

Leiden University

Russia and Ukraine

A post-colonial perspective on the Ukraine-Russia conflict

Bram Danen

8-1-2016

Contents

Introduction	2.
Theory and Methods	5.
Vladimir Putin and Russian foreign policy	8.
Views on Russia's identity and role in world affairs	8.
Views on the near abroad and Ukraine:	10.
Russian identity and foreign policy	14.
Identity formation and national interests	14.
The near abroad: Ukraine in Russian foreign policy	16.
Media and literature: historical and contemporary discourses	20.
Conclusion	27.
Bibliography	30.

Introduction

At the moment of writing the conflict in Ukraine has settled down. A new ceasefire has come into force on the first of September 2015, salvaging the badly damaged Minsk Agreement.¹ The conflict between Ukraine and Russia began over a year ago. After the Ukrainian Revolution that toppled Ukrainian president Yanukovich, Russia annexed Crimea. A pro-Russian uprising in the industrial important Donbas region threatened Ukraine with the further loss of territory. Kiev started a counter-offensive to defeat the insurgency rapidly. Facing defeat, the rebels were supported with significant amounts of Russian equipment and manpower.² After the signing of the Minsk Agreement in September 2014, the conflict entered a more protracted phase. Currently, 6823 people have lost their lives in the conflict. Approximately 17086 people have been injured and 2.5 million have been displaced. That makes Ukraine the largest crisis since the Bosnian War of 1992-1995.³

With the annexation of Crimea Russia changed Europe's post-war borders by force. This significantly affected the relationship between Russia and the West. In order to punish Russia, Washington and Brussels sanctioned Russian individuals and companies (Moscow reacted with counter-sanctions and snap exercises along NATO's borders). From both a political and economic perspective, the War in Ukraine has turned into the largest confrontation between Russia and the West since the end of the Cold War. This makes it a relevant topic of study. To be specific: in order to find a solution to the Ukraine-Russia crisis, it is important to study the origins of it. In this way this study tries to contribute to finding a peaceful solution to the conflict.

Most studies on the conflict between Ukraine and Russia are conducted from a traditional realist perspective. Moscow had been concerned for a long time by the gradual expansion of NATO into its sphere of influence. Russia, which views itself as one of the

¹ Valentyn Ogirenko (2015) Hollande, Merkel, Putin back bid for new Ukraine ceasefire (online) *Reuters*. Available from <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/08/29/us-ukraine-crisis-ceasefire-idUSKCN0QYOHY20150829> (Accessed on 02-09-2015).

² Igor Sutyagin (2015) Briefing paper Russian forces in Ukraine (online) *Royal United Services Institute*. Available from https://www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/201503_BP_Russian_Forces_in_Ukraine_FINAL.pdf [Accessed on 02-09-2015].

³ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2015) Ukraine situation report No. 7 as of 14 August 2015 [online] *United Nations*. Available from https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/ocha_ukraine_situation_update_number_7_14_august_2015.pdf (Accessed on 02-09-2015).

world's leading powers, believes it needs control over the post-Soviet space in order to maintain its status as a great power. The pro-Western Colour Revolutions in the first decade of the 21st century confirmed Russia's fears the West is trying to undermine Russia's position in the international system.⁴ To strengthen Moscow's hold on the post-Soviet space, Russia created the Eurasian (Economic) Union (EaU) with Belarus and Kazakhstan.⁵ However, strategically important Ukraine refused to join. In combination with Brussels attempts to intensify its relationship with Kiev, Russia felt it had no other choice than to act. This has been most consistently argued by J.J. Maersheimer.⁶

From a liberal perspective the crisis in Ukraine was caused by the (potentially) successful proliferation of Western democratic values. Because Putin's system is based on the claim the Western democratic model is not applicable to Russia or the post-Soviet space in general (especially in 'brotherly' nations like Ukraine), the legitimacy of his regime was threatened. Thus, Moscow tries to destabilise Ukraine to prevent it from becoming a successful democracy that could threaten Putin's system. Therefore, while realists stress the importance of Russian control over Ukrainian population, industry and resources, the liberal studies focus on democratic legitimacy.⁷

Little had been written on the Ukraine-Russia crisis from other International Relations theories. Constructivists tend to focus on how Ukraine's conflicting identities contributed to the development and eventual escalation of the conflict. While many people in Eastern Ukraine are relatively comfortable with a Russian-centric identity (including membership of the EaU), Ukrainians in the centre and west of the country hold more nationalist views. Not surprisingly, the revolution was most strongly supported in these parts of the country. The

⁴ Peter Rutland (2014) An Unnecessary War. The Geopolitical Roots of the Ukraine Crisis. In *Ukraine and Russia. People, Politics, Propaganda and Perspectives*. Agnieszka Pikulicka-Wilczewska and Richard Sakwa eds. Bristol: E-International Relations Publishing: 130-133.

⁵ Hannes Adomeit (2012) 'Putin's 'Eurasian Union': Russia's integration project and policies on post-Soviet space', *Neighbourhood Policy Paper 4*: 1-12:3-8.

⁶ J.J. Maersheimer (2014) 'Why the Ukraine crisis is the West's fault: the liberal delusions that provoked Putin', *Foreign Affairs* 93 (5): 77-89.

⁷ Paul D'Anieri (2014) Democracy and Geopolitics. Understanding Ukraine's threat to Russia. In *Ukraine and Russia*. Pikulicka-Wilczewska and Sakwa: 234-237.

studies of Nikolai N. Petro⁸ and Karina Korostelina⁹ are good examples of the constructivist perspective.

Interestingly, few academics have taken a critical perspective on the Ukraine-Russia crisis. Especially lacking is the postcolonial approach. This is surprising given the fact the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of new nation-states such as Ukraine marks the latest wave of decolonisation in modern history. Therefore, extending the reach of postcolonial theory to the post-Soviet space makes sense.¹⁰ However, this is also relevant from a theoretical point of view. Postcolonialism usually focuses on Western Europe's former African and Asian (to a lesser extent Latin American) colonies. This is logically the result of the fact that postcolonialism as a theory arose in response to the (continued) effects of Western colonialism on these continents. However, 'postcolonial' academics admit that colonialism is not an exclusively Western practice.¹¹ In addition, many journalists have analysed Russia's war in Ukraine through postcolonial lenses: generally speaking they argue Russia has taken up a new imperial mission, aimed at unifying the post-Soviet space under its rule. The EaU can be identified as the latest manifestation of this imperial mission. However, this so-called new Russian imperialism is often assumed, but seldom explained. Therefore it makes sense to ask *how the Ukraine-Russia crisis can be explained from a postcolonial point of view*.¹²

A few academics have already used postcolonial theory to explain the relationship between Ukraine and Russia. Myroslav Shkandrij uses postcolonialism as a literary theory. He argues Russia had to reduce Ukrainians to colonial subjects in order to legitimise the Russian imperial project during the 19th and 20th century. This entailed creating a discourse of cultural superiority towards Ukrainians, which has since then been reproduced in Russian literature.¹³ Myroslav Ryabchuk argues along similar lines colonialism continues to influence

⁸ Nicolai N. Petro (2014) Understanding the Other Ukraine: Identity and Allegiance in Russophone Ukraine. In *Ukraine and Russia*. Pikulicka-Wilczewska and Sakwa: 19-31.

⁹ Karina V. Korostelina (2013) 'Mapping national identity narratives in Ukraine', *Nationalities Papers* 42 (2): 293-215.

¹⁰ John Darwin (2007) *After Tamerlane. The Rise and Fall of Global Empires 1400-2000* (London: Allen Lane): 468-479.

¹¹ Ania Loomba (1998) *Colonialism/postcolonialism* (London: Routledge) 2-3.

¹² Mark Galeotti and Andrew S. Bowen (2014) Putin's Empire of the Mind. How Russia's president moved from realist to ideologue. And what he will do next [online] Foreign Policy. Available from <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/04/21/putins-empire-of-the-mind/> [Accessed on 26-02-2015].

¹³ Myroslav Shkandrij (2001) *Russia and Ukraine. Literature and the discourse of Empire from Napoleonic to Postcolonial times* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press).

Russian discourse on Ukraine to this day. Because Russia views Ukraine both as the cradle of her civilization and as an Oriental place, it attributed every positive characteristic of Ukrainian culture to Russian influence, while attributing all bad (anti-Russian) characteristics to malign foreign (Western) influences.¹⁴ This study aims to take the postcolonial perspective one step further by applying it to modern day Russian foreign policy. Edward Said convincingly argues in his *Orientalism*¹⁵ that representations of the Other serve to justify colonialism and imperialism. Therefore, this study will primarily focus on how current images of Ukraine justify Russian involvement. The next section will elaborate on how postcolonial theory can be used to this effect.

Theory and Methods

Postcolonial theory developed in concert with the independence struggles of African, Asian and Latin American colonies.¹⁶ According to Robert J.C. Young, postcolonial theory aims to 'critique (the) forces of oppression and coercive domination that operate in the contemporary world: the politics of anti-colonialism, neo-colonialism, race, gender, nationalisms, class and ethnicities'¹⁷ Postcolonial theory holds that the relationship between the colonial powers and their former colonies is neo-colonial in nature. Independence from the European metropolises did not lead to real sovereignty. They still largely depend on their former colonial master, politically, economically and culturally. The dominance of the former metropolises is enhanced by the workings of the international system: former colonial powers continue to dominate international decision-making, forcing the former colonies to play by their rules.¹⁸

Postcolonialism is not a law-like theory, but a critical perspective. It aims to discover and critique the power/knowledge axis, which binds former colonies to their old metropolises. In line with structuralist approaches it states that the power to define truth and justice has a real effect on the contemporary political and economic environment.¹⁹ Therefore, in the

¹⁴ Mykola Ryabchuk (2010) 'The Ukrainian "Friday" and Russian "Robinson". The Uneasy Advent of Postcoloniality', *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 44: 7-24.

¹⁵ Edward Said (1978) *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books).

¹⁶ Robert J.C. Young (2001) *Postcolonialism. A historical introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers): 18.

¹⁷ Young, *Postcolonialism*, 11.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, 57.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 63-64.

tradition of Said many postcolonial critiques focus on cultural representation. According to Derek Gregory, contemporary imperialism is cultural in nature. Gregory argues Western modernity (or identity in general) cannot exist without its opposite. The Other always reflects what the Self is not. In order to construct such binary oppositions, the Self creates an imagined geography. This is a heterogeneous collection of representations of the Other that serves to confirm the own identity. Gregory argues an imaginary geography does not make a distinction between past, present and future. The image of the Other remains timeless. New additions will be folded in an already pre-existent mold.²⁰ Colonial representations involve a strict dividing line between metropole and colony. The natives are not allowed to represent themselves but are represented and defined by the colonial power. In many colonial writings natives are depicted as having essential and unchanging features, which legitimates colonial power in the form of guardianship.²¹

How does this help us understand whether the relationship between Ukraine and Russia can be characterised as neo-colonial? Gregory argues neo-colonialism is considered morally wrong in our postmodern world because it is associated with violence and oppression. Instead, contemporary imperialism²² is usually a more indirect phenomenon: the dominant powers still need an orderly and stable world. Because the weak cannot protect themselves, a new kind of imperialism is needed: one that uses the language of human rights in order to justify Western involvement in the internal affairs of other countries. The term 'failed state' is strongly associated with this new kind of imperialism: when a state fails to protect its own citizens, the powerful have the moral duty to intervene and create a more orderly and stable environment.²³ Power defines truth (what is a failed state? Which states can be characterised as such?) therefore gives the power to intervene. What is truth depends on imagined geographies, created in and for the benefit of the metropole.²⁴

The following questions can be formulated from a postcolonial point of view: what representations of Ukraine exist in Russia? Who benefits from these representations? How

²⁰ Derek Gregory (2004) *The Colonial Present. Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq* (Malden: Blackwell): 3-7.

²¹ Siba N. Grovogui (2007) Postcolonialism. In *International Relations Theories*. Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith eds. Oxford: OUP: 230-246: 231.

²² Although there are conceptual differences between the terms neo-colonialism and imperialism, this study will use these concepts interchangeable because both concepts relate to subjugating a distant periphery to a dominant centre. See Stephen Howe (2002) *Empire. A very short introduction* (Oxford: OUP): 30-31.

²³ Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, 253-254.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, 262.

do these relate to Russia's own identity and role in the world? How do these representations allow for intervention in Ukraine's internal affairs? To what extent is Ukraine represented as a failed state?

Most of this study will therefore rely on discourse analysis. This method is useful in analysing representations. It allows the author to determine which representations of Ukraine exist in Russia, which of these are normalised by being repeatedly put forward and what Russian actions this made possible during the Ukraine crisis. However, although discourse is a prerequisite for action, it does not cause it directly. Usually, discourses allow for a range of options. What options are chosen does not exclusively rely on discourse, although it can make some actions more likely than others.²⁵ Because not all representations are equally important and lasting, it is important to layer the discourse.²⁶ This study will focus on representations of Ukraine in Putin's speeches, official government documents (mainly relating to foreign policy), media and Russian literature. The focus will be on the discourse of the Kremlin (particularly Vladimir Putin). Besides analysing discourse, the author will also analyse the content of the selected sources. This allows for a comprehensive analysis of all the sources on different levels. Finally, this study will also compare the case of Ukraine to the representation of the post-Soviet space in general. This will allow the author to determine if and to what extent Russian discourse towards the post-Soviet space is neo-colonial in nature.

²⁵ Iver B. Neumann (2009) Discourse analysis. In *Qualitative Methods in International Relations. A pluralist guide*. Audi Klotz and Deepa Prakash eds. New York: Palgrave: 61-77:61-62.

²⁶ Neumann (2009) Discourse analysis. In *Qualitative Methods in International Relations*. Audi Klotz and Deepa Prakash: 73-75.

Vladimir Putin and Russian foreign policy

Views on Russia's identity and role in world affairs

All analysed texts are official publications from the Kremlin. This adds to their importance, but also makes it rather likely they have been carefully prepared for publication (including international consumption). For that reason, it is expected they are very nuanced in both content and tone. This makes it rather unlikely they completely reflect the opinion of Putin.²⁷ The most important source for Putin's views on Russian identity and role in world politics are his annual Addresses to the Federal Assembly (akin to the State of the Union in the United States). Speeches given by Putin at international forums such as the Munich Security Conference (MSC)²⁸ and the Valdai Club²⁹ are also considered.

The Annual Addresses mostly deal with domestic affairs, but they also contain a section dealing with Russia's regional and international position. In his first Annual Address Putin already argues Russia is destined to be a strong state. He deemed the weak international position of Russia at the beginning of the 21st century unacceptable. In Putin's view only strong countries are respected and maintain their sovereignty while weak ones lose independence. Here he clearly refers to Russia's political and economic dependence on the West. This greatly affected Moscow's ability to protect its interest in Yugoslavia during the 1990s. For this reason Putin underlines the importance of the economic modernisation of the country. Russia has to catch up in order to become a respected member of the international community. The main threat facing Russia is falling behind, which would allow the West to dictate international norms. Putin indirectly states that interfering in the internal affairs of other countries (under the guise of human rights) is a good example of this. Thus, Russia rejects what Gregory would call the neo-colonial practices of the West.³⁰

²⁷ Viatcheslav Morozov (2015) *Russia's postcolonial identity. A subaltern empire in an Eurocentric world* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York): 126.

²⁸ The MSC is an annual international discussion forum for security policy. It brings together policymakers (including heads of state) from all over the world. More information available at <https://www.securityconference.de/en/about/about-the-msc/>

²⁹ The Valdai Club is annual a discussion platform which aims to communicate Russian views on international affairs to the international (academic) elite. The speeches of the Russian president play a prominent role during the event. More information available at <http://valdaiclub.com/about/valdai/>

³⁰ Vladimir Putin (2000) Annual Address to the Federal Assembly (online) The Kremlin. Available at http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2000/07/08/0000_type70029type82912_70658.shtml (Accessed at 20-10-2015).

Putin's views on Russia's place in the world remains fairly consistent over time. In his Annual Address of 2003 Putin states Russia has maintained a strong international presence for over a thousand years. The Russian State has succeeded in uniting a vast amount of people at the same time. Russia's past serves as an example to current generations and teaches them Russia (despite challenges) has always remained on top. For Putin there is no question Russia is destined to be a great power. However, he does not refer to some kind of imperial mission. Instead, he argues the main goal of Russian foreign policy is to pursue its national interest. The main strategic goal remains modernising the economy in order to compete in the global economy.³¹

It may seem Putin does not hold any neo-colonial views. However, this is not quite true. In his Annual Address of 2005 he states: "Russia should continue its civilising mission on the Eurasian continent. This mission consists of ensuring that democratic values, combined with national interests, enrich and strengthen our historic community."³² The historic community Putin refers to is the former Soviet Union. At the beginning of the Address he calls the collapse of the USSR the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century. Peoples bound together by a common (Russian) language and culture were separated after centuries of union. In this historic community Russia played the role of civiliser: together with other European nations Russia developed the democratic and law-based state rooted in the values of The Enlightenment and spread these to the distant and peripheral parts of the world. In practise this means Russia wants to deepen integration within the former Soviet Union. In his Address of 2005 he is still largely referring to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).³³

After the Orange Revolution both the tone and content of Putin's speeches grew increasingly assertive. Instead of veiled references to the West, Putin started attacking it directly. His MSC speech of 2007 marks this watershed moment. He argues the West threatens global stability by abusing international law in order to protect its prosperity.

³¹ Vladimir Putin (2003) Annual Address to the Federal Assembly (online) The Kremlin. Available at http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2003/05/16/0000_type70029type82912_44692.shtml (Accessed at 20-10-2015).

³² Vladimir Putin (2005) Annual Address to the Federal Assembly (online) The Kremlin. Available at http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2005/04/25/2031_type70029type82912_87086.shtml (Accessed on 20-10-2015).

³³ Putin (2005) Annual Address to the Federal Assembly (online).

Expanding its sphere of influence through the infringement of the rights of sovereign states provides the West with the necessary tools. In the process it undermines global stability, creating threats like international terrorism and regional conflict. In contrast, Russia takes its role as a great power managing global stability seriously. Putin argues the West should (like Russia) respect international law and enter into a dialogue with rising powers such as China and India. This should lead to the emergence of a multilateral system consisting of the world's great powers, jointly managing global stability³⁴

Anne L. Clunнан argues national interests are largely determined by how the elites view national identity. In Russia's case, its national identity remains strongly attached to its imperial past.³⁵ Therefore, it is not surprising Russian national interests are still premised on the historic role of Russia as an empire that is able to determine the faith of the peoples on its peripheries. Analysing Putin's speeches clearly shows he views the post-Soviet space as a region where Russia plays the role of the unquestioned hegemon, maintaining stability using its vast political, economic and military resources. Maintaining stability in its own backyard also allows Russia to play the role of a global great power, jointly managing global stability with other rising powers and the West.³⁶

Views on the near abroad and Ukraine

Putin does not often refer to Ukraine in his Annual Addresses and other speeches specifically. Beyond mentioning the civilising mission of Russia in the post-Soviet space,³⁷ he argues this 'near abroad' is Russia's zone of privileged interests. He considers it a sphere of influence where Russia's civilising potential can best be utilised. Putin argues 'it was Russia that helped to defuse the tension in many of these (regional) conflicts. We will continue to carry out our peacekeeping mission in all responsibility.'³⁸ Managing stability in Eurasia

³⁴ Vladimir Putin (2007) Speech and the following discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy (online). The Kremlin. Available from http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2007/02/10/0138_type82912type82914type82917type84779_118123.shtml (Accessed on 16-07-2015).

³⁵ Anne L. Clunнан (2009) *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence. Aspirations, identity and security interests* (JHUP: Baltimore): 155-157.

³⁶ Clunнан, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*: 170.

³⁷ Putin (2005) Annual Address to the Federal Assembly (online).

³⁸ Vladimir Putin (2006) Annual Address to the Federal Assembly (online) The Kremlin. Available from http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2006/05/10/1823_type70029type82912_105566.shtml (Accessed on 22-10-2015).

remains at the core of Russia's civilising mission. Putin's sense of ownership towards the region is further reinforced by his views on the nature of international relations: Russia is a great power like any other great power (such as the United States) and is responsible for managing stability within its own region. Conflicts of interest between great powers are resolved through negotiations between them. In this worldview the sovereignty of small countries counts for little. The great powers decide the faith of the world together and respect each other's sphere of influence. Consequently, when the West supported the Orange Revolution, it broke the rules of the game. Instead of advancing stability it actively sought to undermine it. Worse, the West infringed on Russia zone of privileged interests and undermined Moscow's position as a great power in the process. Because Russian identity remains rooted in its imperial past, only Russia has the right to decide the faith of these peoples.³⁹

The most interesting source for Putin's view on regional affairs is the articles he published in state-owned newspaper Izvestia in 2011 and 2012. The pre-election articles offer a useful insight into what Putin wants to achieve during his third term as president. He proposes the creation of a Eurasian Union which will unite as many countries as possible in the post-Soviet space. Economic and political integration will allow the EaU to become 'one of the poles of the modern world.'⁴⁰ The EaU will basically allow Russia to fulfil its historical aspirations as a great power, using economic and political union to strengthen the strategic position of Russia. While the EaU mainly seems to benefit Russia (which would be an argument against post-colonialism) Putin also argues all member states will profit equally. The EaU will stimulate economic growth and strengthen the strategic position of post-Soviet countries on the world stage. Integration will go smoothly since all (prospective) member states share a history of union together. Taking the initiative, Russia plays its historic role as unifier of the Eurasian space. Indeed, Russia is in the position to advance the interests of all member states internationally. In Putin's own words: 'Russia will promote a common agreed position of all (...) members.'⁴¹ Apparently, Russia has the ability to speak for the peoples on

³⁹ Clunna, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*, 128-129.

⁴⁰ Vladimir Putin (2011) A crucial integration project. The future in the making (online) Permanent mission of the Russian Federation to the EU. Available from <http://www.russianmission.eu/en/news/article-prime-minister-vladimir-putin-new-integration-project-eurasia-future-making-izvestia-3-> (Accessed on 22-10-2015).

⁴¹ Putin (2011) A crucial integration project (online).

its periphery. While the EaU is mainly in Russia's interest, it also allows Moscow to fulfil its historic mission of unifier, stabiliser and bringer of prosperity to its periphery.⁴²

In his Annual Address of 2012 Putin refers to another text which is also of interest in this respect. In connection to Russia's future development he refers to Lev Gumilev (1912-1992). Gumilev was a rather obscure Soviet historian, who developed a theory which 'scientifically' proved the peoples of the Soviet Union belonged together. He also believed Russia had the obligation to unite the people of the Eurasian space. Referring to Gumilev, Putin indirectly confirms Russia's role as an imperial power.⁴³ Concerning Ukraine specifically, Putin argues in his Annual Address of 2013 that membership of the EaU will be in the benefit of Kiev. Regional integration profits everyone, including Ukraine.⁴⁴

After the Ukrainian Revolution Putin's tone towards Ukraine becomes more emotional. The conflict in Ukraine was the result of Western interference in Kiev's internal affairs. Because this country is on the intersection of geopolitical and civilizational plates, Western disregard of the interests of the people of Eastern Ukraine nearly ripped the country apart. The West could have prevented this by consulting with Russia beforehand, being one of Ukraine's oldest and most important partners. Russia warned about the dangers of the association agreement between Ukraine and the EU but nobody listened. Interestingly, Putin argues there should be a dialogue between the EU and EaU. Given the fact Moscow believes it can speak for the nations of its periphery, Moscow wants to remain involved in the EU-Ukraine integration process. This way it can influence the form and content of the final agreement.⁴⁵

Ukraine is not only a core part of Russia's sphere of influence, but also of the Russian World. In his speech celebrating the annexation of Crimea, Putin argues Russia and Ukraine should have never separated in the first place. They belong to the same Slavic Orthodox civilisation. Huge swaths of Ukraine once rightfully belonged to Russia. Moscow does accept Kiev's independence, but only when they are capable of protecting the rights of the Russian minority. The Western orchestrated coup against Yanukovich and the rise of fascism left

⁴² Putin (2011) A crucial integration project (online).

⁴³ Marlène Laruelle (2008) *Russian Eurasianism. An ideology of empire* (Washington: JHUP): 71-79.

⁴⁴ Vladimir Putin (2013) Annual Address to the Federal Assembly (online) The Kremlin. Available from <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19825> (Accessed on 22-10-2015).

⁴⁵ Vladimir Putin (2014) Valdai Speech (online) The Kremlin. Available from <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46860> (Accessed on 22-10-2015).

Russia no other choice than to intervene. Here Russia is using the same argument Western states make to legitimate a humanitarian intervention without the approval of the UN.⁴⁶ At the Valdai Club forum Putin is even more forceful: 'here we consider it [the bear] the master of the taiga, and I know for sure it does not move to any other climatic zones-it will not be comfortable there. However, it will not let anyone have its taiga either.'⁴⁷ Putin is clear he considers Ukraine to be part of Russia's natural environment. Only Moscow has the right to decide the faith of the Ukrainian people. The Ukrainian crisis was caused by the West not respecting Russia's rights in the post-Soviet space.⁴⁸

To what extent does Putin hold neo-colonial views towards Ukraine? Given the nature of the documents analysed it remains difficult to give a precise answer to this question. However, his Annual Address of 2012 gives some important clues. Putin refers to Soviet dissident and poet Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918-2008). Solzhenitsyn believed Russia and Ukraine belonged to the same nation. Large parts of Ukraine were once part of Russia, including Crimea and New Russia (Eastern and Southern Ukraine). Putin also referred to the regions as being a historic part of Russia. While Solzhenitsyn recognized there are some significant differences, these largely resulted from foreign invasions. Good Ukrainians feel a natural affection for Russia, Ukrainian nationalism is the result of malign foreign influences. Interestingly, Solzhenitsyn states Ukraine cannot survive without Russia (which he calls a limb without a body). While this indicates Solzhenitsyn held some neo-colonial views, he also rejects Russian imperialism as being costly and not beneficial for the nation as a whole.⁴⁹ Putin's views seem largely consistent with Solzhenitsyn: he wants to act in Russia's interests. His behaviour towards Ukraine is largely motivated by nationalism. However, as Clunnam argues convincingly: imperialism is a by-product of Russian nationalism because Russian nationalism is rooted in Russia's imperial history. Therefore, it is likely that neo-colonialism is part of Putin's foreign policy discourse.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Vladimir Putin (2014) Crimea Speech (online) The Kremlin. Available from <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603> (Accessed on 10-12-2015).

⁴⁷ Putin (2014) Valdai Speech (online).

⁴⁸ Ibidem

⁴⁹ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1991) *Rebuilding Russia. Reflections and tentative proposals* (New York: Harpers Collin): 6-16.

⁵⁰ Clunnam, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*: 170.

Russian identity and foreign policy

Identity formation and national interests

As argued in the previous chapter, national identity has a strong influence of the definition of national interests. Before we can elaborate on Russia's national interests in Ukraine from an elite perspective, it is necessary to determine how these elites view Russia's identity and position in the international system. First of all, the Russian elites consist of politicians, oligarchs, security services, military and high-ranking civil servants. After the collapse of the Soviet Union these elites largely abandoned Russia's imperial national identity. They viewed liberalism as the fastest way to political and economic modernisation of their country. This meant they aimed at integrating Russia in the Euro-Atlantic community as quickly as possible. Russia's imperial past was considered burdensome, because it could slow down Russia on the path of becoming a modern and powerful nation-state.⁵¹ According to former prime minister Yegor Gaidar (1956-2009), Russia had to put its own strategic interest in the backseat if necessary. He expected this would speed up the integration process with the Euro-Atlantic community.⁵²

From 1992 onwards the liberal view increasingly faded into obscurity. The adverse effects of transformation to a market economy plunged Russia into poverty and dependence. Still adhering to the idea of Russia as a great power, the 'national humiliation' triggered a nation-wide move to the right.⁵³ Russia's identity was again defined in imperial terms. Especially radical nationalists (mostly concentrated in the Duma) started reappraising Russia's role as an imperial power.⁵⁴ According to Kuchins and Zelevyev, radical nationalists consist of three subgroups. Neo-imperialists argue Russia should restore a single state on the territory of the former Soviet Union. The Communist Party is the main advocate of this position. Ethnic nationalists (the traditional far right) advocated creating a (militarily) strong and autarkic Russia which would subjugate its periphery. They want to create a buffer zone between Russia and the West consisting of dependent states and protectorates. The Liberal

⁵¹ Astrid S. Tuminez (2000) *Russian Nationalism since 1856. Ideology and the making of foreign policy* (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers: Oxford): 187-189.

⁵² Andrew C. Kuchins and Igor Zelevyev (2012) *Russia's Contested National Identity and Foreign Policy*. In *Worldviews of Aspiring Powers. Domestic Foreign Policy debates in China, India, Japan and Russia*. Henry R. Nau and Deepa M. Ollapally eds. OUP: Oxford: 185.

⁵³ Tuminez, *Russian Nationalism since 1856*, 11.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, 202-207.

Democratic Party is the main proponent of this position. Finally, there are the nativists in the tradition of Solzhenitsyn. They reject an imperial mission in Eurasia but do believe Russia, Ukraine and Belarus should be united in a single Russian Union.⁵⁵

The move to radical nationalism worried Russian elites. Although closer to radical nationalists than liberals⁵⁶, Russia's elites considered right-wing nationalism as impractical and dangerous.⁵⁷ The elite reply to the shift to radical nationalism was statism. Historically, the tradition of statism goes back to tsarist times. Statists tend to prioritise the interests of the state over those of the nation. They are largely non-ideological and pragmatic in their foreign policy goals.⁵⁸ Statists believe Russia should be recognised as a great power and equal partner by the West. Although the interests of Western countries sometimes conflict with those of Russia, they do not believe in confrontation (but in competition). Russia's main role in the international system is being a force of global and regional stability. Russia has special rights in the post-Soviet space and other powers have to respect these rights. Putin is a good example of a statist.⁵⁹ As with radical nationalism, statist views tend to reflect certain imperial points of view (Russia's special rights) because they base Russia's national identity at least partly on its imperial past. However, these are relatively marginal compared to radical nationalists.⁶⁰ Russia's elites favour statism because it is effectively a compromise between liberalism and radical nationalism: statists combine Russia's historical aspiration with pragmatic foreign policy goals.⁶¹ The lack of a clear external threat to Russia's interests during most of the 1990s helped to consolidate statism as the 'official ideology' of the elites.⁶²

The expansion of NATO and the Colour Revolutions again shifted Russia's identity to the right. While Putin became more nationalist during his time in office, he never committed himself to a single ideology. The Russian president remains a pragmatic politician, combining

⁵⁵ Kuchins and Zelejev, Russia's Contested National Identity. In *Worldviews of Aspiring Powers*. Nau and Ollapally, 192-194.

⁵⁶ Clunna, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*, 114-116.

⁵⁷ Luke March (2011) Is Nationalism Rising in Russian Foreign Policy? The Case of Georgia. *Demokratizatsiya* 19 (3), 187-207: 188-190.

⁵⁸ Tuminez, *Russian Nationalism since 1856*, 175.

⁵⁹ Clunna, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*, 83-97.

⁶⁰ Tuminez, *Russian Nationalism since 1856*, 175.

⁶¹ Clunna, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*, 119-121.

⁶² Tuminez, *Russian Nationalism since 1856*, 279.

liberalism, statism and radical nationalism as he sees fit.⁶³ However, society-wide Russia's foreign policy discourse did move to the right obscuring the differences between statism and radical nationalism in the process.⁶⁴ This also signalled the re-emergence of neo-colonial views on Russia's identity and foreign policy. According to Tuminez, this imperial self-image consists of three main components: Russia's special rights in the post-Soviet space, reappraisal of the empire and projection of Russia's (military) power, both regionally and globally. Finally, rejection of the West and the belief of Russia being a separate civilisation remain at the core of Russian imperialism.⁶⁵

The near abroad: Ukraine in Russian foreign policy

The National Security Concepts (NSC) of 1997 and 2000 signalled the consolidation of the statist perspective.⁶⁶ The NSC 1997 is a large document, which elaborates on Russia's strategic position and priorities in detail. The document is rather positive, even stating inter-state conflict is unlikely to happen anytime soon. The NSC 1997 defines three equally important strategic priorities: integration with the West, good neighbourly relations and economic modernisation. Referring to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), it states Russia has to maintain regional stability. Peacekeeping operations are named specifically in this respect.⁶⁷ Good neighbourly relations are defined as the absence of regional conflict and increased regional cooperation. Russia strives for the establishment of an economic union on the territory of the CIS. Economic cooperation is described as mainly in the interest of Russia itself. Finally, Russia reserves the right to intervene on the behalf of Russian minorities in the post-Soviet space.⁶⁸

The National Security Concept 2000 is a far briefer text. However, the content is very similar to the NSC 1997. Expansion of NATO and Western intervention in Kosovo (as well as the economic crisis of 1998) have made Russia realise its strategic position remains

⁶³ Kuchins and Zelevnev, Russia's Contested National Identity. In *Worldviews of Aspiring Powers*. Nau and Ollapally, 201-205.

⁶⁴ Tuminez, *Russian Nationalism since 1856*, 232-233.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, 272-276.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, 232.

⁶⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (1997) National Security Concepts of the Russian Federation (online) *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*. Available from <http://fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/blueprint.html> (Accessed on 11-11-2015).

⁶⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1997) National Security Concept (online) *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*.

weak.⁶⁹ The tone of the document, especially in connection with cooperation with the West, is rather pessimistic as a result. Strategic priorities in the post-Soviet space have hardly changed: regional cooperation and the deepening of integration within the CIS remain at the core of Russian foreign policy. In contrast to NSC 1997, the NSC 2000 states the importance of regional integration, not only for the prosperity of Russia, but for the post-Soviet space as a whole. However, like its 1997 counterpart the NSC 2000 prioritises Russian national interests. In addition, no specific countries are named. Although both documents elaborate extensively on the CIS, the exact shape and content of regional integration remains unclear.⁷⁰

The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (FPCRf) from 2008 is far more detailed than previous editions. It defines Russia as a Eurasian power, responsible for maintaining regional stability. The FPCRf 2008 states Russia's unique geographical position between Europe and Asia (as well as its history) demands a strong regional and global role.⁷¹ In addition, the FPCRf 2008 argues Russia and other post-Soviet countries possess a unique and common culture, rooted in geographical proximity and shared historical experiences. The Foreign Policy Concepts of the Russian Federation from 2013 is very similar to the FPCRf 2008. The importance of the EaU for Russia and other post-Soviet countries is basically the only new element. Again it is stated the people of the former Soviet Union possess a common culture, while not specifying exactly what the nature of this common culture is. However, the FPCRf 2013 adds this common culture is part of a separate civilization, much in line of Lev Gumilev's thinking. Ukraine is named specifically as Russia's most important partner and prospective member of the EaU. The FPCRf makes clear post-Soviet states with a large Slavic/Russian presence are at the core of this common civilisation.⁷²

⁶⁹ Jakub M. Godzimirski (2007) Russian national security concepts of 1997 and 2000: a comparative analysis. *European Security*, 9 (4): 73-91: 78.

⁷⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (2000) National Security Concepts of the Russian Federation (online) *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. Available from <http://archive.mid.ru//bdomp/ns-osndoc.nsf/1e5f0de28fe77fdcc32575d900298676/36aba64ac09f737fc32575d9002bbf31!OpenDocument> (Accessed on 11-11-2015).

⁷¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2008) Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (online) *The Kremlin*. Available from <http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/text/docs/2008/07/204750.shtml> (Accessed on 11-11-2015).

⁷² Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2013) Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (online) *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. Available from http://archive.mid.ru//brp_4.nsf/0/76389FEC168189ED44257B2E0039B16D (Accessed on 11-11-2015).

Both texts stress Russia's role as regional leader. A position which is enhanced by the claim regional organisations will become the building blocks of a multipolar world. While formally recognising the sovereignty of all post-Soviet countries, both the FPCR 2008 and the FPCR 2013 make clear Russia does want these nations to take Moscow's interests into account when developing ties with organisations of which Russia is not a part. Basically, the sovereignty of these states depends on their level of agreement with Russia. Similarly, Russia states it has the right to intervene anywhere in the post-Soviet space to protect the rights of compatriots (Russian-speakers) if necessary. However, all these interventions should be in accordance with international law.⁷³

Most of the texts connected to Russian foreign policy do not name any post-Soviet country specifically (with the exception of Ukraine in FPCR 2013). This is significant in itself: Russia's views all post-Soviet countries as a single cultural whole. Russia defines these countries as part of the same civilization. They do not seem to have a separate identity beyond what connects them with Russia. This indicates Russian elites are not unfamiliar with neo-colonial thinking. The short movie vice-premier Dmitri Rogozin posted on his Facebook-account is a good example in this respect: in the movie 'Russian Occupier' Russia is portrayed as a civilising force in Eurasia. It brought industry, technology and prosperity to Ukraine and the Baltic states. It developed underdeveloped regions like Siberia and Central Asia. This way it contributed to (technological) progress in general. The Russian Occupier considers it unjust its being told to back off. This is ungrateful to the great work the Russian people have accomplished. The Russian Occupier is proud of its historic mission, even if this means nobody likes him. It does not want to be accepted by the West if this means repudiating its historic mission. Finally, the video stresses Russia's enormous military might, further strengthening its imperial message.⁷⁴ Similarly, minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov wrote a well-known biography (critical historians consider it to be a hagiography) of the Eurasian thinker Lev Gumilev. However, this does not mean all post-Soviet countries are of the same importance politically.⁷⁵

⁷³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2013) Foreign Policy Concept (online) *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*.

⁷⁴ Robert Mackey (2015) A viral defence of Russian imperialism, addressed to Obama (online) *The New York Times*. Available from http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/03/world/europe/a-viral-defense-of-russian-imperialism-addressed-to-obama.html?_r=0 (Accessed on 11-11-2015).

⁷⁵ Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, 55-56.

Above examples indicate Russian empire and military might have been reappraised within the Russian elite. Imperial discourse was relatively marginal at the beginning of Putin's presidency but its popularity and influence has increased ever since.⁷⁶ Texts connected to official foreign policy clearly state Russia possesses special rights in the near abroad, a crucial part of neo-colonial reasoning (according to Tuminez).⁷⁷ However, official documents do not mention anything resembling some kind of imperial mission specifically. Russia is not necessarily portrayed as a civilizing force. Instead, Russia is largely viewed a normal country that primarily looks after its own interests. The exception is the presumed right to protect compatriots and the importance attached to Russia being a separate civilisation. Russia's right to intervene on the behalf of vaguely defined minorities is the strongest evidence of neo-colonialism yet. Although Russian imperialism is to a certain extent part of foreign policy discourse (increasingly), it is not clear whether there is any direct influence on foreign policy itself. As said in the introduction: neo-colonialism is a prerequisite for action, there is not necessarily a causal connection with actual foreign policy.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Clunna, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*, 172-173.

⁷⁷ Tuminez, *Russian Nationalism since 1856*, 232.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, 175.

Media and literature: historical and contemporary discourses

According to Gregory, imagined geographies are a crucial part of neo-colonial discourse. The concept was first employed by Said, who defined it as a multiplying of partitions that separates the space of the Self from the space of the Other. The unfamiliar space of the Other usually stands in opposition to the familiar space of the Self. Said compared the imagined geographies with a photographic negative: while the Other might become like the Self (if guided properly) it lacks the positive qualities of the Self.⁷⁹ The following section will look at the imagined geography of the lands surrounding Russia. The most important sources for imagined geographies are works of art, such as literature. After all, imagined geographies might be imaginations but are given substance through cultural practices.⁸⁰ After reviewing the 'Russian' borderlands the case of Ukraine will be analysed in depth. To summarise: the following section mainly deals with the question to what extent imagined geography colonises Ukraine in Russian discourse. The before mentioned Myroslav Shkandrij already did a great deal of research in this field. His work has been of great importance to this section.⁸¹

There is substantial overlap between what Said called Orientalism and the imagined geographies of the borderlands. The borderlands are full with religious extremism, slavery and despotism. Russia, in contrast, is portrayed as an enlightened European country: it is masculine, industrious and creative. The people of the borderlands are female, unchanging and mysterious.⁸² The word unchanging is crucial here. Although one can gain more knowledge of the Other, its substance never changes fundamentally. New texts are simply modifications of already existing ones: they confirm what we already know about the Other. The imagined geographies of the borderlands are a good example of this process: they remain fairly constant over time and reaffirm previous knowledge. The imagined geographies of the borderlands were mainly produced in the period 1817-1864. This corresponds with the Caucasian War, in which Russia subjugated the Caucasus.⁸³

⁷⁹ Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, 17.

⁸⁰ Ibidem, 18.

⁸¹ Shkandrij, *Russia and Ukraine*, abstract.

⁸² Ibidem, 38-40.

⁸³ Said, *Orientalism*, 63 and 71.

The people of the Caucasus are portrayed as passionate yet inferior to Russia. They are barbarians and noble savages at the same time: closer to nature than Russians (which is considered admirable), they resist Russia's attempts to enlighten them. Unable to grasp the advantages of Russian imperialism, the Russians have little choice but to subject them by force.⁸⁴ The resistance of the natives is in the end always futile: because of the superiority of Russian civilisation, the barbarians are destined to lose. Russia emerges victoriously, spreading civilisation to the benefit of the natives and maintaining peace and stability.⁸⁵

Russia's imperial mission did not limit itself to the Caucasus. Especially Slavophiles believed Russia had the task to liberate and unite all Slavic peoples. While fellow Slavs were recognised as equals, they were to be united and led by Russia. In this sense they were portrayed as little brothers: part of the same family yet not developed enough to be truly independent. Slavophiles argued only Russia was powerful enough to protect the interest of its little brothers. Obviously, these did not differ substantially from Russia's interests. Because all Slavs were considered to be part of the same family, Slavophiles considered it impossible they might resist Russian liberation and guidance. This could only be the result of malign foreign (Western) influences. Especially the Poles were considered unreliable. While all Russian authors shared these sentiments, Pushkin is particularly known for representing the official discourse towards the Poles. According to Pushkin, Poles were unreliable because they were corrupted by foreign influences. This caused Poles to lose touch with their true Slavic identity. The imagined geography of the borderlands thus enables colonialism: barbarians have to be civilised and fellow-Slavs liberated. Russia is always the civilising force and liberator in this discourse.⁸⁶

Ukrainians are represented as being superior to other peripheral peoples. However, they remain inferior to the Russians.⁸⁷ Ukrainians are also represented as being a kind of 'original Russians'. The first Russian state emerged on Ukrainian soil, and the people who inhabit these lands have not changed substantially ever since. So, Ukrainians were viewed as a less developed part of the same civilisation. This excluded the possibility of an independent Ukraine. Ukrainians needed Russian guidance to survive in the modern world. Russian

⁸⁴ Shkandrij, *Russia and Ukraine*, 41-43.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, 52.

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, 59-70.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, 84-85.

imperialism would enlighten these people and make them indistinguishable from Russia. This discourse systematically excluded the possibility of an independent Ukraine: the Ukrainian people could not be independent because they needed Russian guidance, but because they were part of the same civilisation, they would eventually become like Russians (thus removing the need for independence).⁸⁸

While the differences between Russians and Ukrainians were partly contributed to the unchanging nature of the Ukrainian, Polish influences were considered the main contributing factor.⁸⁹ In his novel *Poltova*, Pushkin describes the rebellion of the Cossack leader Ivan Mazepa (representing medieval Ukraine) against Russia. Mazepa betrays the tsar by siding with the Poles in order to re-establish a Ukrainian state. Because an independent Ukraine was considered a relic of the past, Mazepa's rebellion was doomed to fail. He could not match the Enlightened Russian people, and his attempts to resurrect a long dead political identity resulted in failure.⁹⁰ After the defeat of Mazepa's rebellion the last remains of Polish influence (language and culture) were removed and replaced with a Russian high culture. Ukrainian culture was relegated to the realm of folk culture, thus denying Ukrainians the right of self-determination.⁹¹

Ukraine's elite was forced to comply: in order to retain power, they had to recognise the superiority of Russian culture.⁹² Attempts to resurrect an Ukrainian culture were considered to be the work of underdeveloped people, who believed a folk culture such as Ukraine's could not produce anything resembling Russian high culture. In the worst case scenario, these attempts were considered to be a danger to national security, since an independent Ukrainian culture would threaten the existence of the Russian Empire.⁹³ Because Ukrainians were considered to be part of the same people (the triune Russian nation) these attempts had to be the result of foreign influences. These 'bad Ukrainians' had been detached from their true Slavic roots and served the cause of Russia's enemies. In contrast, 'good Ukrainians' did not question Russia's superiority and its imperial mission. Nikolai Gogol is a good example of a 'good Ukrainian'. In his works he described Ukraine as a

⁸⁸ Shkandrij, *Russia and Ukraine*, 74-75.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, 70-71.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, 101-102.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, 72.

⁹² Ryabchuk, 'The Ukrainian "Friday" and Russian "Robinson"', 8-9.

⁹³ Shkandrij, *Russia and Ukraine*, 65.

place that once had enjoyed independence, but those days represented Ukraine's past, not its future. Those who try to resist being part of Russia are in Gogol's works usually manipulated by the Poles.⁹⁴

Russia's imagined geography towards Ukraine attributed everything positive about Ukrainians to the shared heritage with the Russians. This is clearly demonstrated in the examples above. All bad characteristics are the result of foreign influences. This denied Ukraine the right of an independent existence: only behaviour deemed acceptable by Russia could be truly Ukrainian and thus legitimate while everything which was harmful to Russia's interests was only the result of foreign manipulations. By representing Ukraine in this light, Russia monopolised the right to speak for the Ukrainian people, while denying them the possibility to speak for themselves.⁹⁵

This imagined geography proved to be very resilient. When the protests started in November 2013, Russian media immediately ascribed these to foreign (Western) influences.⁹⁶ Since Ukrainians feel a natural connection to Russia, the protesters at the Maidan could not represent the majority of the Ukrainian people.⁹⁷ This fits the Russian discourse towards Ukraine perfectly: 'good Ukrainians' would never rebel against Russia's interests. The Maidan had to be the work of 'bad Ukrainians' instead. From this point of view the representation of Ukraine has remained stable since Pushkin's *Poltava*.⁹⁸ In addition, Ukraine is largely dependent on Russia economically. Association with the EU would be a disaster. In order to remain a prosperous country Ukraine has to remain in close association with Russia.⁹⁹

In Russian media Russia is always portrayed as the 'good guy': the West only serves its own interests whereas Russia is thinking of the interests of the Ukrainians. However, most articles published by Russia Today on this subject are interviews with foreign 'experts'. Russia Today does not interview any ordinary Ukrainians or Ukrainian experts. Many of these so-called 'experts' have a dubious background: they are known for their fierce anti-Western

⁹⁴ Shkandrij, *Russia and Ukraine*, 114-116.

⁹⁵ Ryabchuk, 'The Ukrainian "Friday" and Russian "Robinson"', 13-14.

⁹⁶ Russia Today (2013) Crisis in Ukraine was instigated by the West (online) Russia Today. Available from <http://rt.com/op-edge/crisis-ukraine-instigated-west-026/> (Accessed on 10-06-2015).

⁹⁷ Russia Today (2013) Ukrainian opposition wouldn't sign 'suicidal' EU agreement (online) Russia Today. Available from <http://rt.com/op-edge/ukraine-eu-deal-opposition-598/> (Accessed on 10-06-2015).

⁹⁸ Ryabchuk, 'The Ukrainian "Friday" and Russian "Robinson"', 13-14.

⁹⁹ Russia Today (2013) Ukrainian opposition wouldn't sign 'suicidal' EU agreement (online)

stances and are often attached to far-right parties. Russia thus monopolises the right to speak for Ukrainians. The Ukrainian people themselves are silenced in the process.¹⁰⁰

After the Ukrainian Revolution the tone of the Russian media becomes more hostile. Russian media claim Ukraine's legitimate government was ousted with the support of the far right. What the West called a revolution was nothing more than an ordinary coup d'état, instigated by the West and carried out with support of political extremists.¹⁰¹ Russian media also state the lack of a legitimate government caused a further spread of unrest and chaos (especially in the east, the so-called Russian Spring), which might make Russian intervention necessary in order to stabilise the situation and protect the rights of Russian-speakers: Russian troops will deter the fascist mob from carrying their revolution eastwards, it is argued.¹⁰² The legitimacy of the Ukrainian authorities is further undermined by the claim they do not control their own security forces anymore. Far-right militias, with support of certain parts of the army, and CIA-supported foreign mercenaries carry out a military operation against the people of the Donbas.¹⁰³ The authorities in Kiev stand by powerless because they are dependent on foreign backers who are determined to bring Ukraine in their camp by force if necessary (of course against the will of the Ukrainian people).¹⁰⁴

For the entire duration of the Ukrainian crisis the legitimacy of the protesters and eventually the new Ukrainian government is systematically put into question by Russian media. As a result of the 2 May Odessa incident (in which 39 pro-Russian protesters were burned alive in the Trade Union Building), Russian journalists go in overdrive. This incident showed Russia was right all along: right-wing extremists threaten the survival of the (pro)-Russian population of Ukraine. Because Kiev lacks control over its own security forces, it is

¹⁰⁰ Russia Today (2013) Crisis in Ukraine was instigated by the West (online) Russia Today. Available from <http://rt.com/op-edge/crisis-ukraine-instigated-west-026/> (Accessed on 10-06-2015).

¹⁰¹ Pepe Escobar (2014) 'Sooner or later Kiev's army, Right Sector will attack civilians' (online) Russia Today. Available from <http://rt.com/op-edge/156400-kyiv-fighting-against-civilians-ukraine/> (Accessed on 10-06-2015).

¹⁰² Russia Today (2014) 'Russian forces in Ukraine could be stabilizing factor in a country with no legitimate govt' (online) Russia Today. Available from <http://rt.com/op-edge/russia-forces-restraint-ukraine-392/> (Accessed on 10-06-2015).

¹⁰³ Russia Today (2014) 'Presence of foreign mercenaries in Ukraine shows weakness of Kiev govt' (online) Russia Today. Available from <http://rt.com/op-edge/foreign-mercenaries-in-ukraine-373/> (Accessed on 10-06-2015).

¹⁰⁴ Russia Today (2014) 'Kiev govt lost control of security forces in Eastern Ukraine' (online) Russia Today. Available from <http://rt.com/op-edge/ukraine-no-control-of-forces-037/> (Accessed on 10-06-2015).

very likely more incidents like this will happen.¹⁰⁵ One journalist even compares the tragedy in Odessa to Pearl Harbour: in 1941 the Americans were cowardly attacked by the Japanese, resulting in the American entry into World War II. This analogy suggests Russia has no choice left but to become an active participant in the Ukrainian crisis.¹⁰⁶ Despite the fact Russia opted not to send its forces over the border, Russian media continued to delegitimise the Ukrainian government. Although Ukraine's new president Poroshenko was seemingly elected democratically, he could not be Ukraine's legitimate leader because the people in the Donbas were denied a vote. He also failed to reign in the military operation in the east, suggesting he has no real power.¹⁰⁷

As argued above, neo-colonialism is clothed as a humanitarian intervention. Russian media present Ukraine as a failed state. This allows Russia to intervene militarily, in order to protect the people.¹⁰⁸ However, the people Russia claims to protect are not allowed to speak for themselves. Russian media discourse towards Ukraine was clearly neo-colonial.¹⁰⁹ However, Russia did not intervene (or at least invade). Instead, Moscow effectively froze the conflict and argued for a political solution. Despite the fact Russian media effectively utilised imagined geography to delegitimise the Ukrainian authorities and pave the way for a Russian intervention, this did not happen. This again makes clear that, while discourse allows for certain actions, it cannot fully explain why a certain path was chosen.¹¹⁰ In addition, imagined geography is not mobilised under all circumstances: this usually happens during a crisis. This fits the case of Ukraine as well: although certain neo-colonial images towards Ukraine do exist in Russian foreign policy (and the post-Soviet space in general), they have become stronger in the aftermath of the Ukrainian Revolution. It is important to note these images have remained stable since the early 19th century. Whereas

¹⁰⁵ Russia Today (2014) Russia's warnings of inter-ethnic violence in Ukraine come to fruition (online) Russia Today. Available from <http://rt.com/op-edge/156524-sleboda-ukraine-odessa-violence/> (Accessed on 10-06-2015).

¹⁰⁶ Russia Today (2014) A day that will live in infamy: the day Odessa citizens were savagely killed (online) Russia Today. Available from <http://rt.com/op-edge/156632-odessa-burnt-protesters-ukraine/> (Accessed on 10-06-2015).

¹⁰⁷ Russia Today (2014) 'Poroshenko can only pretend that he controls the situation in Ukraine' (online) Russia Today. Available from <http://rt.com/op-edge/161688-ukraine-president-poroshenko-military-operation/> (Accessed on 10-06-2015).

¹⁰⁸ Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, 253-255.

¹⁰⁹ Ibidem, 262.

¹¹⁰ Neumann, Discourse analysis. In *Qualitative Methods in International Relations*. Audi Klotz and Deepa Prakash: 61-62.

Europe/Poland and the Cossacks used to represent the Other in historical discourse, nowadays they are represented by the West and Ukrainian nationalists. Like their forebears, they are violent and motivated by self-interest.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, 58-60.

Conclusion

The research goals of this study are twofold: to determine to what extent post-colonialism is applicable in a Western context and how this could explain Russian behaviour towards Ukraine from 2014 onwards. Judging from official government documents such as speeches made by Putin and foreign policy doctrines, Russia does have a neo-colonial perspective on the relations with other post-Soviet states. In his speeches, Putin refers to Russia as a great power, unifier of peoples and its civilising mission in Eurasia. Specifically, Putin states Russia's role of great power has historically consisted of the spreading of democratic values throughout its empire. More importantly, Putin believes Russia is still destined to spread these values throughout the post-Soviet space. The peoples of Eurasia are, according to Putin, bound together by centuries of Russian union. They share the (Russian) culture and language and therefore Russia still enjoys privileged interests in this region. This is most clearly demonstrated by Russia's right to protect compatriots. In addition, Putin argues in favour of Russia playing its historic role as stabiliser in Eurasia. While it is in Russia's interest to prevent post-Soviet conflicts from spilling over (thus legitimating its role in traditional realist/liberal arguments), he also legitimises Russia's position in the post-Soviet space on cultural/imperial grounds.

In relation to Ukraine, Putin considers this country to be part of the 'triune Russian nation'. His views towards Ukraine are thus routed in nationalism. However, this does not exclude imperialism. As both Clunna and Tuminez argue: imperialism is intrinsic to most forms of Russian nationalism (liberalism being the exception) because they all place the core of Russia's identity in its imperial past. While this is most obvious the case in radical nationalism, Russia's dominant and moderate statist foreign policy identity also displays imperial features: a special role for Russia in the post-Soviet space. This mainly consists of unifying and stabilising the Eurasian landmass (EaU) and the importance attached to the idea of Russia/Eurasia being a separate civilisation. At the core of this civilisation stands the Slavic/Russian culture, which has historically been at the core of empire-building. In addition, statist stress the importance of military might in international relations. Ukraine is considered to be part of this privileged sphere of interests by both Putin and the rest of the foreign policy establishment. It is especially crucial to the Eurasian integration project. Russia's sense of ownership over Ukraine is most forcefully expressed by Putin in his speech

at the Valdai Club in 2014: he states the post-Soviet space in general and Ukraine in particular are part of the 'bears taiga'. As the bear is the master of the taiga, it goes without question Putin considers Russia to be the master of Eurasia. In the process he denies real sovereignty to neighbouring peoples (or in the case of Ukraine, denying they are a separate people at all) and allows Russia to speak for them as well. This is most clearly demonstrated by Russia's consistent insistence on the EaU being in the advantage of all participating countries.

While it is clearly demonstrated that a neo-colonial attitude does exist in Russia, this does not mean it directly influences individual foreign policy decisions. The Ukrainian crisis makes this abundantly clear. As Gregory argues, an imagined geography is usually mobilised in times of crisis in order to justify military violence. In Ukraine's case, Russian media successfully utilised existing geographies of Ukraine and Ukrainians in order to portray the conflict in such a way it would legitimise a Russian intervention. Historically, Ukrainians are divided into two groups of people: good Ukrainians, who are close to Russia and would never cross its interests, and bad Ukrainians. These Ukrainians are corrupted by foreign influences in order to undermine Russia. Because they serve foreign interests, they are not legitimate representatives of the Ukrainian people. Therefore, Russia has the right to speak for them. The Ukrainians are denied a voice in the process. In addition, the threat of genocide on compatriots would have allowed for humanitarian intervention. In spring 2014, Russian troops stood ready to cross the border and march to Kiev. Yet, this did not happen.

The case of Ukraine shows both the strengths and weaknesses of the post-colonial approach. Applying post-colonialism successfully to a European case shows it is applicable to Russian foreign policy in the post-Soviet space. Specifically, post-colonialism makes clear how the images of Ukraine in Russian discourse allowed government officials and the Russian media to portray it as a failed state in need of Russian intervention. In addition, the image of the good and bad Ukrainian denies Kiev real sovereignty in case Ukraine crosses Russian interests. This allows continued Russian involvement in Ukrainian politics. However, post-colonialism cannot explain why Ukraine specifically is so important to Russia. Although Russia believes it has a civilising mission in the post-Soviet space in general, Ukraine is far more important to it than for example Turkmenistan. Additionally, post-colonialism cannot explain Moscow's specific policy response.

This study showed the postcolonial approach is a useful contribution to the academic discussion on the origins and course of the Ukrainian crisis. It showed Russia does not have a clear imperial agenda, but that nonetheless imperialism remains important to Russian identity and foreign policy. It also raises some interesting questions for future research: how post-colonialism accounts for individual foreign policy decisions, or can it only be used to analyse discourse and map possible courses of action? Can post-colonialism explain the differences of prioritisation in Russian foreign policy towards the post-Soviet space, or are other theories needed for this purpose? To what extent can post-colonialism be applied to the foreign policy of other European states towards each other? These questions go beyond the scope of this study and give space for future research that will further enrich our understandings of both Russian politics and postcolonial theory.

Bibliography

Primary sources

Engdahl, William (2014) US, EU meddling in Ukraine battle (online) Russia Today. Available from <http://rt.com/op-edge/us-eu-interference-in-ukraine-402/> (Accessed on 10-06-2015).

Escobar, Pepe (2014) 'Sooner or later Kiev's army, Right Sector will attack civilians' (online) Russia Today. Available from <http://rt.com/op-edge/156400-kiev-fighting-against-civilians-ukraine/> (Accessed on 10-06-2015).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (1997) The foreign policy concept of the Russian Federation [online] Rossiiskaya Gazeta. Available from <http://fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/blueprint.html> (Accessed on 16-07-2015).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (2000) National Security Concept of the Russian Federation [online] President of Russia: official web portal. Available from <http://archive.mid.ru//bdomp/ns-osndoc.nsf/1e5f0de28fe77fdcc32575d900298676/36aba64ac09f737fc32575d9002bbf31!OpenDocument> (Accessed on 16-07-2015).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (2008) The foreign policy concept of the Russian Federation [online] President of Russia: official web portal. Available from <http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/text/docs/2008/07/204750.shtml> (Accessed 30 April 2014).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (2013) The foreign policy concept of the Russian Federation [online] President of Russia: official web portal. Available from http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/76389FEC168189ED44257B2E0039B16D (Accessed 10-06-2015).

Putin, Vladimir (2000) Annual Address to the Federal Assembly (online) The Kremlin.

Available at

http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2000/07/08/0000_type70029type82912_70658.shtml (Accessed at 20-10-2015).

Putin, V. (2003) Annual Address to the Federal Assembly (online) The Kremlin. Available at http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2003/05/16/0000_type70029type82912_44692.shtml (Accessed at 20-10-2015).

Putin, V. (2005) Annual Address to the Federal Assembly (online) The Kremlin. Available at http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2005/04/25/2031_type70029type82912_87086.shtml (Accessed on 20-10-2015).

Putin, V. (2006) Annual Address to the Federal Assembly (online) The Kremlin. Available from http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2006/05/10/1823_type70029type82912_105566.shtml (Accessed 28-11-2011).

Putin, V. (2007) Speech and the following discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy (online). The Kremlin. Available from http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2007/02/10/0138_type82912type82914type82917type84779_118123.shtml (Accessed on 16-07-2015).

Putin, V. (2011) A new integration project for Eurasia. The future in the making [online] Permanent mission of the Russian Federation to the European Union. Available from <http://www.russianmission.eu/en/news/article-prime-minister-vladimir-putin-new-integration-project-eurasia-future-making-izvestia-3-> [Accessed 16-07-2015].

Putin, V. (2012) Russia and the changing world [online] Moskovskiye Novosti. Available from Available from <http://rt.com/politics/official-word/putin-russia-changing-world-263/> [Accessed 16-07-2016].

Putin, V. (2012) Russia muscles up-the challenges we must rise to face (online) Izvestia. Available from <http://archive.premier.gov.ru/eng/events/news/17755/> (Accessed on 28-07-2015).

Putin, V. (2013) Annual Address to the Federal Assembly (online) The Kremlin. Available from <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19825> (Accessed on 22-10-2015).

Putin, V. (2014) Valdai Speech (online) The Kremlin. Available from <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46860> (Accessed on 22-10-2015).

Putin, V. (2014) Annual Address to the Federal Assembly (online) The Kremlin. Available from <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47173> (Accessed on 10-06-2015).

Putin, V. (2014) Crimea Speech (online) The Kremlin. Available from <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603> (Accessed on 10-12-2015).

Russia Today (2013) Ukrainian opposition wouldn't sign 'suicidal' EU agreement (online) Russia Today. Available from <http://rt.com/op-edge/ukraine-eu-deal-opposition-598/> (Accessed on 10-06-2015).

Russia Today (2013) Crisis in Ukraine was instigated by the West (online) Russia Today. Available from <http://rt.com/op-edge/crisis-ukraine-instigated-west-026/> (Accessed on 10-06-2015).

Russia Today (2014) Ukrainian opposition and the West 'playing with fire siding with extreme nationalists' (online) Russia Today. Available from <http://rt.com/op-edge/ukraine-west-extreme-nationalists-034/> (Accessed on 10-06-2015).

Russia Today (2014) 'Ukrainian opposition does not control crowds' (online) Russia Today. Available from <http://rt.com/op-edge/ukrainian-opposition-no-control-228/> (Accessed on 10-06-2015).

Russia Today (2014) 'Whole of Ukraine held hostage by a small group of radicals' (online) Russia Today. Available from <http://rt.com/op-edge/extreme-radicals-violence-ukraine-742/> (Accessed on 10-06-2015).

Russia Today (2014) 'Russian forces in Ukraine could be stabilizing factor in a country with no legitimate govt' (online) Russia Today. Available from <http://rt.com/op-edge/russia-forces-restraint-ukraine-392/> (Accessed on 10-06-2015).

Russia Today (2014) Existential threat: 'Russians cannot allow Ukraine to be ruled by neo-fascists' (online) Russia Today. Available from <http://rt.com/op-edge/ukraine-existential-threat-russia-413/> (Accessed on 10-06-2015).

Russia Today (2014) 'Kiev govt lost control of security forces in Eastern Ukraine' (online) Russia Today. Available from <http://rt.com/op-edge/ukraine-no-control-of-forces-037/> (Accessed on 10-06-2015).

Russia Today (2014) 'Presence of foreign mercenaries in Ukraine shows weakness of Kiev govt' (online) Russia Today. Available from <http://rt.com/op-edge/foreign-mercenaries-in-ukraine-373/> (Accessed on 10-06-2015).

Russia Today (2014) 'Moscow has the responsibility to defend Russian in Ukraine' (online) Russia Today. Available from <http://rt.com/op-edge/154736-russian-minority-ukraine-protection/> (Accessed on 10-06-2015).

Russia Today (2014) Russia's warnings of inter-ethnic violence in Ukraine come to fruition (online) Russia Today. Available from <http://rt.com/op-edge/156524-sleboda-ukraine-odessa-violence/> (Accessed on 10-06-2015).

Russia Today (2014) A day that will live in infamy: the day Odessa citizens were savagely killed (online) Russia Today. Available from <http://rt.com/op-edge/156632-odessa-burnt-protesters-ukraine/> (Accessed on 10-06-2015).

Russia Today (2014) 'Poroshenko can only pretend that he controls the situation in Ukraine' (online) Russia Today. Available from <http://rt.com/op-edge/161688-ukraine-president-poroshenko-military-operation/> (Accessed on 10-06-2015).

Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr (1991) *Rebuilding Russia. Reflections and tentative proposals* (New York: Harpers Collin).

Yakovenko, Alexander (2014) Ukrainian crisis: the way toward a solution (online) Russia Today. Available from <http://rt.com/op-edge/158112-ukrainian-crisis-way-solution/> (Accessed on 10-06-2015).

Secondary sources

Clunna, Anne L. (2009) *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence: Aspirations, Identity and Security Interests* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press).

Darwin, John (2007) *After Tamerlane. The Rise and Fall of Global Empires 1400-2000* (London: Allen Lane).

Dunne, Tim, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith eds (2007) In *International Relations Theories* (Oxford: OUP).

Galeotti, Mark and Andrew S. Bowen. (2014) Putin's Empire of the Mind. How Russia's president moved from realist to ideologue. And what he will do next (online) Foreign Policy. Available from <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/04/21/putins-empire-of-the-mind/> (Accessed on 26-02-2015).

Godzimirski, Jakub M. (2007) Russian national security concepts 1997 and 2000: a comparative analysis', *European Security* 9 (4): 73-91.

Gregory, Derek (2004) *The Colonial Present. Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq* (Malden: Blackwell).

Howe, Stephen (2002) *Empire. A very short introduction* (Oxford: OUP).

Klotz, Audi and Deepa Prakash eds (2009) *Qualitative Methods in International Relations. A pluralist guide* (New York: Palgrave).

Korostelina, Karina V. (2013) 'Mapping national identity narratives in Ukraine', *Nationalities Papers* 42 (2): 293-215.

Kuchins, Andrew C., and Igor A. Zelevyev (2012) 'Russia's Contested National Identity and Foreign Policy', In *Worldviews of Aspiring Powers: Domestic Foreign Policy Debates in China, India, Iran, Japan and Russia*, Henry R. Nau and Deepa M. Ollapally (Oxford: OUP).

Laruelle, Marlene (2008) *Russian Eurasianism: and ideology of an Empire* (Washington : JHUP).

Loomba, Ania (1998) *Colonialism/postcolonialism* (London: Routledge).

Maersheimer, J.J. (2014) 'Why the Ukraine crisis is the West's fault: the liberal delusions that provoked Putin', *Foreign Affairs* 93 (5): 77-89.

March, Luke (2011) Is Nationalism Rising in Russian Foreign Policy? The Case of Georgia. *Demokratizatsiya* 19 (3), 187-207.

Morozov, Viatcheslav (2015) *Russia's Postcolonial Identity. A Subaltern Empire in an Eurocentric world* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan).

Ogirenko, Valentyn (2015) Hollande, Merkel, Putin back bid for new Ukraine ceasefire (online) *Reuters*. Available from <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/08/29/us-ukraine-crisis-ceasefire-idUSKCN0QY0HY20150829> (Accessed on 02-09-2015).

Pikulicka-Wilczewska, Agnieszka and Richard Sakwa (2014) *Ukraine and Russia. People, Politics, Propaganda and Perspectives* (Bristol: E-International Relations Publishing).

Ryabchuk, Mykola (2010) 'The Ukrainian Friday and Russian Robinson. The uneasy advent of post-coloniality', *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, 44: 7-42.

Said, Edward (1978) *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books).

Shkandrij, Myroslav (2001) *Russia and Ukraine. Literature and the discourse of Empire from Napoleonic to postcolonial times* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press).

Sutyagin, Igor (2015) Briefing paper Russian forces in Ukraine (online) *Royal United Services Institute*. Available from https://www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/201503_BP_Russian_Forces_in_Ukraine_FINAL.pdf [Accessed on 02-09-2015].

Tuminez, Astrid S. (2000) *Russian Nationalism Since 1856. Ideology and the making of Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers).

Young, Robert J.C. (2001) *Postcolonialism. A historical introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers).

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2015) Ukraine situation report No. 7 as of 14 August 2015 [online] *United Nations*. Available from https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/ocha_ukraine_situation_update_number_7_14_august_2015.pdf (Accessed on 02-09-2015).