):          “A believer feels uncomfortable in an aggressively secular society [...]”, “I am very afraid of these tendencies. This is what is happening in Western countries: for the first time in the history of human civilization, legislation has come into conflict with the moral nature of man” (Patriarchia.ru 2016, November 20);</p>	
Spatial-temporal proximization	
Category	Lemma & phrases
1. Noun phrases conceptualized as elements of the IDC	<p><b>Compartment-2</b>          “Christians” / “our Christian brothers and sisters”/ “our brothers and sisters” / “innocents” / “believers”</p> <p><b>Compartment-3</b>          “Christianity” / “Christianity as a whole” / “Christian world” / “Christian countries” / “Christian European countries” / “Christians around the globe” / “Christian centers”</p>
2. Noun phrases conceptualized as elements of the ODC	<p>“extremists” / “fanatics” / “fundamentalist”          – linked to –          “so-called Christian West” / “the West” / “EU” / “western European countries” / “United States” / “Western states” / “Western governments” / “Europe” / “liberals” / “anti-Christians”</p>
3. Verb phrases of motion and directionality as indicators of movement of ODC towards IDC and vice versa	<p><b>ODC-3 -&gt; Compartment-2 &amp; Compartment-2</b>          “has been spreading/spread/is spreading” / “has risen/rose/is rising” / “has grown/grew/is growing”</p>
4. Verb phrases of action conceptualized as indicators of contact between ODC IDC	<p><b>ODC-3 -&gt; Compartment-2 &amp; Compartment-3</b>          “have been persecuted/are persecuted” / “have been forced to flee/are forced to flee” / “have been fleeing/are fleeing” / “have been pushed away/are pushed away” / “have been attacked/are attacked” / “have been suffering/are suffering” / “have been marginalized/are marginalized”</p>
5. Noun phrases expressing abstract notions conceptualized as anticipations of potential contact between ODC and IDC	<p><b>ODC-3 -&gt; Compartment-2 &amp; Compartment-3</b>          Not applicable</p>

6. Noun phrases expressing abstract notions conceptualized as effects of actual contact between ODC and IDC	<b>ODC-3 -&gt; Compartment-2 &amp; Compartment-3</b> “violence” / “danger” / “murder” / “repression” / “expulsion” / “persecution” / “violation of rights” / “oppression” / “loss of rights” / “genocide” / “threat” / “fear” / “marginalization”
ODC-3 (threat): “ <b>Christianophobia</b> ” / “ <b>Western secular liberalism</b> ”	
Axiological proximization	
Category	Lemma & phrases
1. Noun phrases expressing abstract notions conceptualized as values and/or value sets/ideologies of IDC	<b>Compartment-2 &amp; Compartment-3</b> “Christianity” / “Christian roots” / “historic identity” / “civilization” / “peace” / “faith” / “morality” / “tradition”
2. Noun phrases expressing abstract notions conceptualized as values and/or value sets/ideologies of ODC	“secularism” / “religious phobias” / “liberalism” / “Western democracy” / “anti-Semitism” / “Islamophobia” / “Christianophobia” / “lost Christian roots”
3. NPs expressing abstract notions conceptualized as effects of IDC-ODC physical contact (conflict)	<b>ODC-3 -&gt; Compartment-2 &amp; Compartment-3</b> “violence” / “danger” / “murder” / “repression” / “expulsion” / “persecution” / “violation of rights” / “oppression” / “loss of rights” / “genocide” / “threat” / “fear” / “marginalization” / “loss of identity” / “loss of history” / “loss of Christian roots”

### 3.2. International expression of the *Holy War* discourse

#### Macro-level and micro-level empirics (1)

<p>ODC-1 (threat):  <b>“terrorism”</b>          Derived from macro themes (example):          “The most acute issue today is the persecution and discrimination of Christians in the Middle East and North Africa. The situation of the Christian communities in these regions can be characterized as critical. Terrorists represented by the "Islamic State" and other groups are committing a real genocide of the followers of Christ” (Patriarchia.ru 2017, January 13)</p>	
<p><b>Spatial-temporal proximization</b></p>	
Category	Lemma & phrases
1. Noun phrases conceptualized as elements of the IDC	<p><b>Compartment-1</b>          “Syria” / “Middle East” / “North Africa and Middle East” / “Levant” / “Iraq” / “Yemen” / “Libya” / “Tunisia” / “Egypt”</p> <p><b>Compartment-2</b>          “Christians” / “our Christian brothers and sisters” / “our brothers and sisters” / “innocents” / “believers” / “civilization”</p> <p><b>Compartment-5</b>          “Russia” / “Russian state” / “Russian officials” / “Russian government” / “President Vladimir Putin” / “Minister for Foreign Affairs” / “Russian armed forces” / “Russian military” / “Russian aviation forces” / “peace keeper” / “warrior”</p>
2. Noun phrases conceptualized as elements of the ODC	<p>“ISIS” / “IS” / “Daesh” / “Islamic terrorist” / “terrorist” / “ideologist” / “extremist” / “fundamentalist” / “persecutor” / “killer” / “bandit” / “criminal” / “fanatic”</p>
3. Verb phrases of motion and directionality as indicators of movement of ODC towards IDC and vice versa	<p><b>ODC-1 -&gt; Compartment-1 &amp; Compartment-2</b>          “has encroach/encroached/encroaches” / “has overrun/overran/overruns” / “has invaded/invaded/invades” / “has spread into/to/spread into/to/spreads into/to” / “has reach/reached” / “has come/come” / “has arrived/arrived”</p> <p><b>Compartment-5 -&gt; ODC-1</b>          “force out” / “expel” / “push out” / “remove”</p>
4. Verb phrases of action conceptualized as indicators of contact between ODC IDC	<p><b>ODC-1 -&gt; Compartment-1 &amp; Compartment-2</b>          “destroy” / “kill” / “expel” / “persecute” / “erase” / “eradicate” / “fight” / “clash”</p> <p><b>Compartment-5 -&gt; ODC-1</b>          “fight” / “combat” / “destroy” / “remove” / “confront”</p>
5. Noun phrases expressing abstract notions conceptualized as	<p><b>ODC-1 -&gt; Compartment-1 &amp; Compartment-2</b>          Non applicable</p>

anticipations of potential contact between ODC and IDC	<b>Compartment-5 -&gt; ODC-1</b> “removal” / “riddance” / “destruction”
6. Noun phrases expressing abstract notions conceptualized as effects of actual contact between ODC and IDC	<b>“ODC-1 -&gt; Compartment-1 &amp; Compartment-2</b> “genocide” / “death” / “terror” / “mass atrocities” / “destruction” / “persecution” / “eradication” / “exodus” / “horror” / “fear” / “violence” / “crimes” / “tragedy of historic proportions” / “execution” / “violation of fundamental rights”  <b>Compartment-5 -&gt; ODC-1</b> “removal” / “riddance” / “destruction”
ODC (threat): <b>“terrorism”</b>	
<b>Axiological proximization</b>	
Category	Lemma & phrases
1. Noun phrases expressing abstract notions conceptualized as values and/or value sets/ideologies of IDC	<b>Compartment-1</b> “cradle of Christianity” / “peaceful people” / “faith” / “civilization” / “family” / “historic root” / “freedom” / “home” <b>Compartment-2</b> “peaceful people” / “faithful people” / “innocence”  <b>Compartment-5</b> “duty” / “mission” / “protection” / “morality” / “responsibility” / “the good” / “love”
2. Noun phrases expressing abstract notions conceptualized as values and/or value sets/ideologies of ODC	“terrorism” / “evil” / “hatred” / “fundamentalism” / “extremism” / “phobia” / “Christianophobia” / “black plague” / “absolutism” / “son of devil”
3. NPs expressing abstract notions conceptualized as effects of IDC-ODC physical contact (conflict)	<b>ODC-1 -&gt; Compartment-1 &amp; Compartment-2</b> “genocide” / “death” / “terror” / “mass atrocities” / “destruction” / “persecution” / “eradication” / “exodus” / “horror” / “fear” / “violence” / “crimes” / “tragedy of historic proportions” / “monstrous execution” / “violation of fundamental rights”  <b>Compartment-5 -&gt; ODC-1</b> “fight for good” / “fight against evil” / “justice” / “end to war” / “return of peace” /

## Macro-level and micro-level empirics (2)

<p>ODC-2 (threat): “<b>Arab Spring / Destabilization</b>”  <b>Derived from macro themes (examples):</b>  “Two years ago we discussed here the tragic consequences of the so-called Arab Spring” (Patriarchia.ru 2017, October 31);  “ We see in the example of Syria that Russia is doing everything possible to stabilize the situation in that country, but forces from other so-called anti-terrorist coalitions are doing everything possible to destabilize it” (Patriarchia.ru 2017, June 24</p>	
Spatial-temporal proximization	
Category	Lemma & phrases
1. Noun phrases conceptualized as elements of the IDC	<b>Compartment-1</b> “Syria” / “Middle East” / “North Africa and Middle East” / “Levant” / “Iraq” / “Yemen” / “Libya” / “Tunisia” / “Egypt”
2. Noun phrases conceptualized as elements of the ODC	“government change” / “regime change” / “illegitimate people” / “so-called opposition” / “these people” / “different names” / “different organizations” / “so-called Syrian Liberation Army” / “protestors” / – linked to – “the West” / “Western countries” / “the United States” / “NATO” / “so-called anti-terrorist coalitions”
3. Verb phrases of motion and directionality as indicators of movement of ODC towards IDC and vice versa	“has swept into/to/swept in to” / “has come/came over” / “has pushed into/pushed into” / “has left behind/left behind”
4. Verb phrases of action conceptualized as indicators of contact between ODC IDC	“has caused/caused” / “has ousted/ousted” / “has overthrown/overthrew” – linked to – “has incited/incited” / “has supported/supported” / “has facilitated/facilitated”
5. Noun phrases expressing abstract notions conceptualized as anticipations of potential contact between ODC and IDC	<b>Compartment-1</b> Not applicable
6. Noun phrases expressing abstract notions conceptualized as effects of actual contact between ODC and IDC	<b>ODC-2 -&gt; Compartment-1</b> “disarray” / “chaos” / “deterioration” / “persecution” / “regime change” / “turmoil” / “splitting” / “insecurity” / “instability”
<p>ODC-2 (threat): “<b>Arab Spring / Destabilization</b>”</p>	
<p><b>Axiological proximization</b></p>	
Category	Lemma & phrases

<p>1. Noun phrases expressing abstract notions conceptualized as values and/or value sets/ideologies of IDC</p>	<p><b>Compartment-1</b>  “legitimacy” / “sovereignty” / “stability” / “free choice” / “freedom” / “safety”</p>
<p>2. Noun phrases expressing abstract notions conceptualized as values and/or value sets/ideologies of ODC</p>	<p>“illegitimacy” / “extremism” / “so-called freedom”  – linked to –  “lack of understanding” / “so-called democracy” / “imperialism” / “colonialism” / “arrogance”</p>
<p>3. NPs expressing abstract notions conceptualized as effects of IDC-ODC physical contact (conflict)</p>	<p><b>ODC-2 -&gt; Compartment-1</b>  “disarray” / “chaos” / “deterioration” / “persecution” / “regime change” / “turmoil” / “splitting” / “insecurity” / “instability”</p>

### Macro-level and micro-level empirics (3)

<p>ODC-3 (threat):  <b>“Christianophobia” / “Western secular liberalism</b>  <b>Derived from macro themes (examples):</b>          “And if this continues, there will be no Orthodox and Christian presence in the Middle East, that is, Christians will be expelled from the places where Christianity originated” (Patriarchia.ru 2015, April 16);</p>	
Spatial-temporal proximization	
Category	Lemma & phrases
1. Noun phrases conceptualized as elements of the IDC	<p><b>Compartment-2</b>          “Christians” / “our Christian brothers and sisters”/ “our brothers and sisters” / “innocents” / “believers” / “civilization”</p> <p><b>Compartment-3</b>          “Christianity” / “Christianity as a whole” / “Christian world” / “Christian countries” / “Christian European countries” / “Christians around the globe” / “Christian centers”</p>
2. Noun phrases conceptualized as elements of the ODC	“so-called Christian West” / “the West” / “EU” / “western European countries” / “United States” / “Western states” / “Western governments” / “Europe” / “liberals” / “anti-Christians”
3. Verb phrases of motion and directionality as indicators of movement of ODC towards IDC and vice versa	<p><b>ODC-3 -&gt; Compartment-2 &amp; Compartment-2</b>          “has been spreading/spread/is spreading” / “has risen/rose/is rising” / “has grown/grew/is growing”</p>
4. Verb phrases of action conceptualized as indicators of contact between ODC IDC	<p><b>ODC-3 -&gt; Compartment-2 &amp; Compartment-3</b>          “have been persecuted/are persecuted” / “have been forced to flee/are forced to flee” / “have been fleeing/are fleeing” / “have been pushed away/are pushed away” / “have been attacked/are attacked” / “have been suffering/are suffering” / “have been marginalized/are marginalized”</p>
5. Noun phrases expressing abstract notions conceptualized as anticipations of potential contact between ODC and IDC	<p><b>ODC-3 -&gt; Compartment-2 &amp; Compartment-3</b>          Not applicable</p>
6. Noun phrases expressing abstract notions conceptualized as effects of	<p><b>ODC-3 -&gt; Compartment-2 &amp; Compartment-3</b>          “violence” / “danger” / “murder” / “repression” / “expulsion” / “persecution” / “violation of rights” /</p>

actual contact between ODC and IDC	“oppression” / “loss of rights” / “genocide” / “threat” / “fear” / “marginalization”
<p>ODC-3 (threat):  <b>“Christianophobia” / “Western secular liberalism”</b>  Derived from macro themes (examples):  “We are deeply concerned about the marginalization of Christianity in Europe and in some other regions”  (Patriarchia.ru 2017, January 13);</p>	
Axiological proximization	
Category	Lemma & phrases
1. Noun phrases expressing abstract notions conceptualized as values and/or value sets/ideologies of IDC	<b>Compartment-2 &amp; Compartment-3</b> “Christianity” / “Christian roots” / “historic identity” / “civilization” / “peace” / “faith” / “morality” / “tradition”
2. Noun phrases expressing abstract notions conceptualized as values and/or value sets/ideologies of ODC	“secularism” / “religious phobias” / “liberalism” / “Western democracy” / “anti-Semitism” / “Islamophobia” / “Christianophia” / “lost Christian roots”
3. NPs expressing abstract notions conceptualized as effects of IDC-ODC physical contact (conflict)	<b>ODC-3 -&gt; Compartment-2 &amp; Compartment-3</b> “violence” / “danger” / “murder” / “repression” / “expulsion” / “persecution” / “violation of rights” / “oppression” / “loss of rights” / “genocide” / “threat” / “fear” / “marginalization” / “loss of identity” / “loss of history” / “loss of Christian roots”

### 3.3. Key findings

Subsuming the subchapter 3.1. *Domestic expression of the discourse*, and the subchapter 3.2. *International expression of the discourse*, this part presents the key take-aways from the thesis' analytical work.

In reference to the guiding research question - *How does the Russian Orthodox Church construct its discourse of legitimation for the Russian military intervention in Syria domestically and internationally?* – this study's research design is a single-case study, split up into two focal points: the ROC's legitimization of Russia military intervention in Syria on the domestic public stage, and the ROC's utterances on the international public stage. The reasoning behind this design is to enable a comparison and subsequently identifying potential differences in the ROC's *presentation / expression* of its *Holy War* discourse pertaining to different contextual settings and audiences. Thus, I have arrived at:

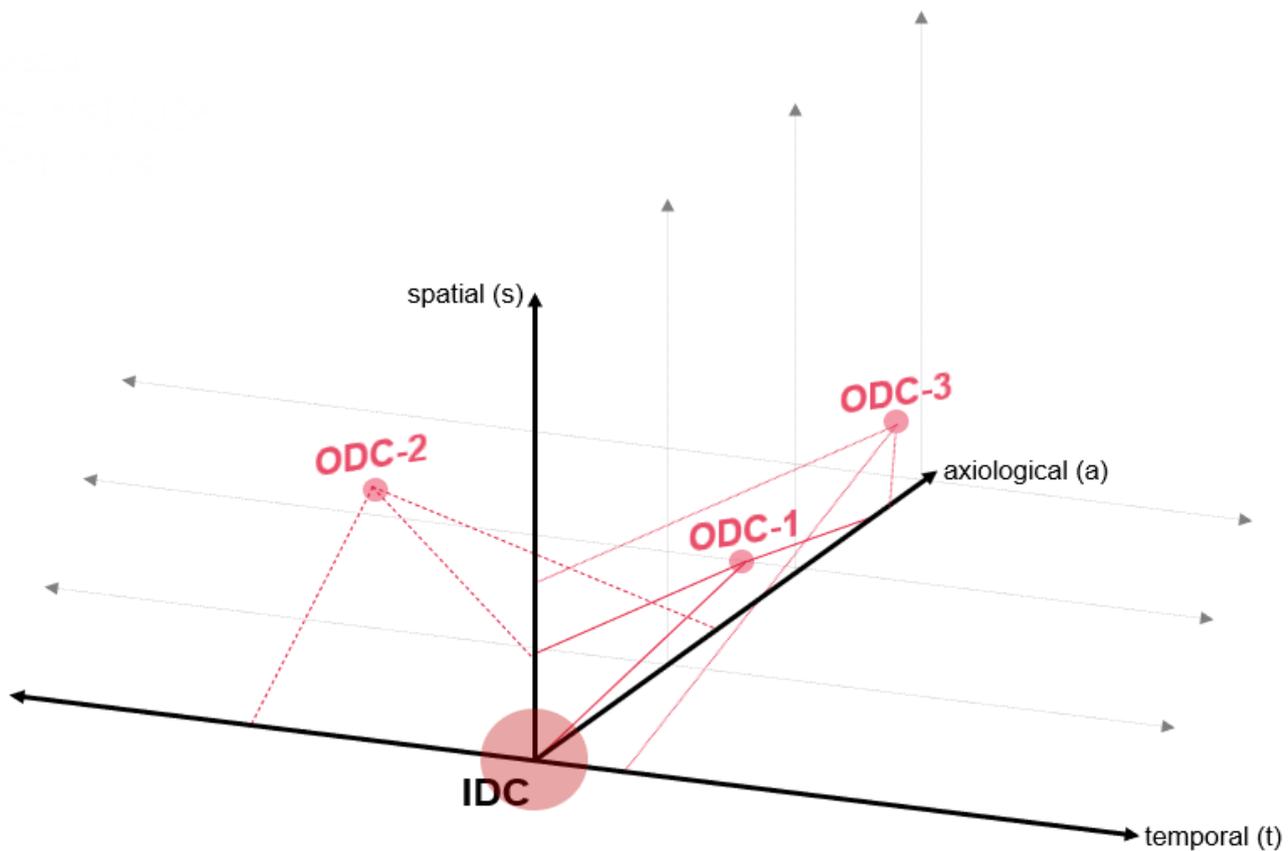
#### **Finding 1**

Derived from the analysis in this chapter's previous subchapters, it has become evident that there are no indications for a *substantial* difference between ROC's *presentation / expression* of its *Holy War* discourse on the domestic level and the presentation on the international level. Both, the inside-deictic-center, as well as the outside outside-deictic-centers, are conceptualized equally, with one exception (see Finding 2). While this finding should be taken as it is, it refutes my expectation which originated in the very-different contexts in which the ROC expressed itself pertaining to the situation in Syria.

Returning to this study's research objective of *unraveling the ontological structure of the ROC's Holy War discourse*, I have arrived at:

#### **Finding 2**

Following, Chilton's conceptualization of a discursive space along three axes (spatial, temporal, axiological/modal) and Cap's conceptualization of discursive entities' (inside-deictic-center/IDC, and outside-deictic-center/ODC) positioning and movement within said discursive space, I have recreated the configuration, and thus mapped the ontological structure of the ROC's discourse (Fig. 6):

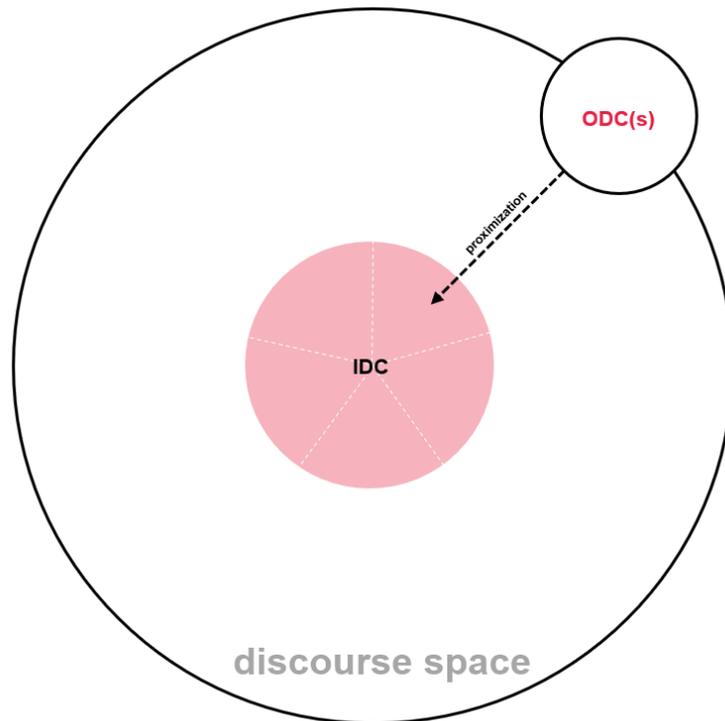


**Fig. 6:** Visualized ontological structure of the ROC's *Holy War!* discourse

As can be seen, the ROC's *Holy War!* discourse's spatial configuration positions four entities within the discourse space. Their conceptualization was derived from the Church's expressions of its perception of the political reality pertaining to the context of the Russian military intervention in Syria. In the following, I will outline the conceptualizations derived from the data of these four entities and what their conceptualizations entail.

**IDC** (inside-deictic-center / speaker/hearer):

As conceptualized by Cap, the IDC most commonly encapsulates both the speaker and the hearer to whom the speaker addresses her utterances in order to seek support for her political action. It forms the center of the discourse space and faces the encroachment of an, or several outside-deictic-center(s), a threat. Of all four entities that were derived from the textual data, the IDC is conceptualized by the speaking ROC in the most complex way. In fact, it consists of several compartments (Fig. 7):



**Fig. 7:** “Compartmentalization” of the IDC

In its entirety, covering all compartments, the IDC is characterized by a dualistic conceptualization. The ROC constructs an IDC that covers opposite polar ends of a scale, ascribing the IDC a dual role. On the one hand, the IDC is presented in a victimized, trapped or passive, and endangered role. On the other hand, the IDC is in a criminative, active, and protective role. This duality responds to the conceptualization of the IDC encapsulating both the speaker and the hearer; the ROC invokes an endangered image for certain compartments of the IDC while simultaneously expressing that the IDC “can”, “has”, “does”, and “will” counteract the endangerment. However, not all compartments of the IDC are “activated” in every contextual setting of the many speech events that have taken place over the course of the time frame from 01.01.2015 until the 31.12.2021. Pertaining to the individual setting, the Church expresses an individual compartment of its complex IDC that corresponds to the setting-specific hearer. This indicates to a certain degree that the ROC strategically adjusts and chooses which elements of its *Holy War* discourse are to be expressed pertaining to the individual setting. Cap (2017) and Reyes (2011) state that such specific choices characterize the strategic element of a political discourse and subsequently reflect the speakers’ efforts to attain “credibility” in correspondence to its hearer (p. 10; p. 783). Which IDC compartment is addressed in which contextual speech event by the ROC is going to be addressed in the sections about the specific conceptualization of the other three entities (ODC-1, ODC-2, and ODC-3) of

the ROC's *Holy War* discourse. In the following, I am going to lay out the different compartments of the IDC, beginning with the compartments that are presented in a victimized, trapped or passive, and endangered role:

Compartment-1: The first compartment of the IDC is conceptualized by the Church geopolitical terms, pertaining to the operation's location of the Russian military intervention: "Syria". However, the Church expands the conceptualization in almost every occasion by linking "Syria" representatively to other geopolitical descriptions, specifically "Middle East", "North Africa and Middle East", "Levant", "Iraq", "Yemen", "Libya", "Tunisia", and "Egypt". Noticeably, the expansion of the conceptualization from "Syria" to the other is arguably a very broad stretch from the confined territory of Syria to other geopolitical spaces and concepts that – although they share an overlapping core – comprise extensively larger regions.

Compartment-2: The second compartment the Church constructs is conceptualized as "Christianity" (hereafter: "Christianity-I). The ROC fragmentizes the concept of "Christianity" however and divides it into two compartments: "Christianity-I", and "Christianity-II" (see below). "Christianity-I" in a more macro-sense is confined to the spatial location in which the Russian military operation is taking place: "Syria", and extendedly to the linked geopolitical spaces of "the Middle East", "the MENA region", and "the Levant". This geographic anchoring of the conceptualization is achieved via markers such "our Christian brothers and sisters in Syria", "fellow Christians in the Middle East", "Christianity in the Levant", "Christianity in North Africa and the Middle East".

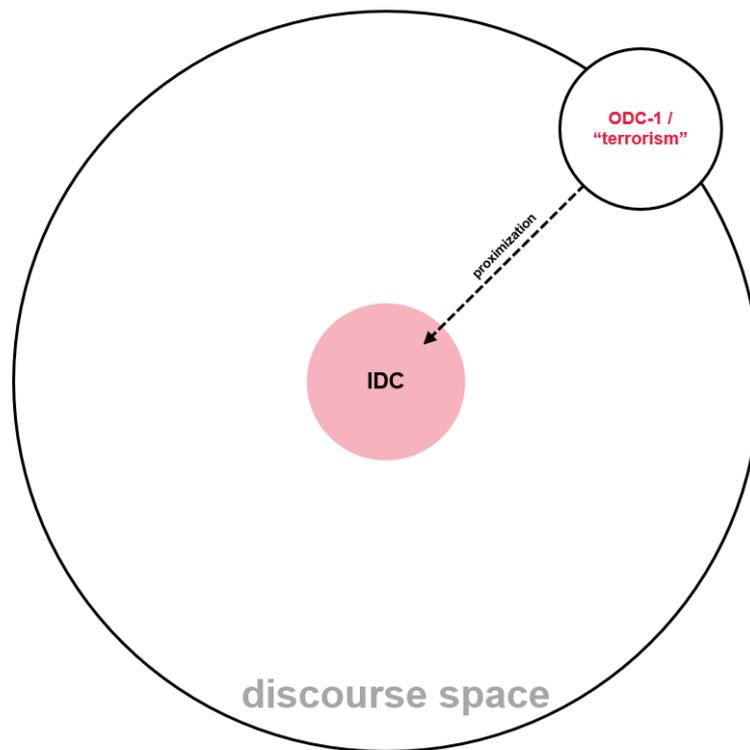
Compartment-3: The third compartment is conceptualized as "Christianity" as well (hereafter: "Christianity-II"), too. However, while the conceptualization of "Christianity-I" is linked to the Church's spatial conceptualization of the region of conflict "Syria", extended to the "the Middle East", "the MENA region", and "the Levant", "Christianity-II" is conceptualized by the Church on a meso-, universal-level: "Christianity as a whole", "the Christian world", "Christian countries", "Christians around the globe".

Compartment-4: The fourth compartment of the IDC is conceptualized is conceptualized by the Church in geopolitical terms as well. It comprises a broad construct, spanning across "Russia", "the Russian Federation", "our people", "the Caucasus", and "Eurasia", "our neighbors", "our neighborhood", "our near borders". This conceptualization, when mapped out encapsulates both, a significant area of Eastern Orthodox Christianity and in its broadest sense Russian "sphere of influence" (Hast 2012, pp. 223-275). Compartment-1-4 in their endangered role represent the contextual audiences that the Church addresses in its speech events.

Lastly, I address Compartment-5, which is in a criminative, active, and protective role, and is conceptualized directly as the “the Russian Orthodox Church” and indirectly the “Russian state”, “the Russian officials”, “the Russian government”, “the President Vladimir Putin”, “the Minister for Foreign Affairs”, “the Russian armed forces”, the “Russian military”, “the Russian aviation forces”.

The Church, leading the speech events which convey its *Holy War* discourse of legitimization for the Russian military intervention, in its conceptualization of Compartment-5 conflates the ecclesiastical agent of the ROC with the earthly agent of the Russian state – entailing the military. This linking between the two takes place, however, as it must be noted, solely on a subliminal level. One explanatory argument for the choice of keeping the linking between Church and the state at a minimum would be the Church’s understanding that it would potentially undermine its own authority. Authority to speak on a matter enhances the likelihood of attaining one’s goal of maximizing the number of shared views for one’s conceptualization of reality (Cap 2017, p. 13). As I laid out in the *Subchapter 3.1. Domestic expression of the discourse*, and in *Subchapter 3.2. International expression of the discourse*, the ROC’s speech events have been taking place in semi-ecclesiastical, semi-diplomatic contexts and settings. Thus, an “over-infusion” of the IDC’s speaker-Compartment-5 with conceptions could entail the hearer(s) to assume that the Church would just mirror the discourse of an earthly, political agent (the Russian state).

**ODC-1** (outside-deictic-center / “terrorism”):



**Fig. 8:** *ODC-1 / “terrorism” encroaching the IDC*

Derived from the analysis of the textual data on the macro-level, I have identified the first theme, which marks the utterances of the ROC pertaining to the *Holy War* discourse. This first theme, while being the most expected theme, has been uttered by the Church, both in the domestic as well as the international context, and it is the most uttered theme: *The threat of terrorism*. This theme encapsulates the ODC-1. The Church expresses its conceptualization of the threat of “terrorism”, both on the domestic level and the international level in speech events as follows:

The ODC-1 encapsulates at its core “(Islamic) terrorists”, “ISIS”, “IS”, “Daesh”, “extremists”, “bandits”, “criminals”, and “fundamentalists”. The threat of “terrorism” is marked by axiological identifiers – values – that comprise “hatred”, “fundamentalism”, “extremism”, and “phobia” – especially “Christianophobia”.

The Church expresses the threat of “terrorism” towards specifically three compartments of the IDC. First, the Compartment-1 and Compartment-2, whereas the Compartment-1 – to briefly reiterate – is conceptualized as a complex construct comprising “Syria”, “the Middle East”, “the Levant”, “Christians”, “modern civilizations”, “our brothers and sisters”, linked to axiological identifiers – values – such as “cradle of Christianity”, “peace”, “faith”, “civilization”, “historic

roots". Compartment-2, "Christianity I" is conceptualized as "Christians", "our Christian brothers and sisters", "innocents", "believers", and "civilization". It is apparent that the Church invokes a distinct opposition between the ODC-1 "terrorism" and the Compartment-1 of the IDC to conceptualize a direct opposition, in deictic, metaphoric terms (e.g., "peace" vs. "hatred") between the two identities. The ROC, however, does not just draw an opposition of entities but further conceptualizes, that the ODC-1 poses a direct threat to the Compartment-1 and Compartment-2. The Church employs proximization via deictic functions in order to conceptualize that the direct threat to the IDC Compartment-1 is encroaching. In fact, in this first case, the Church relies dominantly on proximization along the spatial, and the temporal axes, to conceptualize that the threat of "terrorism" has already reached the IDC Compartment-1 and Compartment-2. It relies on employing spatial deictic functions of motion and directionality as indicators of movement of the ODC-1 "terrorism" to the complex IDC Compartment-1, comprising the geopolitical space of "Syria", "the Middle East", "the Levant". Notably, in reference to factual situation *on the ground* in the conceptualized geopolitical space, at the time of the utterances by the ROC in the domestic and international political sphere, the conflict in Syria had already been going on for four years (since 2011); and the reports about persecutions of Christian minority groups by Islamic terror groups, especially in Syria, had been mounting up already (Haider 2017). The Church conceptualizes this situation by expressions such as "has encroached", "has overrun", "has invaded", "has moved into", "has spread into/to", "has reached", "has come", and "has arrived". It points to the hearer, that the threat of "terrorism" has already penetrated the IDC Compartment-1 and Compartment-2, with consequences of negative nature to all elements conceptualized in within. As a consequence of contact between the ODC-1 and the Compartment-1 and Compartment-2, the threat of "terrorism" "has destroyed"/"is destroying" Christian communities and monuments, "has killed"/"is killing" Christians, "has expelled"/"is expelling" Christians from their home, "has erased"/"is erasing" Christianity from the map, "has eradicated"/"is eradicating" Christian communities, "has fought"/"is fighting" against the good, and "has clashed"/"is clashing" with Christian faith, and having culminated in "exodus", "persecution", and "genocide". The Church expresses the consequences both in past perfect and present tense verbal forms, to conceptualize a) the threat has already reached the IDC Compartment-1 and Compartment-2, b) the threat has had negative consequences already, and c) the threat continues to inflict negative consequences. This is underlined by the linking of the verbal forms with deictic, temporal functions such as "now", "right now", "for a while", "since 2011", and "continuing/continuous". The

consequences for the IDC-Compartment-1 and Compartment-2 culminate by the Church's utterances of "mass crimes", "mass atrocities", and "genocide".

The third IDC Compartment which the ROC expresses, mainly within the domestic context, is the conceptualized IDC Compartment-4. To reiterate its conceptualization, it is a second geopolitical complex, spanning across "Russia", "the Russian Federation", "our people", "the Caucasus", and "Eurasia", "our neighbors", "our neighborhood", "our near borders". Also here, the Church constructs an encroachment of the ODC-1 "terrorism" towards the specified IDC Compartment. Logically, this proximization is conceptualized more focused along the spatial and the temporal axes employing deictic functions than along the axiological axis. Pertaining to the context, this focus on the spatial and the temporal axes is comprehensible. The ROC in all its speech events in a domestic setting addresses an event that is taking place in a physical distance to the hearer (Syria – Russia). Thus, between the IDC Compartment-4 and the ODC-1 threat of "terrorism" exists a genuine level of remoteness that the Church attempts to bridge via deictic functions. Along the spatial and the temporal axis, the Church expresses deictic functions that indicate create a complex threat of "terrorism" for the Compartment-4, one that jumps back and forth between remoteness and proximity in spatial terms, and between past, present, and future in temporal terms. To give a few examples of expressions: "we have seen it ["terrorism"] within our own borders", "it is already spreading to us", "what is happening there ["Syria", "the Middle East"] will happen here".

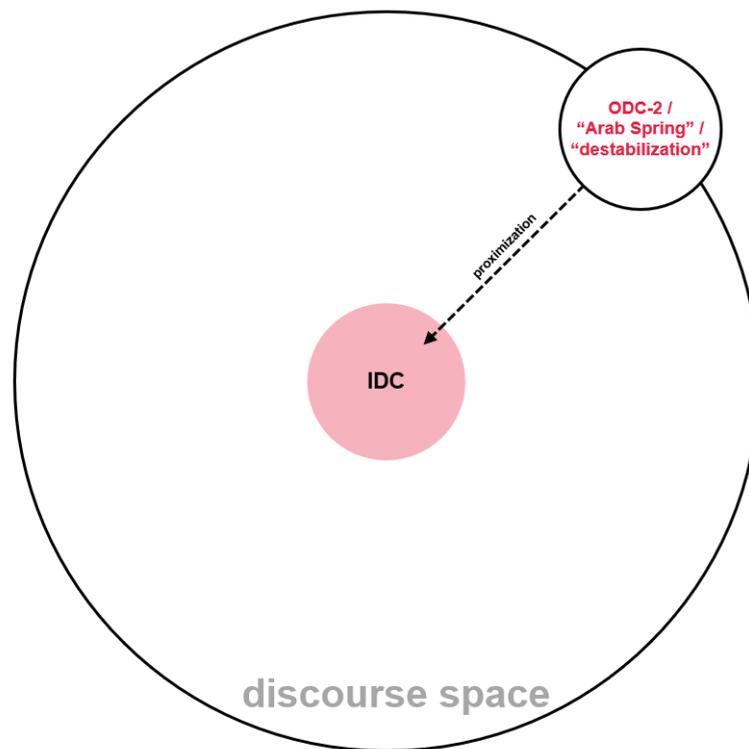
To recapitulate, the first ODC-entity within the discourse space of the *Holy War* discourse is the ODC-1 "terrorism". Based on the conceptualization of the ODC-1 and the identification of deictic function markers, mainly focusing on proximization along the spatial and the temporal axes, the ODC-1 can be positioned in three-dimensional layout (Fig. 6). Note however, that this positioning is taking place in relativity to the conceptualization of the other entities, forthcoming.

Reiterating the main strategic goal behind political discourses – maximizing the number of shared views of one's conceptualization of reality in order to attain a social/political goal – it is necessary to further look further at what the Church expresses publicly. Linking the ODC-1 "terrorism" to the two compartments of the IDC, Compartment-1, Compartment-2, and Compartment-4, does not alone serve as *linguistic evidence* that could support the premise that the ROC is constructing a discourse of legitimization for the Russian military intervention in Syria. The analysis on the macro- and micro-level provides further insight. A second guiding theme, that is expressed, both domestically and internationally, by the Church is: "Russia and

the armed forces of Russia/the Russian military participate in resolving the conflict”. This theme is contextually linked to the IDC Compartment-5, conceptualized directly “the Russian Orthodox Church” and indirectly the “Russian state”, “the Russian officials”, “the Russian government”, “the President Vladimir Putin”, “the Minister for Foreign Affairs”, “the Russian armed forces”, the “Russian military”, “the Russian aviation forces”. Within the *same* contextual setting of the *same* speech events, the Church on the one hand constructs the ODC-1 (threat of “terrorism”) - Compartment-1 (“Syria”, “the Middle East”, “our brothers and sisters” etc.) and the ODC-1 (threat of “terrorism”) – Compartment-4 (“Russia”, “our people”, “Eurasia”, “Caucasus”, etc.) linkage; on the other hand, the Church a) expresses the macro-topic of “Russia and the armed forces of Russia/the Russian military participate in resolving the conflict”, and b) *activates* the IDC-Compartment-5. In its conceptualization of the latter, the Church presents the IDC-Compartment-5 as part of the overall endangered IDC, while predominantly focusing on expressing a conceptualization of the compartment as an active counterpart that engages the ODC-1. In that sense, the Church conceptualizes the Compartment-5 as a representation of the Russian military intervention. It directly opposes the threat which is invoked through the employment of deictic functions along all three axes. In spatial-temporal terms through verbs of motion and temporal markers such as “has now joined”, “is currently fighting”, and “is now engaging”. Axiologically, the proximization is conceptualized in terms of value deictic functions in which the Russian military intervention by “Russia and the armed forces of Russia/the Russian military” is a “mission”, to fulfil “duty”. The Church further expresses a “caring” role of Russia, in that this “[the] good” “Christian country” who serves as a “protector” of the conceptualized IDC Compartment-1, Compartment-2, and Compartment-4 “fights a Holy War” against “the evil” of the ODC-1 “terrorism”. Pertaining to the threat of “terrorism”, the ROC, both internationally and domestically, conceptualizes a complex element of its *Holy War* discourse, that comprises a broad geopolitical space and entities under threat. By linking “Russia and the armed forces of Russia/the Russian military” to this complexity in a threat engaging role, the Church invokes a necessity of the Russian military intervention in Syria. Notably, in the domestic scene, the Church expresses the threat to both compartments outlined above. It reveals a setting-specific engagement with its target *home* hearer. The expression of the conceptualization “Russia”, “the Russian Federation”, “our people”, “the Caucasus”, and “Eurasia”, “our neighbors”, “our neighborhood”, “our near borders” as being encroached by threat of “terrorism”, is the Church’s attempt invoke fear at home and attain the goal of the public adopting the Church’s conceptualization of reality. Kirill I. in 2016 stated that “[...] if terrorism wins in Syria, it will

have huge change of extremely darkening the life of our people and causing trouble [...]” (RBTH 2016, January 7).

**ODC-2** (outside-deictic-center / “Arab Spring” / ”destabilization”):



**Fig. 9:** *ODC-2 / “Arab Spring” / “destabilization” encroaching the IDC*

Derived from the analysis of the textual data on the macro-level, I have identified the second main theme, which marks the utterances of the ROC pertaining to the *Holy War* discourse. This second theme has been uttered by the Church, both in the domestic as well as the international context: *The threat of destabilization represented by the case of the Arab Spring*. This theme encapsulates the ODC-2. The Church expresses its conceptualization of the threat of “destabilization”, both on the domestic level and the international level in speech events as follows:

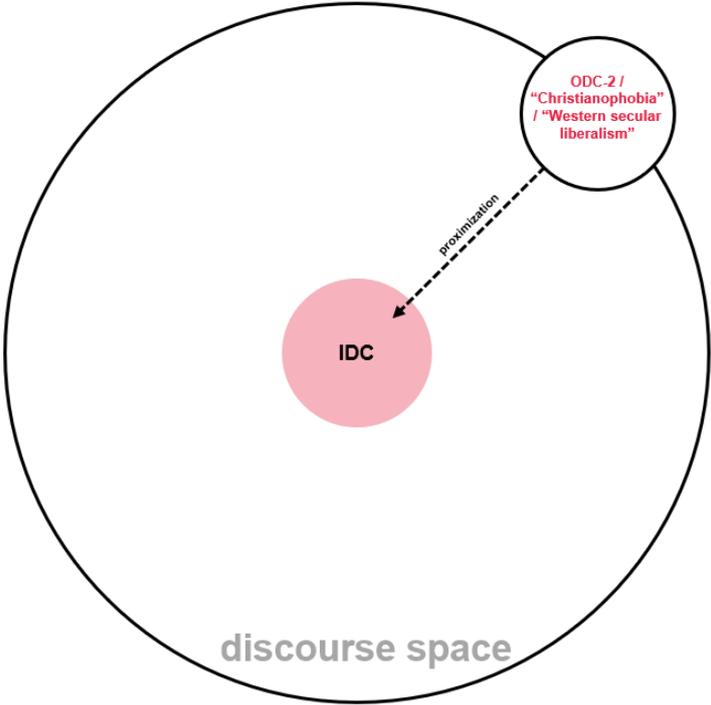
The ODC-2 encapsulates complex structure in which the Church links “government change” and “regime change”, “illegitimate people”, “so-called opposition”, “these people”, “different names” / “different organizations” / “so-called Syrian Liberation Army”, to “the West”, “Western countries”, “the United States, “NATO”. The structure is ascribed set of values conceptualized as “so-called democracy”, “pretexted freedom”, “imperialism”, and “colonialism”.

The ODC-2 threat of “destabilization” according to the Church is a threat to the IDC Compartment-1 which comprises – “Syria”, “the Middle East”, “North Africa and Middle East”, “Libya”, “Iraq”, “Egypt”, and “Tunisia”. The proximization is performed via deictic functions with a heavy focus on the spatial and the temporal axes. “Destabilization” represented by the “Arab Spring” within the geopolitical spaces “has swept/swept”, “has left behind/left behind”, and “has moved in/moved in”. It becomes clear that, unlike in the case of the ODC-1 threat of “terrorism”, the Church speaks in present perfect and simple past to express that the ODC-2 threat of “destabilization” has already penetrated the conceptualized IDC Compartment-1. At the time of the utterances by the Church that are taken into account in this study (2015-2021), the events comprising various anti-government protests and uprising across the Arab World, and referred to under the broader label of Arab Spring, had already happened. This logically explains the ROC’s conceptualization of the ODC-2 threat of “destabilization” having already gotten to the IDC Compartment-2, which on top cover at their core the same geopolitical space as the Arab World. The results of the penetration of, or having made contact with, the IDC Compartment-2 are expressed as: “has caused/caused” “chaos” and “disarray” and “insecurity”, “has overthrown/overthrew” “legitimate governments”, “has created/created” “instability” and “civil war(s)”.

The striking point of the ROC’s conceptualization of the ODC-2 threat of “destabilization” is the linkage that it has constructed: In essence, the threat of “destabilization” has caused massive negative, personal consequences for the geopolitical space of the Middle East. However, a closer look into the expressions of the Church reveals that the threat of “destabilization” is in itself a consequence of actions by “the West”, “Western countries”, “the United States”, and “NATO”. Exemplary, the chairman of the Church’s Department for External Church relations, Metropolitan Hilarion, stated in an interview to Rossiya-24:

“It seems to me that now the West still understands that betting on people who are not well managed is too risky. What did the support provided to extremist forces in the Middle East ultimately lead to? To the fact that now in the Middle East, terrorism and extremism continue to grow and spread, like a plague epidemic. And the Western world no longer knows what to do” (Patriarchia.ru 2015, May 5).

**ODC-3** (outside-deictic-center / “Christianophobia” / “Western secular liberalism”):



**Fig. 10:** *ODC-3 / “Christianophobia” / “Western secular liberalism” encroaching the IDC*

The third entity that the ROC conceptualizes as threatening to the IDC is that of ODC-3. It pertains to the third theme that, on a macro-level, frames the discourse, both on the domestic and the international level. Here, the Church conceptualizes its most complex threat linkage in the context of the Russian military intervention in Syria: “Christians suffer from Christianophobia rooted in Western secular liberalism“. The ODC-3 threat of “Christianophobia”-“Western secular liberalism” is constructed in a sense of dualism. The third theme of the Church’s discourse in itself is a sequential linkage construction: “Christianophobia” is a consequential outcome invoked by “Western secular liberalism”. Accordingly, the Church conceptualization of the ODC-3 threat of “Christianophobia” encapsulates a mixed grouped of entities where “extremists” are linked with the “so-called Christian West”, “the West”, “EU”, “western European countries”, “United States”, “Western states”, “Western governments”, “Europe”, “liberals” , and “anti-Christians”.

The ODC-3 threat of “Christianophobia”-“Western secular liberalism” is, according to the Church’s conceptualization of reality a threat to two IDC compartments. The first, IDC Compartment-2, is spatially contained and refers to “Christians”, “our Christian brothers and sisters”, “our brothers and sisters”, “innocents”, and “believers”, which are exemplary located by the Church in the “Syria”, “North Africa and Middle East”, “the Levant”, “Iraq”, “Yemen”,

“Libya”, “Tunisia”, and “Egypt”. The second IDC compartment in danger, Compartment-3, breaks with the spatial confinements and is conceptualized in a much broader scale, virtually encapsulating the globe: “Christianity”, “Christianity as a whole”, “Christian world”, “Christian countries”, “Christian European countries”, “Christians around the globe”, and “Christian centers”. The Church recognizes and expresses that both compartments have already been penetrated by the ODC-3 threat. Deictic functions along all three axes reveal that as a consequence of the ODC-3 contact with the IDC compartments, “Christians around the globe” “have been suffering” and continuously “are suffering” from the consequences of “Christianophobia”. The ODC-3 threat has led from “threat” and “fear” to societal “marginalization”, and most extremely “genocide” for “Christians”.

Notably, in the context of the speech events on hand, pertaining to the Russian military intervention in Syria, the Church exemplifies Syria to construct its complex threat linkage: The protest movements in Syria, that have spiraled into a broad complex since 2010/2011, were seeking a democratic and liberal Syria. However, these values in the “West” have been accompanied by secularity. Western liberal secularity has led to “loss of identity” and “loss of morality” in the “Christian world”. Through this linkage, the Church on the one hand manages to expand its expressions of threat entities well-beyond the spatial confinement of Syria where Russians fight to protect Christians, and on the other conceptualizes a culprit for the situation of a) “our brothers and sisters” in “Syria”, and of b) “Christians around the globe”.

### 3.4. Limitations

As a concluding part of the analytical chapter of this thesis, I address the limitations of my study. First, the selection of a synchronic critical discourse analysis of the ROC’s political discourse does not allow for observations that would indicate changes within the discourse over time. Although the selection is justified for this study’s purpose, a second analysis as a diachronic critical discourse analysis of the data can be encouraged due to a) the large timeframe, and b) several marking events (e.g., the first four years of the conflict in the Syria; the beginning of the Russian military intervention; the Havana declaration between Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill I; the phase post-announcement of the supposed defeat of the Islamic State etc.).

Second, as laid out before, the ROC shows a high degree of institutionalization that resembles any other public or governmental body. The ROC’s external communication activities represent this degree of institutionalization: Positions of the Church are decided on by the governing

bodies of the Church; only dedicated spokespersons speak on political positions of the Church publicly; statements are pre-formulated and vetted before publication in press releases, speeches, interviews, and position papers. While for my data collection, I relied on such publications, this high degree of institutionalization in form of carefully designed external communications provided necessary credibility to the sources. However, only taking into account the official, carefully vetted publications about the positions of the ROC entails a false assumption that the ROC is a single-stream, monolithic Church. In fact, as Knox (2003), Papkova (2011), and Stoeckl (2014) present, within the post-Soviet ROC, at least three factions are represented, ranging from the fundamental, across the predominant traditional, to the liberal strand; all with respective followings. While the analyzed discourse is derived from the expressions of positions agreed upon by the governing bodies of the Church, it is important to highlight, that intra-Church positions could deviate from the official releases. In either case, the ROC is not a monolithic, ecclesiastical institution.

Third, a continuous issue of a study contributing to the post-Soviet state-church-nexus was met here as well. In reference to Curanović (2018), researchers tend to face severe constraints regarding potential subsumptions about the directionality of influence(s) between the state and the church: one cannot simply extract, whether one actor influences the wording of the other. In that sense, the discourse of the Church is solely seen as the discourse produced by the Church. Thus, the results of this discourse analysis should be viewed as the first half of an answer to a broader puzzle. An analysis of the discourse of the state pertaining to the military intervention in Syria in comparison would shed further light on the exact degree of conflation within the state-church-nexus.

## Subsumption and conclusion

At the starting point of this thesis, I identified an open gap in the contemporary literature pertaining to the recent activities of the post-Soviet ROC: The Church's overt vocalization in the context surrounding the Russian military intervention in Syria. While the existing scholarship has thus far recognized that the ROC has expressed domestically and internationally its support for the Russian activities in Syria, thus providing discursive legitimization framed under the label of a *Holy War*, there is yet a lack of detailed analysis of this discovered discourse of the Church. I have approached the discourse with the research question *How does the ROC construct its discourse of legitimization for the Russian military intervention domestically and internally*. The operating word *construct* points to this thesis' research objective of *unraveling the ontological structure (or configuration) of the Church's discourse*. In *Chapter 1*, on the outset, the Church's discourse of legitimization has been conceptualized as a political discourse, in that, it is of strategic character by attaining to a political (or social) goal; aiming to maximize the number of shared visions for its conceptualization of reality that legitimizes the Russian military in Syria. Further, I have introduced Chilton's (2004) *Discourse Space Theory* and the concept of *Discourse Space* which is built on the postulation that political actors conceptualize and express their perception and understanding of reality in political discourses in terms of spatial metaphors along three axes (spatial, temporal, and modal/axiological) – thus creating a three-dimensional discourse space in which the political actor positions entities via linguistic means in form of deictic functions. This theoretical groundwork has been further amplified in Cap's (2004, 2006, 2010, 2016, 2017) *Proximization Theory* which pertains to political discourses of seeking legitimization for political (or social) action in times of *crisis*. Through proximization of an outside threat towards conceptualized deserving-protection centers within the conceptualized discourse space, political actors render or invoke the necessity for the political (or social) action in order to avert the outside threat. The laid out theoretical framework has been deemed as adequate as it pertains to a) the developed research question and the subsequent research objective, and b) this study's case specificities of a political discourse in times of *crisis* aiming to attain legitimization for the Russian military intervention in Syria. Moreover, I have elaborated on the political role and capital of the post-Soviet ROC by including several indicators, ranging from the Russian state's enablement of political agency of the Church on various levels to the Church's own identified prerogative to become politically involved in secular, post-Soviet Russia. What that section has indicated, is an ongoing conflation within the nexus of state and church. I am going to address this conflation after briefly reiterating the results of this study's analysis:

Leading up to and during the Russian military intervention in Syria, the ROC has expressed its *Holy War* discourse both domestically and internationally. The analysis has revealed that the discourse is built around four identified entities, conceptualized by the Church. These four identities can be positioned within the discourse space (see Fig. 6) – in relation to each other – according to the Church’s framing through *themes* on the discourses macro-level, as well as the employment of deictic functions in spatial, temporal, and axiological terms. The first entity is the inside-deictic-center, a complex entity that encapsulates five specified compartments which are *activated* according to the specific threat that the Church speaks about and references to. The IDC is attributed a dual role within the discourse, the victim and endangered, and deserving-protection role on the one hand, comprising the IDC Compartments-1-4 (reiterating: 1 = broad geopolitical space ranging from “Syria” to the entirety of the “Middle East”; 2 = “Christianity” in “Syria” and the region; 3 = “Christianity” “[...] around the globe”; 4 = broad geopolitical space ranging from “Russia” to “Eurasia”). On the other hand, the IDC Compartment-5 is conceptualized as an active “protector”, comprising the Russian entities around the military intervention in Syria. In this way the Church expresses that Russia is part of the endangered center but also the one actor who engages in confronting the sources of the endangerment, the ODC threat sources. The latter are derived from the interpretively identified *themes*. The first threat is that of “terrorism” which serves as the main theme of the discourse and which is conceptualized as the main danger that the IDC Compartment-5, represented by Russia and its military intervention, “combats”.

It is, however, the other ODC threat sources that the Church conceptualizes that are indicators for further inquiry. The second ODC threat “Arab Spring” / “Destabilization”, and the third ODC threat “Christianophobia” / “Western secular liberalism” are conceptualized and expressed by the Church, both domestically internationally, as abstract linkages. Both threats are conceptualized with elements and descriptions that express that “the West” and their negative value/ideology sets form the direct threat to the compartments of the IDC. This observation can be described as an *infusion* of anti-Western sentiments into the Church’s discourse of legitimization for the Russian military intervention in Syria. Although at first sight it is an abstract linkage by the Church to conceptualize the shortcomings of “the West” as threats in the overall context pertaining to Russia’s military engagement against terrorism in Syria, it could potentially hint to a coherent continuation of the post-Soviet ROC’s *general discourse* of views on contemporary issues:

First, in connection to the three identified ODC sources of threat, the Church’s conceptualization of the IDC Compartment-5, encapsulating all Russian entities pertaining to

the military intervention, as “active” and “counter(acting)” these threats, the Church touches upon the sense of “mission” (Curanović 2018, p. 254) or “messianism” (Engström 2014, p. 357) connected to Russia as an Orthodox Christian nation. This sense of “missions” is rooted in a shared understanding between the Russian state and the ROC, ascribing Russia a character of “exceptionalism” that entails the “task” to act upon it in the international order when needed (Curanović 2018, pp. 254-255): In this case, to act as a protector of Christianity (in Syria; in the Middle East); even with the use of force. The Church on numerous occasions officially signed off on the necessity of military force with the arguments of the Russian military fulfilling its moral duty of protection (exemplary Patriarchia.ru 2015, October 10; November 10; December 15; December 29; 2016, January 21). This expression of blessing by the ROC for the armed Russian forces has been observed in prior engagement and points to a theme in the ROC’s general discourse that can be described as *ecclesiastical militarism*, derived from the meshing of cooperation between the ROC and the Russian military complexes (Adamsky 2019, 2020).

Second, the Church links “the West” in terms of being directly involved and contributing to the ODC-2 threat of “Arab Spring / Destabilization” and the entailing extremely negative consequences for the entire conceptualized region (IDC Compartment-1) (Patriarchia.ru 2015, May 5). Here, the ROC ascribes “the West” axiological markers such as “arrogance”, “lack of understanding”, and “imperialism”. These expressive connections reflect the Church’s continuous utterances of its shared *vision* with the Kremlin for contemporary global politics. This vision entails, first the primacy of indefeasibility of “state’s “sovereignty”, thus promoting noninterference in the affairs of other states, and second the believe in a “multipolar world”, advocating against Western tendencies to influence other regions (Blitt 2021, pp. 2-3). This believe in sovereignty was expressed by the Church with regards to limits of the Russian armed forces’ operation in Syria: “They do not participate in the internal political struggle in this country, they do not propose any plans for political change that would not be determined by the will of the people of Syria” (Patriarchia.ru 2016, July 26).

And lastly, the ROC has conceptualized and expressed a linkage between the ODC-3 threat of “Christianophobia” / “Western secular liberalism” and “the West”. The Church invokes a picture of threatening Western values, in particular “secular liberalism”, that endangers “Christianity” anywhere, provoking “loss of tradition”, “loss of identity”, and the rise of “immorality” and “Christianophobia” in “Christian countries”. This further infusion of anti-Western sentiments mirrors a theme which the Church and Kremlin have agreed upon – Russia is a protector against the loss of “spiritual-moral values” (Østbø 2016). This theme, arisen from

the conservative turn in Russia since the early 2010's, is directly "addressed to Euro-Atlantic countries" (Makarychev & Yatsyk 2014, p. 2). The Church has been actively promoting this theme which contains a dual message of the West actively abandoning its traditional spiritual and moral values, and Russia standing up to protect those who suffer from the consequences of the loss of these values. Especially internationally, the Church has engaged in the continuous utterances of this theme (Curanović 2018, p. 258; Adamsky 2020, pp. 52-56), seeking its perpetuation in international bodies concerned with human rights (Haft 2021), all while enacting a role of a "moral norm entrepreneur" (Stoeckl 2014, 2016).

What becomes visible from these subsumptions is that the ROC in its *Holy War* discourse, pertaining to providing legitimization for the Russian military intervention in Syria, through linkages, has infused the discourse with themes that are already existent in the post-Soviet Church's *general discourse*. Pairing this finding with the understanding of political discourses as strategic in character, by expressing the *Holy War* discourse as laid out, the ROC attempts to convince its hearers to share a rather complex conceptualization of the Church's understanding of the reality surrounding the conflict in Syria; thus seeking approval for the necessity of the Russian military's actions.

Finally, as laid out, in these presented themes, the Church and Kremlin share a mutual understanding, highlighting the ideological conflation within the post-Soviet state-church-nexus. These findings provide grounds for further analysis. Therefore, as a final remark for this study, it is now encouraged in a next logical step to move the attention to drawing a direct comparison between the Church's discourse and the expressions of the Russian state around its military intervention in Syria in order to move beyond the findings subsumed from this work.

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