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The Blushing Bear: What lessons can be drawn from the French defeat and humiliation in the late 19th century when considering the potential of Russia to scramble for Outer Space?

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Abstract: Understanding the motivations of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and the ways Russia may respond to its current humiliation there is of paramount importance. To this end this thesis employs status theory to compare modern Russia's to France's to its defeat in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71. This comparison allows for the development of our understanding of the importance of status to state's decision-making processes, as well as making clear the likelihood of a Russian need to re-assert its status. This thesis contends that this is most likely to be done via an expansion in their Outer Space efforts which runs the risk of kickstarting a Scramble for Space among major powers, just as France inadvertently began the scramble for Africa in 1881.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

For just over a year, the world has been watching the unfolding tragedy in Ukraine. This invasion by Russia of its neighbour has caused a huge amount of interest both in academia, and the wider public. However, much of this attention has been devoted to understanding the various reasons for the invasion, how it could have been avoided, or what the world, particularly the West, should or should not be doing in response (The Economist, 2022; Baev, 2022). This thesis aims to take a different angle and question what the past may teach us about Russia's current actions and, critically, what insight it may give us into its response to the current international humiliation it appears to be facing (Strategic Policy, 2022, p. 65). In short, this study has as its goal the application of status competition theory to present-day Russia via an interpretivist comparative case study (Barnhart, 2021; Boswell, Corbett & Rhodes, 2019; Mukherjee, 2022). It is worth noting here that the importance of status, and the humiliation its loss implies, has not been totally ignored as leaders such as Macron initially advocated against a "humiliation" of Putin on precisely these grounds (Ricard, 2022). However, this angle was rapidly abandoned as the conflict escalated, and as a result, an investigation into its possible implications, desirable or otherwise, has yet to be carried out.

The case chosen as a comparison is France at the end of the 19th century, particularly following its defeat in the Franco-Prussian War in 1871 (Barnhart, 2016, p. 399). The case will be made that this defeat ultimately motivated France to initiate the Scramble for Africa seen during the last two decades of the 19th century, primarily due to its overwhelming need to re-assert its status as a major power. This development of a historical precedent for sudden, and financially and strategically unfounded, expansion in the interest of status will then be used to analyse the current trend in Russian behaviour to discern whether it appears to be following a similar trajectory. However, it is at this point that a key issue becomes apparent, namely that there is no longer any "easily" conquerable territory left for a humiliated major power, in this case Russia, to claim without triggering a large-scale conflict. As a result, this study will draw on the growing body of literature arguing for Outer Space as the next stage for global competition, to make the case for a potential Russian initiation of a scramble for off-planet influence and "territory" (Simon, 2021, p. 221; Strategic Policy, 2022, pp. 42, 46). Therefore, the research question proposed is as follows: *What lessons can be drawn from the French defeat and humiliation in the late 19th century when considering the potential of Russia to scramble for Outer Space?*

Given that this comparison of 19th-century France to present-day Russia is indeed possible it then becomes vital to consider the manifold implications of what a Russian turn towards outer Space may imply. This thesis puts forward the argument that Russia, given its similar trajectory to 19th century France, may indeed take this path and that such a development could trigger a new race, or indeed scramble, for Space on the part of the major powers in today's world. While this proposal is naturally theoretical it highlights some key

considerations regarding the regulatory and normative governance of Outer Space that may come to play a key role in the future of International Relations.

Chapter 2. Conceptual Framework

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will lay out the key concepts and literature underpinning the arguments that will follow. Traditional International Relations theory, while slowly increasing its diversity, has remained strongly attached to material considerations and overlooked social concepts and the importance of soft power ideas, such as status (Larson & Shevchenko, 2010, p. 66). However, the past two decades have seen a growth in interest in these ideas and their potential for playing a significant role in improving our understanding of key issues such as conflict and competition (MacDonald & Parent, 2021, p. 358). This work has already allowed historians such as Joslyn Barnhart (2016 & 2020) to re-evaluate the importance of status in the past and will here be shown to set up a perfect lens through which to analyse the current trajectory of Russia under Vladimir Putin.

The choice of Outer Space as the stage for reactionary competitive behaviour by Russia is based on several factors which will be discussed at greater length in section 2.3. However, the most important factors are the exponential growth of private sector access and expansion in space, and the normative opportunities and challenges this presents (Simon, 2021; Young, 2014). Moreover, during a publicised discussion at the Kremlin between Vladimir Putin and the head of ROSCOSMOS, Yury Borisov, in April 2023, they directly stated the Russian intention to increase funding for space activities and accelerate work on a Russian orbital station with the goal of “implementing our (Russia’s) lunar plans” (The Kremlin, 2023). It can therefore be confidently stated that Outer Space is, at the very least, one of the main channels of status competition in Russia’s plans going forwards.

2.2 Status Theory

The first and most important concept, and indeed growing academic field, that must be tackled is that of status and status competition at the level of states. Considerations of status, and the importance of one’s perception of one’s position vis-à-vis others, has its origins in psychology and sociology. In these fields, it has been conclusively proven that the importance attributed to status is not only intrinsic to humans, and indeed other animals, but also practically universal in nature, as are its corollary emotions of envy and humiliation (Huberman, Loch & Öncüler, 2004; Dvash, et. al. 2010). However, status as a key driver of International Relations is often overlooked by the more mainstream theoretical bodies that focus on material concerns, such as Realism and Liberalism (Forsberg, Heller, & Wolf, 2014, p. 262; Mukherjee, 2022, p. 10). While some have argued that it could be considered under the broad hat of constructivist thought, due to its use of normative principles and social constructions and status being an inherently social concept that relies on third parties for its relevance, this study will apply it on its own merits and as a separate and unique concept

(Forsberg, Heller, & Wolf, 2014, p. 262; Clunan, 2014, p. 273). Indeed, despite its relatively low status compared to traditional considerations of power, security and the economy, the acknowledgement of the importance of status, and its associated ideas of honour, reputation and glory can be traced from Thucydides to Hobbes (Dafoe, Renshon & Huth, 2014, p. 371).

Recently, status has seen a resurgence of interest and has begun to be applied as an explanation for conflicts throughout the last century, as well as a powerful motivator in International Relations more broadly (Bobić, 2019; Neumann, 2014; Mukherjee, 2022). Of particular interest is the development of three sub-themes of status interactions, namely: status mobility, competition, or creativity (Larson & Shevchenko, 2010, pp. 66-67). Social mobility is of little relevance to this study as it focuses on efforts carried out within the accepted bounds of the system by a rising power, but competition and creativity are highly important as they describe the actions of a state either directly challenging the status quo or seeking to create new fields of status acquisition outside of those promulgated by its nominal superiors (Larson & Shevchenko, 2010, pp. 72-73). It could be argued that the latter two, competition and creativity, are instead the same but carried out via different channels, however, this would be an oversimplification. Competition as defined above refers exclusively to acts that aim at equalling or surpassing others “in the area on which its claims to superior status rest”, that currently being military power and to a lesser extent economic performance (Larson & Shevchenko, 2010, pp. 66-67). Creativity on the other hand is defined as the identification of new areas or dimensions in which a group or country seeking status can claim superiority without direct competition or defeat of an opponent (Larson & Shevchenko, 2010, p. 73). As a result, these two subthemes are closely linked, the second often following a failure in the first as will be suggested is the case in Russia but are distinct in the methods they represent for the pursuit of status.

Another important sub-theme of status that will be employed here is the concept of humiliation, which is frequently even more overlooked than status more broadly (Wolf, 2011, p. 105). This is often invoked as the origin of subsequent status-seeking actions by states and is most often caused by losses in military conflicts but can also be due to perceived slights by other states at the diplomatic or political levels (Barnhart, 2016; MacDonald & Parent, 2021; Barnhart, 2021). Indeed, this concept is seemingly more important the higher the status of the state in question, meaning that it is especially felt by major powers (Barnhart, 2021, p. 44). Of particular interest here, given the choice of France as a case study, is the importance placed on the reputation and status as the sources of motivations for states, particularly their link to the fear of humiliation via their loss, by one of the most important of French political writers, cardinal Richelieu, who says “*il est certain qu’entre tous les principes capables de mouvoir un État, la crainte, qui est fondée en l’estime et en la reverence, a le plus de force*” (Richelieu and Hay du Chatelet, 1719, p. 372).¹

¹ Translation by the author: “it is certain that of all the principles capable of moving a State, fear, which is founded in esteem and reverence, has the greatest force”.

Though the intricacies of its rise to major power status are outside the scope of this thesis, China serves as a prime example of the importance and power of humiliation in driving the development of countries. Following its defeat in the First Opium War of 1840, China began what would become known as its “Century of Humiliation” (technically 109 years) until Mao proclaims the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 (Schiavenza, 2017). The importance of this self-perceived humiliation is made clear by the central role it has played in the Communist Party’s language and propaganda ever since as a motivator for retribution and resurgence that drove China’s meteoric rise over the past decades while ensuring its continued unity and collective identity (Kaufman, 2010, pp. 1-3; Wang, 2008, p. 783). As to Russia, though it will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 6, it is worth noting already that Putin has consistently identified the fall of the USSR as one of, if not the greatest, “geopolitical disaster of the century” and claimed it to be a humiliation for the Russian nation and all its people, inside and outside of Russia (Putin, 2005, para. 6).

Not only has status become an important consideration in International Relations, but it has also already been effectively shown to influence states’ decision-making process (Snyder, 1991). Indeed, the late 19th century witnessed an unprecedented European expansion in Africa, driven primarily by the need of the major, and indeed middling, European powers to either gain or maintain status within the established system (Barnhart 2016; Barnhart 2020). Beyond this, the behaviour of states throughout the 20th century has also been shown to be heavily influenced by a drive to raise or preserve their national status. Examples of this include studies of minor powers’ wars on major powers and analyses of the development of the Cold War and the rise of China (Bobić, 2019; Neumann, 2014). Indeed, Russia itself has been repeatedly and consistently identified as one of the most status-driven and focused major powers throughout the past centuries (Tsygankov, 2012; Clunan, 2009). While this fixation on status can be traced through most leaders in Russia’s recent history, it is particularly notable with Putin who has compared himself to, and actively glorified, key figures in the expansion of Russia’s empire during the 18th and 19th centuries such as Peter the Great and Catherine the Great (Danforth, 2023; Zorin, 2022). These figures have been raised by Putin to represent all the glories of the past as he sees them, while their failures and setbacks have been swept under the carpet in favour of emphasising the hegemonic status of Russia in the past, to justify and inspire its actions in the present (Zorin, 2022).

In addition to the importance of status to states’ decision-making processes on the general level, it is worth highlighting the key role that elites play in the influence of status and humiliation in national governments. All people naturally understand the role of status in their lives and most work to maximise their own, both within and without their in-groups (Wolf, 2011, p. 105). However, when the people in question are the elites of a state their status tends to become inextricably linked to the status of the state they lead, and as a result, they perceive any humiliation or damage to the status of their state on a personal and

emotional level, as well as professional one (Barnhart, 2021, p. 115; MacDonald & Parent, 2021, 362). This detail is of relatively little importance when a country's government is democratic or composed of many people as the emotional response of each will be slightly different and likely diluted in the greater whole. However, in states where power is in the hands of a small group of individuals, such as Russia, the impact becomes magnified as one person's response can become the foreign policy of an entire country (Forsberg, Heller & Wolf, 2014, p. 262).

2.3 Competition in Outer Space

The second most important area of investigation that requires attention before discussing the practicalities of this research is the nature of states' competition in Outer Space and how it has become an important, and rapidly growing, part of International Relations (Bowen, 2020, p. 24). Indeed, countries have been staking claims to Outer Space, either directly or via attempts to guide its jurisdiction, since the early 20th century (Young, 2014, p. 6). However, it was the Space Race during the Cold War, and the Russian launch of Sputnik in particular, that truly saw the beginnings of major powers looking to space as a means for practical, strategic and status competition (Ramírez, Biziewski & Duarte, 2020, pp. 72-74). Since then, there have been a few major developments in the governance and international regulation of Outer Space, most notably the Outer Space Treaty of 1966 which still forms the bedrock of international law in Outer Space (von der Dunk, 2011, p. 8). Over the following decades, the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) and the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) have worked to introduce several other documents and legislations regarding space, the last of which concerning the moon, was signed in 1984 and currently has only 18 ratifications which do not include the main spacefaring countries (Simon, 2021, p. 222; Di Pippo, 2023). The most important effects of these international agreements have been the banning of nuclear weapons in space and the legally binding agreement that "activities in outer space be carried out for the benefit of humankind" (Lucas-Rhimbassen, Rapp & Mallowan, 2021, p. 119).

However, in practice, these agreements amount to very little as they contain mostly vague language and, critically, have no established or accepted enforcement mechanisms, and do not even properly outlaw the conventional militarisation of Outer Space (Ramirez & Bauza-Abril, 2021, p. 72). As a result, following a brief honeymoon period in the early to mid-1990s, Outer Space has remained a key area of competition for the major powers of today, with an ever-increasing interest in its securitisation and militarisation (Bowen, 2020, p. 278). Indeed, over the last few decades Russia, China, and the USA, among others, have all created dedicated Outer Space branches of their militaries and tested various anti-satellite weapons, whose use would violate the very laws referenced above (Simon, 2021, p. 221).

Furthermore, the growing interest in the creation of semi-permanent or permanent moon bases for research and resource extraction, as well as recent deals between Russia and China for the creation of a new Space Station, threaten to fully breakdown the existing multilateral structure in Outer Space and initiate a descent into multipolar competition (Antoni, Schrogl & Giannopapa, 2021, p. xxii; Di Pippo, 2023; The Kremlin, 2023). Indeed, some of the key treaties that heralded a reduction of nuclear tension have been dismantled with Russia “suspending its participation” in the New START treaty in early 2023 heralding the fall of the last of these (Chappell, 2023, para. 3). This deterioration of the existing order has been further emphasized by the recent announcement by Russia of tactical and, potentially, intercontinental nuclear missiles being stationed in Belarus, the first deployment of the kind beyond Russian borders since the collapse of the USSR in 1991 (Reuters, 2023b). This pattern is particularly worrying given the precedent established by countries’ illegal claims to the Antarctic eventually becoming accepted and eroding global commons previously held to be inviolable, as Outer Space is now (Young, 2014, p. 7).²

Lastly, on the topic of competition in Outer Space, it is important to acknowledge the potential role of off-planet private enterprise and states’ competing jurisdiction over it (Lucas-Rhimbassen, Rapp & Mallowan, 2021, p. 123). As the rapid growth of companies such as SpaceX and BlueOrigin have shown, private industry is rapidly moving into the Outer Space market, currently only as a support to national agencies such as NASA, but with ambitions for much more (Ramirez & Bauza-Abril, 2021, p. 73). This economic drive, coupled with a significant lack of international legislation on-off world private enterprise, leaves the door open for opportunistic states to offer low taxation and lax oversight deals to companies willing to operate from their launch facilities (Simon, 2021). This could allow for status and power competition by states looking to rapidly portray themselves as beacons of Outer Space innovation and exploration, at the cost of global security and the maintenance of Outer Space as a truly global common.

² Global Commons are generally defined as international and supranational spaces where common-pool resources are located, they are generally accepted to include the atmosphere, outer space, the high oceans, and the Antarctic. For a discussion of some of the challenges facing this see: Smith, K. (2017). Innovating for the global commons: multilateral collaboration in a polycentric world.

Chapter 3. Research Question

3.1 The Research Question and its Limitations

The research question that this thesis seeks to answer, i.e. *What lessons can be drawn from the French defeat and humiliation in the late 19th century when considering the potential of Russia to scramble for Outer Space?* is designed to combine the value of historical insight with the new and developing theories on status and competition, terrestrial and beyond, to better understand Russia's current actions and its potential trajectory going forwards. This line of inquiry was inspired not only by the paramount importance of improving our understanding of Russia's motivations but also the importance of expanding on the research done by previous academics such as MacDonald and Parent (2021, p. 384) who suggested investigating "When do wartime humiliations generate feelings of shame versus romanticization of a lost cause?". Moreover, the combination of this research with the nascent discipline of Outer Space International Relations and competition provides an exciting opportunity to bring together two underrepresented fields, while researching a topic of great and ongoing importance (Wolf, 2011; Antoni, Schrogl & Giannopapa, 2021).

Russia has been consistently identified as one of the most status-centric major powers, which has spent the last three decades trying to recover from the humiliation of the collapse of the Soviet Union, even going so far as to trump their economic and security concerns (Forsberg, Heller & Wolf, 2014, p. 261). Indeed, under Vladimir Putin, it has increasingly engaged in classic examples of status competition, most dramatically its wars with Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine since 2014 (Larson & Shevchenko, 2010, p. 92). However, given the lacklustre results of the Russian invasion in 2022 and the increasing, if not total, global isolation that has followed, it is becoming increasingly likely that recent humiliations may push Russia into more creative forms of competition, such as a push for a greater presence in Outer Space.

Furthermore, the work done by Barnhart in both her 2016 article and 2020 book, provides an excellent basis for comparison. The analysis she provides of France's drive to conquer territory in Africa to restore its lost status following a humiliating defeat against a nominally weaker Prussia has great potential for comparison to the modern-day challenges facing Russia, as briefly outlined above (Barnhart, 2016; Barnhart, 2021). Moreover, pursuing such research into how a modern major power such as Russia reacts when this position is challenged is of vital importance given the current potential for a transition towards a more multipolar world in which others such as the USA and China may follow similar paths (Fink & Oliker, 2020). While far from the same, there are more than a few similarities between our current global order, or disorder, and that of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as large global power structures are entering into flux, as a result, looking to a key player during this previous period may provide vital information.

Lastly, the research question will help guide this study towards contributing to the growing body of knowledge regarding the war in Ukraine more broadly. As one of the most important and impactful conflicts in recent history, developing an understanding of the role that status is playing in it, and may play in its aftermath, is vital. Moreover, considering the potential for a Russian shift towards space, and the subsequent scramble this could cause, as the French did in the 19th century, is extremely important given the lack of existing safeguards against such a development (Simon, 2021, p. 219). However, it is worth noting that some may question why Africa was not chosen as the focus of power competition between Russia and The West. Indeed, given the nature of the French response to humiliation in the 19th century, it would, at first glance, seem like a much more natural choice than Space. Indeed, groups such as Wagner have been expanding their operations in Africa and taking over effective control in areas where Western troops have withdrawn (Brown, 2023). Moreover, during the various United Nations General Assembly sessions on the war carried out over the past year several African states, most notably South Africa, have abstained from voting (United Nations, 2022). Consequently, it is undeniable that now, as in the past, Africa is and will continue to be subject to vigorous competition for status and influence between Russia, the West, and indeed other global players such as China.

However, there are several reasons that this thesis will not be tackling this issue. Firstly, there is already a great amount of attention in the media and existing academic literature on this topic. Secondly, the revolutionary nature of the sudden French expansion in Africa which will be described in Chapter 5 is more akin to a turn towards Outer Space than any Russian attempts to curry greater favour in present-day Africa. This is because, ever since the Cold War, Russia and The West have competed for influence in Africa and the Middle East, with the present efforts being more akin to a renewal of this competition than any revolutionary change in direction (Bodomo, 2017). Thirdly, Africa is now a continent undeniably and indisputably made up of sovereign states that are not open or susceptible to a Russian conquest akin to that of France, or others, during the 19th century. As a result, any efforts by Russia to restore its status via a means other than direct military conflict must per-force take place on another stage entirely. Lastly, given the current state of the Russian military and the trajectory of the war in Ukraine, it is highly unlikely Russia will be able to spare the personnel for any kind of serious large-scale operations in Africa, while efforts in space necessitate far fewer people and would permit Russia to focus its military forces on securing its territorial integrity (Fonseca, 2023).

Chapter 4. Research Methods

4.1 Research Methods

This study has employed an interpretivist comparative case analysis approach. This decision has been made to have the best chance possible to provide useful insights and shed light on the case of present-day Russia by comparing it with 19th-century France. As Boswell, Corbett & Rhodes (2019, p. 4) say “by understanding how they (In this case Russia and France) see these choices, as a reflection of the webs of belief in which they are embedded, we can explain why actors do what they do”. The interpretivist comparative case analysis provides the perfect vehicle for carrying out a status-focused investigation because of its interest not only in what actors do but why they do it (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 48). Moreover, the interpretivist openness to a variety of possible results, rather than one pre-decided hypothesis, is particularly appropriate for this study given its investigative and open-ended nature (Boswell, Corbett & Rhodes, 2019, p. 98).

Interpretivism, and the use of it to carry out a comparative case study, is also particularly appropriate due to the recourse to international history in the case of 19th century France: the analysis of this case relies heavily on interpretation and deduction by historians and would therefore be practically unapproachable from a more positivist and/or quantitative view (Trachtenberg, 2009). Indeed, it is this deep connection to history, and indeed history’s heavy influence on the present case, that makes a study of how status affects a humiliated major power, in this case, Russia, so interesting and important. More than any other classically accepted realist notion of what makes states do what they do, such as power, money or security, status is uniquely tied to history. This is to say that, while a state’s wealth and power at any given time are a result of its history, they are mostly not dependent on it, as they are expressions of extant, material, concerns (Wolf, 2011, p. 105). However, a state’s status is inextricably and undeniably linked to its history, and similarly, the humiliation of that status can, and usually does, last far beyond the time in which it is inflicted (Barnhart, 2021, p. 9). Given this innate historicity and timelessness of status, the use of two cases far apart in time presents few problems and grants this study the opportunity to show how consistently status has affected the decision-making of states across time, particularly following a military humiliation (Blatter & Haverland, 2012, p. 5).

Russia in the present day and France in the 19th century may superficially seem unrelated and, therefore, incomparable. However, as has hopefully been shown above and will be argued at length in the following chapters, status is not a modern concept, and states’, and for that matter humans’, reactions to its loss and gain have appeared to change little in the intervening years (Barnhart, 2021). Consequently, these cases have been chosen because the last three decades of the 19th century for France appear to have followed an astoundingly similar trajectory to Russia’s since the fall of the Soviet Union. That being said, the collection

of data on each of these has followed somewhat different paths, though employing the same general principles. Textual analysis forms the backbone of the data-gathering process since this tried and tested historical research technique allows for the rapid scanning and collation of data from a wide array of primary and secondary sources (Trachtenberg, 2009, pp. 58-59). This method relies on the use of titles, subtitles, abstracts, introductions, and conclusions to identify the most relevant and important literature, and then analyse the logic, internal consistency, and reliability of those deemed appropriate (Trachtenberg, 2009, pp. 58-59). Given the unique nature of this study, no other method could effectively account for the wide variety of sources necessary to research both a 19th-century major power and a 21st-century one. Indeed, the flexibility provided allows for its application to historical primary texts, academic work on either of the time periods and recent Russian governmental output and journalistic pieces.

Once enough information had been collected on both cases, each will be laid out separately to identify the primary factors leading to the need to pursue status, and the methods chosen to do so. Once each of the cases has been analysed and laid out, Chapter 7 will seek to compare their most salient features to identify if the similarities are truly significant or merely superficial. This will allow an answer to be given regarding the comparability of the two cases and permit commentary to be made on the likelihood of Russia pursuing status in Outer Space. While this may seem something of a logical leap, Chapter 2 already clarified how Outer Space has become steadily more accepted as an important and growing stage for international competition strategically, economically, and for status. As a result, if the comparison were to reveal a considerable similarity between both cases, the proposed Russian use of Outer Space for their own status acquisition needs becomes considerably more feasible.

4.2 External and Internal Validity

The research question proposed in this thesis is self-evidently specific to the cases in question. This may present some issues regarding questions of external validity and the applications of any lessons drawn to other cases. However, this is not necessarily the case. Firstly, a focused investigation such as the one carried out is vital if any significant results are to be obtained in a timely and interpretable manner (Trachtenberg, 2009, p. 80). Secondly, the interpretivist nature of the research being conducted lends itself to a so-called “thick” contextuality which then permits other, future, readers to draw their own conclusions as to the works’ relevance outside of its direct subject (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 48).

Moreover, despite its very specific focus on modern Russia and its potential to initiate a scramble for space, the theoretical backing employed to do this, namely status theory, humiliation, and the role of Outer Space in competition between states, means that many of the inferences drawn will have far wider implications. Indeed, as this thesis conclusively

demonstrates that Russia is following the same, or at least a very similar, trajectory to 19th century France and consequently have the potential to look to Outer Space for its acquisition of status, these findings are extremely important in a broader sense. Not only do they allow for better decision-making on the world's dealings with Russia, but they also provide great insight into the potential future actions of all major powers as they begin to decline and/or attempt to retain their status.

Another challenge is the availability and interpretation of sources on modern Russia. However, as far as the broad historical context following the dissolution of the USSR is concerned there is a wealth to draw from, as will be discussed in Chapter 6. The primary challenge, therefore, is collecting sufficient information on the reactions to the current war in Ukraine. But this is still not impossible, arguably even due to Russia's interest in status, they have put out a sizeable body of English language material since the invasion which provides ample insight into how they wish it to be perceived. Naturally, this material, and Western commentary on it, is highly biased towards one side or the other, but given the highly subjective nature of status and its specific reliance on the perception of events by states and third parties, as well as the methods employed by interpretivism, this bias is, in fact, unproblematic, rather it is itself the very subject of study (MacDonald & Parent, 2021, p. 367; Boswell, Corbett & Rhodes, 2019). Due to the high number of English language sources on the conflict, even from Russia itself, and the external nature of its status-seeking, there was no need to make use of any Russian literature.

Finally, the internal validity of this research is its strongest point as the restriction to two case studies allows for extensive research into both, leading to their detailed analysis and comparison along the lines previously laid out and discussed in greater detail by Boswell, Corbett, and Rhodes (2019). However, it is worth noting here that, given the large coalition of forces supporting Ukraine, Russia has often portrayed itself as losing to a much more powerful force than a single minor power (Faulconbridge, 2023). Nonetheless, the result of a defeat would remain much the same, especially as they were the instigators of the direct conflict. Indeed, this issue will be discussed at greater length in the following chapters.

Chapter 5. The Case of 19th Century France

5.1 Introduction

Following the French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon and his successors France entered the 19th century as one of the indisputable major powers of the world. While not without some considerable defeats, most notably at Waterloo, the French empire had successfully expanded its global territories in strategic economic locations while strengthening its position on the European continent. Indeed, while its power at sea was curtailed by the British Royal Navy, on land there was no other power in Europe that could match the French army alone and their status as the dominant regional power was broadly accepted, if not supported, by the other main powers of the time. This position had allowed France to focus on political and economic priorities in its imperial expansions, with vast territorial gains generally being avoided due to the high costs and low financial yields involved.

However, the course of the 19th century saw a steady decline in this pre-eminence as more wars against Britain were lost and other regional powers, such as Germany and Italy, began to vie for entrance into the group of major powers more assertively, both in Europe and beyond, with a particular focus on the African continent. Despite all of this, it is unlikely that France would have initiated the Scramble for Africa via its sudden and dramatic conquests of Tunisia and Congo in the 1880s, were it not for its humiliating defeat against its nominally weaker Prussian neighbour in 1871 (Barnhart, 2021, p. 5). Indeed, following this defeat in a supposedly quick crushing of a regional rival, and the loss of Alsace and Lorraine that followed, France began scrambling to re-assert its status as an imperial power capable of power projection abroad and worthy of membership in the Club of Great Powers through the acquisition of territory outside of Europe (Barnhart, 2021, p. 134).

Despite it being undeniable that European colonialism in Africa had been slowly progressing for over two hundred years before the French expansion and the Scramble for Africa that followed, the sudden change from small settlements and trading posts to wholesale territorial conquest was nothing short of revolutionary (Copeland, 2014, p. 385). While the arguments explaining this sudden shift in attitude cover all areas from strategic competition to economic market dynamics, and these will be discussed in this chapter, it is only humiliation-driven status competition that truly captures the complex reasoning behind the French decision (Barnhart, 2016).

While a detailed discussion of the historical intricacies and nuances of French history during the 19th century is beyond the scope of this thesis, this chapter will set out the various stages that led to the French initiation of the Scramble for Africa, with a particular focus on the Franco-Prussian war and its immediate consequences for the other major powers of its time. Following this, a summary of the key historical points of the Scramble for Africa will be

provided. Finally, it will conclude with a discussion of the various theories that have been put forward to explain it, especially the roles of reputation, humiliation, and status in motivating the politics of major powers.

5.2 19th Century France Pre 1870

France had entered the 19th century as the dominant power in Europe, but in 1815 the battle of Waterloo put a sudden and dramatic end to this. Following this defeat France was by no means powerless and would indeed recover and go on to see a series of victories and defeats over the following decades as Napoleon and his successors sought to re-establish it as the dominant power in Europe and the world. Indeed, some territories outside of Europe were slowly claimed by France during this period such as Vietnam and Fiji, some within France even began to push for expansion in Africa but these voices were largely ignored (Copeland, 2014, p. 385; Newbury & Kanya-Forstner, 1969). Most notably, the British navy would continue to curtail French sea power and the gradual unification of Italy and Germany undermined their military primacy on the continent (Marshall, 2005; Copeland, 2014, p. 377). Indeed, it was this period, particularly from the 1850s onwards, that saw both Germany and Italy begin to push in earnest for membership of the great powers. Alongside this growth in political and military competition for status within Europe, France also faced increasing economic challenges as trade deals with Britain began to fail, trade tariffs increased and a recession became ever more likely (Copeland, 2014, pp. 387-390).

5.3 The Franco-Prussian War and its Consequences

The growing tensions between France and its continental neighbours came to a head in 1870 due to disputes over the succession to the throne of Spain. Prussia promoted Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, a candidate with strong links to the Prussian rulers who would leave France surrounded by its opponents (Wawro, 2003, p. 34). Despite the eventual reaching of an agreement to prevent this, Napoleon III, having been assured a popularity-boosting swift and decisive victory by his advisors and generals declared war on Prussia (Wawro, 2003, p. 20). However, the French forces were far less efficient and organized than their generals believed, while the Prussian army was able to rapidly acquire the support of many of its neighbouring states to field significant forces and repel the initial French incursion (Wawro, 2003, pp. 90-100). Most significantly, at the battle of Sedan Napoleon III was captured by Prussian forces, leading to his deposal and the founding of the Third Republic under a new government in Paris (Wawro, 2003, pp. 240, 310). After a degree of internal upheaval, this government negotiated a peace treaty with Prussia that forced it to cede Alsace and half of Lorraine while allowing King William the 1st of Prussia to be declared German emperor at Versailles (Barnhart, 2021, p. 36; Wawro, 2003, p. 246.).

The most immediate and important change development for France following its defeat in the Franco-Prussian War was the deposition of Napoleon III and the subsequent founding of the Third Republic. Indeed, this deposition would mark the fall of the last non-democratic leader of France. Also, as mentioned above, the conditions of the peace entailed the humiliating loss of the economically and industrially important regions of Alsace and Lorraine, and the tremendous loss of status and reputation on the international stage that such a resounding defeat by a nominally middling power entailed (Barnhart, 2016, p. 399). Following this defeat some have argued that Britain began to dismiss French claims to the status of great power altogether (Barnhart, 2016, p. 399) Moreover, Prussia built on its victory by uniting the remaining Germanic states not under its control into something resembling modern Germany in size and power, with the colonial ambitions that such a position entailed (Barnhart, 2016, p. 36). Indeed, the exposure of France's military weakness and the fall of Napoleon III also left the papal states without protection and enabled Italy to annex them, effectively completing their unification and bolstering their claims to great power status and colonial interests in Africa (Copeland, 2014, p. 377; Barnhart, 2016, p. 402).

5.4 The Scramble for Africa

While its exact start date is a source of unending historical debate, it is generally accepted that the first major step towards what would become the Scramble for Africa was the French annexation of Tunisia in April 1881 with the deployment of over 35,000 troops (Barnhart, 2021, p. 137). During this same year and into 1882 the British took advantage of local upheaval and a slow French response to overturn the existing joint rule and fully occupy both Suez and Egypt more broadly (Mackenzie, 1983, p. 43; Barnhart, 2016, pp. 406-408). Following this the French would fully commit to the re-assertion of their status via the acquisition of territory in Africa, starting with the Congo in November of 1882 (Barnhart, 2021, p. 137). It is interesting to note here that the subsequent entrance of Germany into the Scramble in 1884 was preceded by a sustained and consistent repudiation of colonial thinking by Bismarck, who only changed course when British heavy-handedness and arrogance in Agra Pequeña left him feeling ignored and humiliated (Barnhart, 2016, pp. 409-412). However, once the first step was taken Germany rapidly proceeded to acquire more territory in Togo and Cameroon (Barnhart, 2021, p. 212). This was soon followed by the further acquisition of territory by Italy and an expansion in the territorial possession of Britain so that the 4% of African territory in European hands in 1881 had increased to 16% by 1884 and would continue to do so over the following decade (Barnhart, 2016, p. 16).

5.5 Theoretical Notes on the Scramble for Africa and the Role of Status

It must be immediately noted that, as in any historical analysis, there can be no single reason or motivation identified for an event. However, several key arguments must be acknowledged when discussing the Scramble for Africa before turning to what this thesis will contend was

its primary motivator, status competition. Firstly, historians such as Copeland (2014) have argued that France's motivations, and indeed those of the rest of Europe, should be primarily identified as economic in nature. This line of reasoning claims that the Scramble was driven by a fear of missing out on key sources of raw materials, exports, and investment capital (Copeland, 2014, p. 376). Indeed, this argument suggests that Economic Realism can explain the Scramble due to a breakdown of trade treaties, such as the Cobden-Chevalier between France and Britain, and the need to secure other partners outside of Europe as trade tariffs rose (Copeland, 2014).

Secondly, historians such as Newbury and Kanya-Forstner (1969) have put forward the idea that the French initiation of the Scramble was less sudden and merely the gradual evolution of existing French policies. This argument tends to focus on the strategic and trade benefits of the expansion and relies on various small-scale projects in Senegal and various French governmental suggestions of territorial expansion in Africa before the 1880s (Newbury & Kaya-Forstner, 1969). Indeed, the number of possible explanations and sub-permutations of these is practically endless as a partial list of explanations compiled in 1983 by J.M. Mackenzie already included Market Saturation, Capitalist Imperialism, Great men imperialism, Expanding Nationalism and Popular Nationalism. However, all of these tend to ignore the central role played by Status and its corollary, Humiliation.

Before turning to humiliation and status, particularly as deployed by Barnhart in her work in 2016 and 2020, it is worth pointing out some of the key issues that the previously mentioned explanations face. A key shortcoming common to many of the historical accounts is an overreliance on specific types of primary data, such as trade records and financial accounts in the case of Copeland (2014), which automatically bias their assumptions and reduce the reliability of their conclusions. Other sources draw on a wide range of sources but tend towards an overreliance on the long-dure school of thinking which, while hugely influential and undoubtedly important as a tool for broad historical analysis, is not well adapted to analysing the minutiae of the motivations for events or decisions. Indeed, Newbury and Kanya-Forstner (1969) provide a highly detailed and informative account of the years leading to the French initiation of the Scramble for Africa but fail to truly tackle the enormity of the shift in French colonial policy following their occupation of Tunisia in 1881. Moreover, they also neglect to effectively account for the impact of any external factors, such as the Franco-Prussia war, on French decision-making, and instead, focus almost exclusively on internal French politics and policy changes without the context of what motivated them. More generally, the focus on questions of economics or strategy is fundamentally misplaced, it is, and was indeed at the time, generally accepted that most colonial holdings of European powers cost far more than they produced financially and tended to result in little to no political gains for those in power during their capture (Mackenzie, 1983, p. 45). Moreover, while some have made the argument for European states need to expand on a strategic front, this also does not hold up to scrutiny as the military resources required to hold the captured

territory in Africa served only to divert more personnel away from Europe and leave the metropole even weaker (Barnhart, 2016, p. 405).

Turning now to the idea of Status competition and Humiliation as the main drivers for the actions of France, and subsequently the other European states. As established in Chapter 2, Status competition is frequently at its strongest when states perceive their reputation as under threat, and even more so after suffering humiliation. Given these principles, it is possible to re-examine 19th-century France and see a clear reason behind their actions. Firstly, the declining influence they had been experiencing since the early 1800s had contributed to a national desire for prestige, and in particular a personal need for glory and status for Napoleon III (Barnhart, 2021, p. 138). The humiliating nature of the rapid defeat that followed was compounded by both the French confidence at victory, crowds in Paris had been jubilant at the announcement, and the state importance of the victory for French status by the French government and the fact that most other states also saw France as the major power and expected it to win easily (Barnhart, 2021, pp. 138-139). Not only this, but the sizeable amount of territory lost to a newly born German empire, officially brought into existence in France's own palace of Versailles after Prussian troops reached Paris, left both the government and the people angry, humiliated and fearing for their status a Major power (Barnhart, 2021, pp. 36, 137-142).

Following this defeat and humiliation it is obvious that France, and the French, would have desired retribution against Germany, and indeed many argue that the origins of World War 1 arguably start here, but in the years following the defeat of 1871, there was an awareness that such a move was not feasible at the time (Barnhart, 2016, p. 400). As a result, the newly born Third Republic spent the following ten years slowly rebuilding and consolidating strength while planning other ways to re-assert its position and status in the world. While some may argue otherwise, it is primarily for this reason that, in 1881, France fully committed to annexing Tunisia, both to assert its status and block growing Italian influence in the region. Indeed, the ministers supporting it openly sold the move to both the government and the people to restore French honour and status in the world, while neglecting any mention of possible material or strategic benefits (Barnhart, 2016, p. 403; Barnhart, 2021, p. 145). Interestingly, it seems that other states were also aware of this need to satisfy a French desire for status as both Britain and Germany appear to have supported the Tunisian annexation (Barnhart, 2021, p. 143). Given the above, it is no great surprise that the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, following a system of co-rule with France that had lasted around a century, provided another huge blow to French status, and resulted in the rapid annexation of Congo by November of that same year (Barnhart, 2021, p. 147). In Congo, as with Tunisia, little to no mention of any potential benefits to trade or military value was made, indeed until only a few months prior to the annexation France had claimed no interest whatsoever in the country, leaving only a sudden need to re-assert its status once again as a plausible explanation.

Once this series of territorial acquisitions had begun, it rapidly became what we now call the Scramble for Africa as Britain began to perceive its status in Africa as coming under threat and Germany and Italy felt their status as major powers could only be truly claimed if they too possessed imperial holdings outside of Europe. Throughout this period, it is key to note that not a single major power appears to have made any substantial claim to economic or strategic reasonings behind these expansions, and those that were made were generally teleological justifications added far later to explain past actions (Barnhart, 2016; Barnhart, 2021).

Chapter 6. The Case of Present-Day Russia

6.1 Introduction

To say that Russia's relationship with Europe, and the West more broadly, has been a complicated one would be an understatement. Its geography, politics, history, culture and more have all been a complex mixture of West and East that have left Russia in a truly unique and challenging position for the better part of the last few centuries, practically since its consolidation into something like its current state around the turn of the 18th century. However, it is particularly following the end of World War 2 that Russia has structured its identity around direct and indirect status competition with the West, and the USA in particular (Tsygankov, 2012, p. 3). The nature of this relationship was one of the primary motivators of Cold War competition and has, despite initial signs to the contrary, survived and even thrived under Putin (Larson & Shevchenko 2010, p. 65).

Indeed, when considering the role of status, and its corollaries, in the history of the development of countries there are possibly no better examples than Russia (Forsberg, Heller & Wolf, 2014, p. 262). The role of honour, an ideal inextricably linked to status and humiliation, is deeply rooted in the Russian psyche and its importance has been made clear by the emphasis placed by Russian leaders such as Putin's naming of the fall of the USSR as "a major geopolitical disaster of the century" that caused humiliation to the entire country (Putin, 2005, para. 6). Moreover, the nature of power in Russia throughout most of its history, generally focused in a very small group of elites, makes it even more susceptible to acting based on status over economic or strategic interests as these elites are the most likely to identify the country's status with their own (Dafoe, Renshon & Huth, 2014, p. 381; Barnhart, 2021, p. 15). This thesis will primarily focus on the ongoing war in Ukraine and how status and humiliation have played a part in it, and even more importantly may play a part in its consequences.

This chapter will seek to set out the historical background to help position the present argument on the Ukraine war in the context of a status-fixated Russian state. Following this the developments that have taken place since Russia's taking of Crimea in 2014 will be covered, particularly as they concern issues of status and reputation for Russia. Once this factual foundation has been laid the role of status and humiliation will be explored at length, as well as some discussion of the potential impacts of the current trajectory of the war. It is worth noting however that a more detailed analysis of the likely fallout will be left for the following two chapters.

6.2 Russia pre-2014

While a full overview of the history of modern Russia is far beyond the scope of this thesis, a brief overview of some of the most prevalent themes, particularly those that appertain to its relationship with the West, is necessary. During the 18th and 19th centuries, Russia oscillated between cooperation and competition with the major powers of Europe but tended towards aligning with them ideologically and socially (Forsberg, Heller & Wolf, 2014, p. 266). During this period leaders such as Catherine the Great and Peter the Great led sizeable campaigns of territorial expansion into Eastern Europe, including the territory of Crimea and part of modern Ukraine in 1783 (Danforth, 2023). These leaders would become central to Russia's self-image and are still invoked today by leaders such as Putin as will be discussed later. Up until World War 1 Russia continued to play the part of the powerful state on the eastern border of Europe that was never fully a part of the "civilized" continent but also not truly an "other" as the nascent USA or Japanese states were (Neumann, 2014, p. 107). That being said, the Tzars of Russia were still generally connected to the powerful royal families of Europe as famously illustrated by the so-called "Willy—Nicky" telegrams at the outbreak of World War 1.³ As a result of this, the status competition between Russia and its European neighbours during this period was active but not unlike the competition between other European states at the time.

The Russian Bolshevik revolution in 1917 fundamentally changed this, as the new ruling elite of Russia had little to no close ties with those of Europe and were opposed ideologically to the majority. During the 1920s and 30s, this was of relatively little importance for this thesis as it spent this time primarily looking inwards and engaging in internal cohesion building and power consolidation while generating powerful symbolic unity to ensure that the status of the elite was internally secure (Tsygankov, 2012, pp. 3-5). However, following the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945, and the significant change in the global balance of power that it heralded, this separation from Western elites and power structures would become far more salient. While previously Russia had, fairly successfully, claimed the status of a major power, following 1945 the USSR began to see itself and wish to be seen, as holding the status of Superpower alongside, or indeed ahead of, the USA with a sphere of influence to match (Clunan, 2009, p. 105).

This period is interesting to briefly discuss here as it simultaneously represents both a considerable change from the past and a seamless continuation. Russia's, or technically the USSR's, claims to status had been raised significantly, and its territorial control was greater than at any other time in its history. The following decades arguably represent the highpoint of Russian status and power as they were indisputably one of only two global powers with a claim to the title of Superpower, having left their previous European and Asian rivals, or even superiors, behind. However, how this status was justified and defended remained markedly

³ The Willy—Nicky telegrams, so called due to the nicknames used by the respective rulers, were a series of telegrams between the cousins Kaiser Wilhelm II and Tzar Nicholas II during the first months of World War 1. For a discussion of these consult: KORFF, SA. "LETTERS FROM THE KAISER TO THE CZAR." *Advocate of Peace through Justice* 82, no. 12 (1920): 379-382.

like before. The deployment of military force, and the newly possible threat of nuclear power, were displayed both internally, during the Prague Spring, and externally in Afghanistan.⁴ However, some of the most influential and long-lasting successes in the Soviet efforts to maintain its status were technological, the most notable being the launching of Sputnik in 1957 and sending of the first dog, Laika, and first cosmonaut, Yuri Gagarin, into space (Gala event to celebrate Cosmonautics day, 2023). Indeed, the space race between Russia and the USA was one of the most public and obvious forms of status competition between the two Superpowers during this period and truly ceased only with the fall of the USSR and the founding of institutions such as the International Space Station. Indeed, it is these aspects of status that truly make it so key to focus on because, as will be discussed in section 4 of this chapter, it is these elements of soft power and status acquisition that traditional schools of International Relations, such as realism, tend to overlook.

However, it is precisely because of the status achieved during this period that the fall of the USSR in 1991, a de-facto acknowledgement of a US victory in the Cold War, was perceived as so humiliating for the reduced, both in size and power, Russia that emerged (Larson & Shevchenko, 2010, p.78). Interestingly, as with its previous and more dramatic convulsions following the 1917 revolution, Russia initially focused on internal consolidation and did not immediately attempt to re-acquire what it had lost. The first decade or so of post-USSR Russia was marked by cooperation with the West, accommodation of US interests and an opening up politically and socially (Larson & Shevchenko 2010, p. 89). However, in 1999 Russia initiated the second conflict in Chechnya and began the slow process of attempting to rebuild Russian status (Liksom, 2022). From this point on Russia slowly reduced its cooperativeness with the West and opposed the eastward expansion of NATO while increasing its attempts to rebuild influence in what it felt to be its sphere of influence, culminating in the military intervention in Georgia in 2008 (Larson & Shevchenko, 2010, p. 91). This intervention, as well as its peacekeeping force in Transnistria, were clear Russian responses to a perceived belittling of its status as a regional hegemon by Western powers whom it accused of meddling in its affairs (Clunan, 2009).

6.3 Russia and Ukraine, 2014-Present Day

While the various actions of the Russian government between the dissolution of the USSR and 2014 varied between cooperation and a return to direct competition, it was their decision to invade and occupy Crimea that truly began to move the stakes back towards their Cold War positions. Indeed, following this, relations between Russia and various Western institutions, both military and political, such as NATO and the EU began to seriously suffer. The various sanctions packages and the suspension of Russia from the G8 (now back to 7) and the NATO-Russia council that followed in 2014 marked a distinct return to the direct status competition

⁴ For more detail on these and other conflicts during the cold war please consult Arnold, J. R., & Wiener, R. (2012). Cold War.

of the Cold War. However, the break was not yet complete and international events such as the Sochi Winter Olympics and continued cooperation in the management running of the International Space Station allowed for some semblance of normality to continue. The following eight years were marked by a slow uptick in tensions as the various treaties and agreements created to mediate the conflict in Ukraine failed to make headway and each side accused the other of foul play and bad faith.⁵ Nonetheless, the situation was relatively stabilized and Russia maintained its claim that it was not directly involved while opposing any signs of a Ukrainian alliance or entry into the EU or NATO on the grounds that it would infringe on their area of influence and thereby go against their desired perception as a Superpower (Stein, 2023). During this period of increasing direct status competition between Russia and the West, Russia also began to increase its projection of power abroad by launching air strikes in Syria before the US could act and demanding the return of NATO to its 1997 borders (Borger, 2016; Roth 2021).

This return to direct but not exclusive competition was brought to an abrupt, if not totally unexpected, end when Russia began its full-scale invasion, called a “special military operation” by Russia, of Ukraine on February 24th, 2022. This decision put an end to any idea of Russia attempting to increase its status through mobility within the system and positioned it squarely and exclusively in the realm of direct, and now violent, competition with the West. However, despite the expectation of a rapid victory this conflict has now stretched on for over a year with the ever-growing economic, political, and military costs for Russia being excruciatingly detailed by Western media and beyond on a daily basis (Norrlöf, 2022; Sorokin, 2022; Sierra, 2023; Fonseca, 2023). Indeed, it appears that the initial confidence of Russian leaders was posited on an overconfident assessment of Russian technological and strategic superiority (Danforth, 2023; Strategic Policy, 2022, pp. 35-39). Moreover, the rapid response by NATO and its allies to both impose economic and political sanctions on Russia and its leadership and supply humanitarian and lethal aid to Ukraine allowed the weaker power to rapidly increase its military capacities (Minassian, 2023; Pietralunga, 2023). This has been further exacerbated by the exodus of Western companies and the further expansion of NATO with the joining of Finland and the continued candidacy of Sweden (Strategic Policy, 2022, p. 66). The growing number of Russian casualties sustained Western financial and military support to Ukraine, recent Ukrainian victories, and seeming increase in infighting in the Russian military have made the war in Ukraine an ever more costly venture for Russia and one which is causing it to haemorrhage reputational and status power on the international stage (Gromada & Zeiuk, 2022; El País, 2023; Duarte, 2022; ISPI, 2023).

6.4 The Role of Status

⁵ The most notable of these were the Minsk agreements which were initially signed in September 2014 and then reworked into the Minsk II agreements in February 2015. Both required ceasefires and withdrawals of military equipment from the Donbas region but neither was fully successful.

Given the dire position that the previous section suggests Russia is in, a better understanding of its reasoning and motivations is vital both when considering potential practical short-term solutions and when thinking about the potential ramifications of this war for the future of Russia, and the world. Naturally, as in any area of International Relations, there is no simple single answer that can be given here but there are definite primary and secondary motivators. However, this thesis does not believe that these can be identified through the traditional considerations of military power and strategy, popular though such topics may be on all sides of the conflict, or economics. Instead, as has already been suggested previously, the argument will now be made that it is a concern regarding status that fundamentally motivated, and continues to motivate, this conflict and, critically, it is status that will drive its consequences.

As has been discussed above, and analysed at length by previous studies, Russia, even without Putin, is a particularly status-centric state (Forsberg, Heller & Wolf, 2014; Tsygankov, 2012). Indeed, it is this focus on status that has driven much of its history as outlined above, especially following World War 2. For this thesis however, and in the interest of brevity, the focus will be kept primarily on Russia following the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, i.e., modern Russia. This transition from an undisputed, if ailing, global superpower with direct control over a considerable number of other states to a more regional, if still powerful, actor with very limited influence beyond its borders was unquestionably a huge reduction in international status. It represented for many of the elites, and indeed a significant number of the population, a serious humiliation of national pride and, critically for Russia, honour (Larson & Shevchenko, 2010; Forsberg, Heller & Wolf, 2014, p. 265). Indeed, this feeling was further emphasized by the way Western powers, and especially the USA, treated Russia as a diminished and defeated power, thereby unleashing what some have termed a “Weimar Syndrome” within Russia who felt themselves unjustly belittled and humiliated (Clunan, 2009, p. 101; Barnhart, 2021, p. 203). The result of this was a near-instant drive to return Russia to the status of superpower it had previously held at the expense of other, supposedly more important, considerations such as military security or economic reason, exactly as expected by psychological studies of status (Dafoe, Renshon & Huth, 2014, p. 378; Larson & Shevchenko, 2010, p. 79). As would be expected, the identity crisis that pervaded Russia, and its exclusion from many elite power systems by the West led to an ever-increasing amount of status-acquiring behaviour.

Most of this can be categorized into either mobility or competition, with a gradual transition away from the former and towards the latter. Initially, Russia’s joining the G7, participation in the NATO-Russia Council and engagement with Europe represented a focus on status mobility as the country appeared to try to rise back up within existing power structures. However, the military action in Chechnya and Georgia, as well as more bellicose rhetoric and celebration of the Soviet Union by Putin and the government during the early 2000s began to signal a shift towards more direct competitive status acquisition (Putin, 2005). During these first twenty years the importance of status to Russia, and indeed its primacy over other issues,

was noticeable but not yet total. This can be seen in its continued cooperation with the West in areas such as Outer Space, though even here Russia was able to work on rebuilding its status due to the reliance on them to ferry crew and cargo to and from the International Space Station.

The true turning point, or at least its beginning, was the Russian capture of Crimea in 2014. It was with this action, and Russia's brushing off the Western response to it, that the shift to direct and absolute competition was made clear. This is not to say that status mobility efforts such as the hosting of the Sochi Winter Olympics were not maintained, but they became secondary as Russia was ejected from many of the Western-dominated power venues it had entered over the previous two decades. It was also around this period that Putin began to truly tighten his grip on power while benefiting from the boost in internal status, and external in certain circles, that the capture of Crimea afforded him. The following eight years are generally marked by a slow uptick in tensions as Russia sought to re-establish its status as an international military player while more actively opposing the Western assumption of military supremacy (Borger, 2016; Stein, 2023). By 2021 these demands for greater respect for Russian status had increased to include the retraction of NATO from Eastern Europe due to its infringement on Russia's perceived sphere of influence (Roth, 2021).

On February 24th, 2022, status finally overcame all other considerations as Putin declared the initiation of the Russian "special military operation" and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The assertion that this action heralded the final enthroning of status as the supreme consideration for Russia's government, and Putin in particular, is dramatic but justified. While Putin has made claims that the invasion was caused by a need to protect Russian security and sovereignty by preventing Ukraine from falling into the Western sphere of influence, there is very little to suggest any truth to this claim (Stein, 2023). Moreover, the consequences the war has already produced have been the exact opposite of this as the West has become more united and Russia has lost significant status and support internationally while cracks have begun to emerge in Putin's power base (Duarte, 2022; Picard, 2023; Tisdall, 2022b). Such consequences would, if the reasoning truly had been an increase in Russian security, have led to a rapid change in course by the Russian leadership, not to mention the significant economic damage caused by sustained Western sanctions.

The importance of reputation and status to Russia, its elite, and Putin in particular, has long been established and accepted, seemingly even by Russia itself (Neumann, 2014, p. 107; Zorin, 2022). Consequently, the significant negative fallout from its invasion of Ukraine is likely to be particularly painful. Since the invasion, Russia has faced several condemnations in the United Nations General Assembly where over 140 member states demanded its withdrawal while its closest significant ally, China, only abstained but offered little support (United Nations, 2023). Meanwhile, it has been barred from participating in many international

forums, at the political, sports, legal and military levels.⁶ While some of these may not initially seem that important, what does a superpower care about Eurovision after all, they have a significant impact on a country's status due to its uniquely subjective nature compared to, say, military power (Larson, Paul & Wohlforth, 2014, pp. 7-8). Indeed, it is the subjective nature of status, as outlined in Chapter 2, that makes Russia's current woes in Ukraine so catastrophic in this regard. This is most notable when considering perceptions of Russia purely in terms of its status as a superpower which are most closely associated with perceptions of military strength and the ability to project it (Brooks & Wohlforth, 2016). On this front is where Russia has likely suffered the most in terms of its status around the world the perception of the Russian military as one granting it the status of a superpower has been almost universally shattered (Norrlöf, 2022; Fonseca, 2023; Sauer, 2023; Sierra, 2023; Strategic Policy, 2022, p. 65). Indeed, Russia has now widely been considered to have become totally dependent, and therefore inferior in status to China on the international stage (ISPI, 2023). Above all however, Russia's humiliation has come from the very confidence it had in itself, it was the arrogant and under-prepared nature of the invasion, coupled with poor training and supplies that truly sealed the fate of this "special military operation" and has seen Russia continue to struggle against a supposedly minor regional power, albeit one with significant external support (Strategic Policy, 2022, pp. 65-72).

However, this military and political humiliation on the world stage has not been met with no resistance by Russia as it has done its best to marshal allies such as China to its defence while keeping powerful states such as India neutral. Meanwhile, it has used its extensive nuclear arsenal to shore up its military capabilities and maintains its position as a power with which the West is unwilling to engage directly. This has been further emphasized by the placement of tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus with the possibility of adding intercontinental capabilities, the first deployment of Russian nuclear weapons abroad since 1991 (Reuters, 2023b). Simultaneously, the apparent failings in direct status competition appear to have led Russia towards greater investments in improving its status via other more creative means such as the widely publicized shooting of the first-ever film in Space in 2023 which Putin himself celebrated as having "beaten" Hollywood (Anonymous, 2023, para. 1).

These developments suggest that Russia, and most importantly Putin, may be beginning to accept, willingly or otherwise, that direct competition is not working and that another, more creative, solution is required given the current trajectory of the Ukraine war. This is particularly the case as, unlike post World War 2 Germany, Russia lacks any credible security umbrella to rebuild or re-orient with as China is supportive but still competitive for status. Also, unlike the German defeat in both World Wars, a potential Russian defeat in Ukraine would be unlikely to result in a full invasion of Russia and have been caused by one, nominally inferior, opponent rather than a strong global coalition. So, the question then remains as to

⁶ No single database exists to catalogue these banning's, but it includes the SWIFT payment system, the EU, Canada and USA's airspaces, Eurovision, FIFA, and many other sporting events.

what Russia may choose to do in its desire to once again re-assert its global status following a loss, or at best a humiliating stalemate, with Ukraine. To answer this question, or at least provide one credible option, the following chapter will seek to compare this case to the one of France, laid out previously, and ascertain whether enough similarities are present to propose a similar course of action may be taken in the present as was chosen in the 19th century.

Chapter 7. Case Study Comparison

7.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters have sought to lay out the cases under consideration by this thesis, as well as the importance of status to both. This chapter will now compare the two to properly ascertain whether Russia's war in Ukraine can truly be said to be similar, or at least similar enough, to the Franco-Prussian war and its surrounding context for inferences to be drawn about Russia's behaviour in the coming years by looking at that of France in the 19th century. As has been previously acknowledged, this comparison is not an obvious one to make and will require a degree of flexibility and creativity to properly carry out. However, this does not mean it is pointless as its focus on the importance of status specifically makes the issues of technological and global political progress less important than it might otherwise be. Indeed, of all the important considerations in International Relations, status may well be the one that has remained the most constant and unchanged throughout our history precisely because of its uniquely human, subjective, and emotional nature (Lebow, 2008, p. 5).

The following comparison will be structured around similar lines as the analyses of the cases themselves. This order has been chosen as it allows for a relatively chronological structure to be followed which tends to facilitate understanding. Also, at the most superficial level, it is already interesting to note that both cases follow a broadly similar outline and therefore their comparisons already fit together neatly, an early sign of the potential this study may hold. Firstly, the backgrounds and lead-ups to the respective conflicts with neighbouring minor, relatively at least, powers will be compared to ascertain whether the two countries entered the wars under similar circumstances and with similar goals. Secondly, the conflicts themselves will be compared to investigate to what extent the current war in Ukraine is following a similar path to that between France and Prussia in 1871. Thirdly, and potentially most challengingly, the fallout of the respective conflicts will be compared. This section will be the most challenging as the war in Ukraine is still ongoing at the time of writing and as a result, no definitive conclusions can be drawn about how it may eventually end. However, as it stands at the time of writing, the impacts on Russia, and indeed the wider world, have already been considerable and so there is still a good deal of material for a comparison to be made.

7.2 Comparison of the Background to the Conflicts

The degree to which the two cases are similar in this regard is considerable. In the period leading up to the initiation of the two respective wars, both France and Russia had reached the apex of their power and status on the international stage. France's empire under Napoleon, and to a lesser extent his successors and the rise to superpower status of the USSR following World War 2 represents the high-water mark of power for each state and come in

the decades immediately preceding the conflicts in question. These heights were then followed in both cases by relatively sudden reversals, be it the defeat at Waterloo and subsequent British rise or the collapse of the USSR, and a period of declining or stagnating influence over the subsequent decades. Indeed, following their initial losses of status to their primary rivals, the UK, and the USA, both states sought a similar type of more peaceful, accounting for a generally higher prevalence of military conflicts in the 19th-century, type of status competition to re-assert their power. For both 19th century France and modern Russia this meant the push for trade agreements and economic engagement alongside smaller demonstrations of military power.

While it was not discussed at length in the previous chapters it is also worth mentioning here that in both cases the countries in question were under similar, broadly speaking, forms of government in the periods leading up to their respective conflicts. The French empire was led by, as the name suggests, an emperor, who had overthrown the republic following his election in 1851 and was supported by a government that ran most day-to-day matters and advised him on key decisions (Wawro, 2003, p.20). Meanwhile, the USSR was under the single-party control of the Communist Party with much of the power vested in the President and his inner circle of elites. While the Russia that declared war on Ukraine had nominally been somewhat democratized, it is widely accepted that by 2014, and definitely by 2022, Putin and his close associates held most, if not all the power in government (Arutunyan, 2014). This similarity is of note because, as has been discussed at length in Chapter 2, status concerns are most keenly felt by the elite of a country and its impacts are therefore likely to be more keenly felt in states with smaller governing bodies where the emotional and personal response of any one person is far more impactful.

It is also worth noting here that the motivations that led up to the initiation of the main conflict under consideration in each case were very similar. The French fear of a Prussian acceding to the Spanish throne leaving it vulnerable to being surrounded has strong echoes in Russian statements regarding NATO expansion in Ukraine and the eroding of its sphere of influence and security. Furthermore, both France and Russia received assurances that the outcomes they feared would not happen but disbelieved them and felt they were not accorded the respect they deserved by neighbours they perceived as weaker and, status-wise at least, inferior. Also, in the run-up to their respective leader's decision to initiate the wars, both Napoleon III and Putin were severely misled regarding the potential difficulty of the war and the odds of victory. The result of this was that in both cases, the wars were announced with great confidence and arrogance with the major powers' armies being under-prepared, under-supplied and badly trained. Indeed, in both cases the minor power proved to appear more ready for the invasion than the major, and belligerent, one as well as more effective at garnering international support and supplies.

The most notable difference worth noting here is the absence of any previous capture of Prussian territory by France comparable to the 2014 annexation of Crimea by Russia. While this is by no means a catastrophic difference it is worth mentioning as the capture of Crimea allowed Russia a far more beneficial starting point to the conflict than was afforded to France given its positions on three sides of Ukraine, due to the possibility of moving Russian troops through Belarus. Indeed, when considering the opponent in each case it is also of note that Prussia was a rapidly ascending power with a well-trained and experienced military that was actively expanding in Europe and more powerful, relatively, than Ukraine was at the start of the respective wars. However, as will be discussed later, this difference may not be so important as the greater amount of aid received by Ukraine could be argued to make up for its weaker starting position. Also, it is of course necessary to mention the presence of nuclear weapons. The fact that Russia holds these and Ukraine does not necessarily shift the balance of power in a way that is incomparable to the 19th century, though the French side did possess early prototypes of the fixed machine gun which presented a major innovation in military technology (Willbanks, 2004, p. 36).

7.3 Comparison of The Conflicts

Moving now to the conflicts themselves, namely the Franco-Prussian war and the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine. At the outset of both the major powers in the international community appear to have expected a rapid and decisive victory by the belligerent major power. Indeed, it is this fact that is one of the most notable similarities between the cases as not only did both France and Russia themselves expect to win but they were widely expected to win by their peers. Furthermore, both conflicts started with rapid advances by the major powers due to their high confidence in victory, though it is worth noting here that France never made it anywhere near as far as Russia. In both cases, the resistance put up by the supposedly weaker power was far fiercer and more effective than had been previously expected. Also, in both cases, the attacked power was able to call on the support of other external third parties with an interest in seeing the major power fail in their attack, though this support has been far greater, and arguably influential, in the case of Ukraine.

However, the comparison here is admittedly not perfect. As suggested previously the French war on Prussia was far less successful than that of Russia on Ukraine, so far, as Prussia was able to rapidly push back the French army, capture their emperor and push as far as Paris to force a capitulation within less than a year. Meanwhile, the Russian invasion has now lasted over a year with the lines of contact having remained unmoving from around October 2022 and a promised Ukrainian offensive in 2023 yet to take place. Moreover, as mentioned previously, the potential extent of a Russian defeat is likely to be considerably lower than that suffered by France. This is due both to Ukraine's relatively weaker state compared to Prussia and, most importantly, the threat of nuclear weapons that Russia can invoke to deter any attempts to push it beyond its borders.

Nonetheless, it is here that one of the differences mentioned above may allow for the result to be that the cases are more similar overall. The point in question is the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. It is important to note here that what follows is necessarily based on a degree of conjecture, but it is worth considering all the same given the currently stated objectives of the Ukrainian government. As the situation stands at the time of writing the Ukrainian government claims to plan to retake the entirety of its territory pre-2014, which, critically, includes Crimea (Miller & Schwartz, 2023). This is relevant when considering that one of the most humiliating results of the Franco-Prussian war, and therefore one of the biggest blows to French status, was the loss of Alsace and Lorraine. As discussed, Russia is extremely unlikely to lose any of its original territory, not least because Ukraine has shown no interest in taking any, but Russia has claimed Crimea as a fully integrated part of itself meaning that its loss would likely represent a similar humiliating blow. Critically, unlike an invasion of any other part of the country, Crimea might feasibly be re-captured by Ukraine without triggering a nuclear response given the recentness of its capture but would still be a huge blow to Russia's status and, like Alsace and Lorraine, be a significant practical loss due to the strategic and military value of the territory.

7.4 Comparison of the Consequences of the Conflicts

This section is inherently the most limited given that the conflict in Ukraine is still ongoing and therefore any consequences to it are still only just beginning to reveal themselves. However, there are still a few key points to consider. It is undeniable that the two cases are not identical and nowhere is this more obvious than in the duration of the wars in question. Unlike the dramatic, total, and rapid Prussian victory in the 19th-century, Ukraine has not routed Russia and the conflict looks unlikely to be resolved in the immediate future. This means that a true comparison of the effects of the war cannot be carried out. However, this is not necessarily a problem as the purpose of this thesis was not exclusively to identify whether the two cases were identical, but only if they were similar enough for some inferences, lessons, or indeed warnings to be drawn.

As far as it is possible to say then, the consequences of the two conflicts do indeed seem to be remarkably similar so far. Firstly, the extent of the loss of status, whose measurement must inherently be subjective, appears to be following similar lines. News outlets around the world have spent the better part of the last year chronicling the continued failings of the Russian invasion in considerable detail (Danforth, 2023; Liksom, 2022; Tisdall, 2022a; Norrlöf, 2022; Gromada & Zeniuk, 2022; Sorokin, 2022; Reuters, 2023a; Sierra, 2023; Duarte, 2022; Minassian, 2023; Ambrosetti, 2022). Moreover, even those states which have remained neutral or supportive such as China have refused to commit to any firm support and continued to insist on the need for a negotiation. Also, as in France once Prussia started to emerge victorious, divides within the Russian elite appear to be widening which further undermines

the status and credibility of the state (SCMP, 2023a). However, the long-term impacts of this divide, and the potential for a similar deposition of the leader and change of government in Russia as occurred in France are impossible to truly measure though likely to be lower given the extent of Putin's control and his possession of nuclear weapons.

Secondly, as alluded to earlier, is the enormous loss of status, and considerable humiliation, that is caused by the loss of territory for the belligerent major power. As identified by Barnhart in both her 2016 and 2020 work, it was the loss of Alsace and Lorraine, potentially more than any other factor, that caused France the most humiliation and spurred their eventual drive to conquest in Africa as a result. This is where the aforementioned Russian conquest of Crimea may prove to be the critical point allowing these two cases to be similar enough for significant inferences to be drawn. The reason for this is that Russia has fully claimed Crimea as part of its territory, as made dramatically clear by the construction of the controversial bridge across the Kerch Strait. This public and official commitment to the annexation, as well as the strategic value of Crimea, means that the loss of this territory would represent an enormous humiliation for Russia, potentially comparable to that of France for the loss of Alsace and Lorraine. However, it is possible, if admittedly far from guaranteed, that, unlike any incursion across other sections of their border, a Ukrainian invasion of Crimea would not instigate a nuclear response from Russia. This is due to the relatively recent acquisition of the territory and the likely fear of an immediate withdrawal of support by China and India if the nuclear taboo were broken (SCMP, 2023b). While it is true that a Russian loss of Crimea is far from certain, its possibility and the current Ukrainian commitment to it, mean the Ukraine war has clear potential to end with a similar humiliation for Russia as that suffered by France in 1871.

Thirdly, while not necessarily the main source of status loss or humiliation, it is still important to highlight the rising death toll of the current conflict in Ukraine compared to that of the 19th century. It is estimated that the Franco-Prussia war led to the deaths or serious injury of around 30,000 French soldiers when combining direct combat deaths and those that occurred during the internal unrest that followed (Barnhart, 2021, p. 138). Meanwhile, though the true numbers are unclear, current estimates suggest that at minimum 20,000 Russian soldiers have died and up to 200,000 have been wounded (The Economist, 2023). This represents a considerable portion, around a quarter, of the Russian regular armed forces which are estimated to number around 830,000 if all personnel and branches are included (Statista, 2023).

Finally, it is worth noting the similar way in which Putin has been depicting the current war in Ukraine and the how the Franco-Prussia war was perceived in its aftermath by the French. Putin has repeatedly called the "special military operation" a fight for Russia's very survival (Reuters, 2023a). Similarly, the leaders of France perceived their state as having been on the brink of destruction during the Franco-Prussian war and saw it as their duty to rebuild from this humiliation (Barnhart, 2021, pp. 138-141). While it is true that, as has been discussed, it

is highly unlikely that Russia will face the same type of invasion and near-total collapse as France, the fact that Putin has now framed the conflict in similar terms means that a loss may be similarly perceived.

7.5 conclusion

This chapter has sought to extensively compare all the main details from each case to ascertain whether the Franco-Prussian war and the events that surrounded it can truly be considered instructive when studying the current Russian invasion of Ukraine. While differences are present, how could they not be when the cases are over a century apart, and, indeed, current events are not precisely following in the footsteps of history, there are enough similarities to make some general inferences. For the purposes of this thesis then the comparison can be considered successful as the main aim was the identification of similar trends and responses both to help better understand the dynamics of the current conflict, and critically, to provide some insight into potential Russian responses to an eventual defeat in Ukraine.

Given the evidence laid out above it seems likely that Russia will, if the war in Ukraine continues its trajectory at the time of writing, suffer considerable reputational and status damage due to a humiliating defeat or, at best, stalemate with its weaker neighbour. This situation, particularly if Ukraine does succeed in re-taking Crimea does have a great number of similarities with the French defeat in the Franco-Prussia war and loss of Alsace and Lorraine. When their similarities in political leadership and the international response, arguably even more negative for Russia now than France in the 19th century, are also factored in it can only be concluded that Russia is highly likely to pursue a similar drive to recover its status in the years following the conclusion of the Ukraine war. Having established this the only key point that remains is ascertaining what form such an attempt at status recovery may take and it is this topic that will be tackled in the following chapter.

Chapter 8. The Scramble for Outer Space

8.1 Introduction

The title of this chapter may seem like something of a leap as this thesis has, until now, focused primarily on the case studies of 19th-century France and present-day Russia, their actions, reactions, and motivations, particularly focusing on status. However, as was discussed in the introduction, Chapter 2, and Chapter 3, the goal has never been to simply compare these two cases for its own sake, but rather to establish to what extent they were comparable to derive potential lessons from the past when considering the present. Having now successfully established that they are similar in nature this chapter will move to what lessons may be learned from France and how its actions may give us insight into the Russian response to its current humiliation and loss of status.

This will be done firstly by briefly summarizing the response of France to its humiliation and the way other countries around it sought to manage these actions. This is important because the ten years between its defeat by Prussia and its conquest of Tunisia were not empty. Furthermore, the other major powers of its time, such as Britain and Germany, acknowledged both France's humiliation and the need to alleviate it (Barnhart, 2021, p. 5). Following this, the argument will be presented for why Russia may now look to Outer Space to fill the role that Africa played for France in the 19th century. While this may seem overly dramatic there is a great deal of evidence to suggest it may at least play a significant role. That being said, this will perforce constitute a degree of conjecture and is therefore intended primarily to illustrate the potential dangers of such a course if the world is not prepared and should encourage further research into other possible outcomes in the future. Indeed, the final section of this chapter will detail some of the primary issues with this proposal and why they are not enough to cause it to be ruled out entirely.

8.2 The Lessons from 19th-Century France

Following their disastrous defeat by Prussia, the sack of Paris, and the crowning of a new German emperor in Versailles, France was left practically on its knees by the end of 1871 (Barnhart, 2016; Barnhart, 2021). What is most striking about this however is the apparent awareness and consideration of the humiliation caused to France by both Britain and Germany during this period, and their attempts to manage it constructively rather than pushing France further out of the corridors of elite power (Barnhart, 2021, pp. 5, 143). Meanwhile, within France, the government was conscious of its inability to immediately get any sort of revenge on Germany and the French government established following the war, under Jules Ferry, immediately focused on "less risky strategies of overcoming the humiliation of 1870" (Barnhart, 2021, p. 142). It was primarily this combination of external support and internal acceptance, at the governmental level at least, that led France towards its eventual

conquests in Africa during the 1880s. However, it is still key to highlight that France's eventual solution to its need for status was still the conquest of territory beyond its borders using military force.

The above-discussed points raise some interesting questions about how Russia may react to a similar situation. Firstly, while some leaders such as Macron had initially sought to maintain some channels of communication with Putin and advocated for avoiding the humiliation of Russia, these calls seem to have faded as the conflict continued (Ricard, 2022). This may mean that following the cessation of hostilities, other states will be less likely to support alternate means of status acquisition for Russia and therefore leave it more isolated than 19th-century France. Of course, this will also depend on the nature of Russia's defeat but, as has been previously discussed, it seems that the total collapse of the current regime is much less likely in this case. What this is likely to mean is a greater focus on more direct, if still creative, competition is more likely. Indeed, with the support of China Russia may still be able to pursue relatively ambitious projects, such as in Outer Space, even following a severe loss of status and trading connections, as France was forced to act without the help of an equivalent powerful partner (Di Pippo, 2023). In terms of the internal acceptance of the military defeat and a need to pursue alternate routes, this too will depend on the nature of the Russian government following a defeat, but it is likely that regardless of the situation it will be undeniable that further military expansion attempts are unlikely to provide the desired results as they did for France in the 19th century.

Given then that the situation in Russia following a hypothetical defeat by Ukraine, or even a stalemate, does seem likely to at least resemble that of France, it is possible to consider what such a scenario may look like.

8.3 The Russian (Re)turn to Outer Space

The most immediate and, arguably, obvious response to this question might seem to be that Russia will simply follow France's playbook to the letter and seek to further increase its influence in Africa via organizations such as the Wagner Group or even direct military action. However, this thesis will instead propose a different option. If the supposition that Russia's war in Ukraine goes badly enough that its current losses of status are not reversed, and may indeed worsen, is accepted then it seems likely that they will have to resort to a more creative form of status competition. Given this situation then there are only a few options left that can still provide enough reputational gain to potentially satisfy Russia's desire to be perceived as one of the world's leading powers. Of these, the area in which Russia has the most existing pedigree and commitment is undoubtedly the exploration and exploitation of Outer Space. While this statement may appear strong it is not without merit. Since its launch of Sputnik in 1957 Russia has consistently used Outer Space as a vehicle for its ambition and a centrepiece

for its status-oriented propaganda, a tradition that has stayed strong under Putin's leadership (Gala event to celebrate Cosmonautics Day, 2023).

Indeed, though space has become one of the only areas where a small degree of cooperation has so far survived, it has also already been deployed as a tool for Russian status acquisition (AFP, 2022). Most recently this has been seen in the confirmation by the head of ROSCOSMOS, Yury Borisov, that Russia is looking to leave the International Space Station in 2024, later delayed to 2028, to pursue the creation of its own orbital station (AFP, 2022). Moreover, in 2023 Russia announced with great fanfare the premiere of the first-ever feature film shot in Outer Space, with Putin himself lauding it as a world first and a symbolic defeat of Hollywood, and thereby the USA (Anonymous, 2023). A similar tone was struck by Putin during his address at the Gala event to celebrate Cosmonautics Day (2023, para. 8) where he emphasized the glory given to Russia by sending Yuri Gagarin into space and reiterated his commitment to "make space exploration a much more important factor of national development" by increasing cooperation with industry and businesses in the satellite sector. Indeed, he went on to discuss the importance of enhancing "cooperation between the state, businesses and science in outer space" to reach the goal of creating a Russian orbital station which would be "primarily about the early resumption of our Moon programme and missions to other planets in the solar system" (Gala event to celebrate Cosmonautics Day, 2023, paras. 12, 14).

On a more practical note, a recent publicized meeting between Putin and Borisov to celebrate Cosmonautics Day provided a great deal of insight into Russian ambitions in Outer Space. Firstly, Putin reiterated the centrality of Outer Space to Russia's history and defence industry before announcing an increase in spending in this sector and emphasizing his desire to accelerate plans for a Russian orbital station to be built (The Kremlin, 2023). Most notably both Putin and Borisov emphasized the importance of this orbital station not only for science and other academic purposes but, critically, as a jumping-off point for more extensive lunar plans (The Kremlin, 2023). While these quotes were specifically selected for public broadcasting and therefore are likely to present an overly optimistic slant on the Kremlin's plans, they are nonetheless vital in showing how the Russian government already sees Outer Space, and expansion in it, as a vital part of its long-term plans.

Taken together the statements and events discussed above make it very clear that increasing the Russian investment and presence in Outer Space is already on Russia's priority list. Indeed, it is interesting to note the importance placed by Putin on increasing cooperation with the private sector given the emphasis placed on this as a particularly viable option by many specialists in the field (Simon, 2021; Ramirez & Bauza-Abril, 2021; Lucas-Rhimbassen, Rapp & Mallowan, 2021). Pursuing a greater amount of private investment, particularly by offering a de-regulated and low-tax framework, might allow Russia to attract many start-ups and smaller companies trying to get into the space industry and thereby boost their technological capacities and scientific know-how. This would be particularly important in a potential post-

war scenario in which ongoing sanctions have left Russia with a dearth of local knowledge and skills to draw on. Simultaneously, it is true that current sanctions are likely to reduce Russia's access to certain components vital for the construction of space-faring vehicles but an already existing, and increasing, partnership with China in this regard could serve to assuage these issues (Di Pippo, 2023).

Another key point to consider when thinking about the potential for Russia to turn to Outer Space when it seeks to restore its status following a defeat by Ukraine is the relative lack of regulation there. As with other international areas, such as the poles, Outer Space and all the various celestial bodies in it, are not considered to be the property of any given state, and indeed their appropriation by any state is expressly forbidden in the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, Article II (United Nations, 1967). However, again as with claims made in the poles, the lack of any national jurisdiction also carries with it the lack of any effective enforcement body. As a result, Outer Space is the perfect venue for a state such as Russia, already under sanctions and disapproval from the West, to pursue the acquisition of status through expansion as it would not directly impinge on the rights of any other state, and its nuclear weapons would likely keep it safe from any direct intervention by others (Young, 2014, p. 7). Indeed, as Young (2014) argues, the current lack of updated and enforceable laws in Outer Space makes it likely that it is those who first break new ground there, be it with the mining of water on the moon for rocket fuel or the regulation, lax or otherwise, of private enterprise will be the ones who get to set the tone and write the rules (Simon, 2021, p. 221). In short then, a significant move towards Outer Space would not only allow Russia to re-establish its status as a major power by taking the lead in one of the most important economic, scientific, and technological areas of exploration but also be the one, likely in cooperation with China, to write the rules for the future of human endeavours beyond our planet.

8.4 The Potential Consequences

If the events outlined in the previous section were to come to pass, however, it would be key to look to the case of 19th-century France's expansion in Africa, and its consequences, and ask if something similar might happen today. This section will be kept relatively short given that this section is itself dependent on the previous one, which was already at least partially hypothetical. However, it is still worth at least briefly considering. As was touched upon in Chapter 5, France's conquest of Tunisia and Congo marked the metaphorical starting pistol for what would become known as the Scramble for Africa. While there is no final agreement among historians as to the reasons for this, and it is doubtless a combination of many, status has been convincingly put forward by Barnhart (2016 and 2020) as the main motivator, an argument this thesis supports. If this primacy of status is accepted as true, then the important question becomes whether the other states of the world are likely to respond to a Russian expansion into Outer Space in a similar manner.

The answer to this question is far from certain. However, it seems likely that some form of Scramble or, to use a more historically emotive term, Race for Space may indeed develop. This is primarily because, as in the 19th century, a failure to do so would likely be perceived by other states or groups such as the USA or EU as causing them a severe deterioration in status. Indeed, having nominally won the first space race by reaching the Moon, the USA would not want to allow Russia, potentially in concert with China, to dethrone its primacy in Outer Space. Furthermore, the increasing militarization and strategic importance of Outer Space, as well as the growing interest in primary resource acquisition there, means that the West would be highly unlikely to want to relinquish control of it and its laws and norms to a Russian and Chinese led initiative (Strategic Policy, 2022, p. 42; Simon, 2021, p. 221). While the technicalities and potential geopolitical implications of such a race are beyond the scope of this paper, their very real and present possibility is something that should not be ignored and merits further investigation.

8.5 Potential Issues with Outer Space

The suggestion that following a humiliating defeat in Ukraine, Russia might turn its attention to greater investment in Outer Space is not without its challenges and these will now be briefly addressed. Firstly, if Russia were to be destabilized at the internal level to a similar degree as France was during the 19th century, then it is likely that it would take a considerable amount of time to return to enough stability to marshal the substantial resources necessary for significant projects in Outer Space. Secondly, given the substantial costs involved, even a more stable Russia might struggle to justify the exorbitant expenditure necessary to pursue such a course of action, particularly given the likelihood of continued economic pressure from the West for some time following the war's conclusion. Lastly, many might ask whether Russia would not be more likely, and possibly better served, by sticking more closely to France's erstwhile playbook and focusing its status-building efforts on Africa through investing in gaining influence there, as it does already in Mali (Brown, 2023).

All the issues raised above are significant and worth consideration but do not inherently disprove or rule out the potential for Russia to look to Outer Space for its status. Starting with the potential need of Russia to first look inwards to its own stability and unity, both geographical and political, following a defeat. This point is of clear significance given the divides already seeming to form within Russian leadership and populace but, for reasons already mentioned, is unlikely to be as significant as in the other case study (Stanovaya, 2023). Indeed, even if the war were to cause Putin to fall, it is possible, if not likely, that his successor might be even keener to pursue Outer Space as a method to restore Russia's status while attempting to reduce its bellicose image under the guise of scientific exploration.

As to the second point raised, current sanctions are indeed likely to continue, at least to some extent, for some time. However, they are also causing economic difficulties to the West which

means that once the conflict has ceased, they may well begin to be lifted, or such a return to a degree of normalcy may be included in potential peace negotiations (O'Donnell, 2022). Furthermore, the previously mentioned agreements between China and Russia on Outer Space cooperation mean that, even if sanctions are maintained, Russia is likely to be able to acquire the necessary know-how and components from its remaining allies. Above all however, it is arguably irrelevant that the investment of exorbitant sums of money into Outer Space endeavours in the pursuit of status would not be logical as many scholars have already extensively proven that, possibly more than any other motivator, the desire for status frequently and reliably leads states to take actions wholly unaligned with their economic, political, or strategic interests (Barnhart, 2016, p. 416; Larson, Paul & Wohlforth, 2014, p. 17)

Finally, this thesis does not seek to deny the likelihood that Russia will continue to seek status by gaining influence in Africa, and indeed world more broadly. Indeed, it is highly likely that Russia will increase these efforts in the years following the conflict as, like France before it, it seeks to shore up its reputation and show its ability to project military power abroad. However, there are a few reasons why this was not chosen as the primary possibility for consideration here. Firstly, many other powerful rising powers such as China and India have recently increased their investments in Africa, while Europe and the USA are also beginning to shift their focus back in that direction.⁷ As a result, the scope left for a weakened Russia to seriously expand is limited, especially given that, unlike in the 19th century, a direct military invasion for the conquest of territory is likely, if not certain, to be unfeasible. That being said, it is worth briefly acknowledging here that Russia would be likely to lean further into its soft power channels of status acquisition in Africa and beyond through diplomatic channels such as the BRICS group.⁸ However, despite its undeniable potential to challenge Western diplomatic and economic power, this is unlikely to prove sufficient for the restoration of status Russia is likely to desire following the current humiliation it faces in Ukraine (Sullivan, 2023).

Secondly, the question of status competition in Africa by external powers has been and continues to be, extensively researched and this thesis would therefore be able to do little to further this field within the scope allowed to it. Finally, considerations of the role Outer Space plays in International Relations and status competition are critically under-studied and therefore vital to bring to the fore (Bowen, 2020, p. 24). As was touched upon in Chapter 2 and previously in this chapter, the governance of Outer Space is currently reliant on outdated

⁷ The topic of growing status competition in Africa, particularly between India, China, Europe, and the USA is one whose complexity is beyond the scope of this thesis. Those interested in more information are advised to consult Bodomo, A. (2017) *The Globalization of Foreign Investment in Africa*.

⁸ The BRICS group, first identified in 2001 by economist Jim O'Neil is comprised of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. These countries have since convened multiple summits and frequently cooperate on numerous issues. They have been recognized by some as comprising one of the most influential groupings outside of the G7 and G20. For further information on this topic please consult: Lo, V. I., & Hiscock, M. (2014). *The Rise of the BRICS in the Global Political Economy: Changing Paradigms?*

and simplistic treaties that have barely been updated since their creation in the 1960s (Simon, 2021, p. 212). Consequently, it is of vital importance to highlight the risks this lack of international oversight poses in an increasingly competitive and divided world where the current global order is vulnerable and rising powers may seek to make their mark in the grey areas of international law, governance, and oversight.

8.6 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the various ways in which the French response to their defeat in the Franco-Prussian war can inform our understanding of possible Russian responses to their ongoing humiliation in Ukraine. While there are undoubtedly other possible avenues for Russia to pursue when it seeks to restore its status, this chapter has sought to make the argument that greater investment in Outer Space, with a particular focus on a new Orbital Station aimed at Lunar expansion, is one of the most likely and interesting. Such an approach would both fit current Kremlin rhetoric and allow Russia to side-step issues of international jurisdiction and governance. Simultaneously, it would build on Russia's existing partnerships with China while undermining the USA's primacy in satellite communications, and symbolic monopoly on moon landings. While there are considerable shortcomings to this proposal, such as the enormous costs of Space exploration and the viability of other options such as African influence projects, this thesis believes that Outer Space is a viable candidate. Moreover, even if it were not to be the eventual path of Russia today, consideration and preparation for the possible impacts of such an expansion, be it by Russia or any other country, remain critically important for the international community.

Chapter 9. Conclusion

The ongoing war in Ukraine has already become one of the most important and impactful events of the 21st century so far. It has marked a return to direct competition between Russia and the West while straining tensions with other rising powers such as India and China and returning all-out war to the European continent for the first time since 1945. However, dramatic, and impactful though it may be, this war is not without historical precedent or beyond interpretation through the lens of theory. To this end, this thesis has sought to apply the theory of status competition while comparing the present Russian invasion, and humiliation, to that of France in the 19th-century Franco-Prussian war. This was done by posing the question: *What lessons can be drawn from the French defeat and humiliation in the late 19th century when considering the potential of Russia to scramble for Outer Space?*

To answer this question this thesis has employed a combination of under-studied and underused theories and concepts, as well as drawing on the value of historiography and textual analysis. While questions of realist thought about military power and physical resources are unquestionably relevant to the dynamics surrounding the current war in Ukraine, and indeed the Franco-Prussian War of the 1870s, they must not be allowed to eclipse all other avenues of inquiry. In this spirit, this thesis employed the lens of status theory to better understand and analyse both conflicts and their consequences, real or theorised. Indeed, it was the combination of this focus on status with an openness to looking back through history that allowed for a comparison of two cases so vastly separated in time. Once status is accepted as a key driver of states' decision-making processes, however, many of the potential issues raised against such a comparison fall away due to the intrinsically human, emotional, and immaterial nature of status. In effect, the way a country or leader experiences and responds to defeat and humiliation has not changed very much since ancient times, let alone the 19th century.

Furthermore, the use of historiographic techniques in both the research and analysis of both case studies allowed for a large amount of secondary and primary material to be included in the study. Indeed, it was only by employing such a historical perspective that the true scale of the similarities between the two cases could truly be identified. When considered as two historical events encapsulated within the richness of their broader context it becomes immediately clear how truly central status and humiliation are to both Russia now and France in the 19th century. This analysis was then complimented by the use of concepts regarding growing competition in Outer Space and how they may come to dominate International Relations in the future. While some may question this angle and highlight the high costs and barriers to entry associated with Outer Space efforts, these issues are rendered less problematic when contextualised in the historical example of the Scramble for Africa. The dramatic and sustained turn towards extensive territorial conquests and colonial holdings in Africa by the major powers of Europe in the late 19th century was also illogical from economic

and strategic perspectives, and yet was both carried out at considerable speed and not fully abandoned for over half a century (Barnhart 2016; Barnhart 2020).

Turning now to the comparison carried out according to these principles, the previous chapters have laid out the defining features of each conflict and analysed how status played a key role in both their inception and consequences. For 19th-century France, it was, primarily, the fear of encirclement and the usurpation of their primacy on the continent, as well as the personal insecurity of Napoleon III, that led them to declare war on their supposedly weaker neighbour. Following their resounding defeat by Prussia, and the humiliation and loss of status it entailed, France spent the following decade re-building its internal stability and strength before looking beyond Europe to strengthen its status as a major power. This process saw France, initially encouraged by its European peers, initiating a conquest of African territory that would spiral, largely due to fear of status loss by Britain, Germany, and others, into a Scramble for Africa. By the early 20th century, this had left Liberia and Ethiopia as the only remaining independent African states as shown in **Figure 1**.

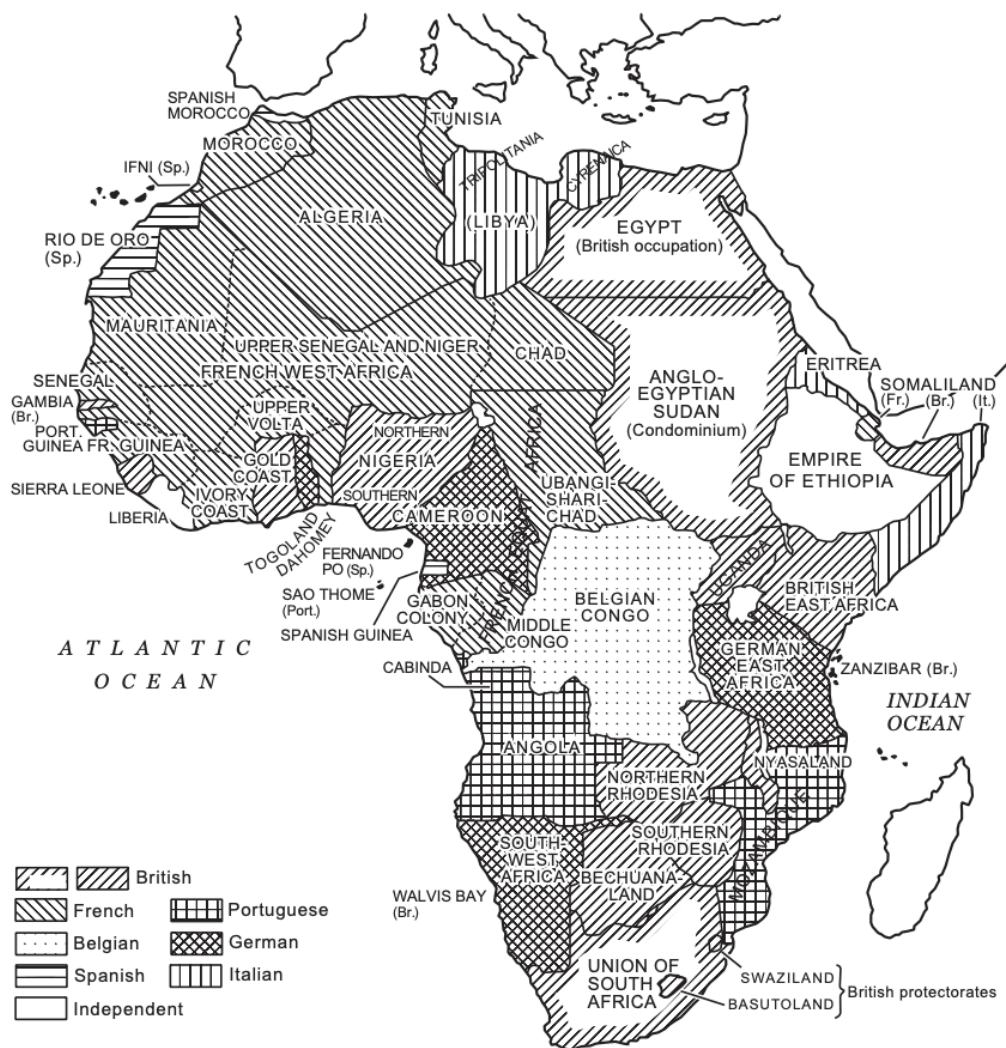


Figure 1. Map of Africa in 1912, following the conclusion of the Scramble. Taken from Harlow & Carter, 2003, p. 18.

Present-day Russia followed a similar path after the collapse of the USSR in 1991 left it feeling increasingly overlooked and humiliated on the world stage, ergo, believing that its status as a superpower was being ignored. The result of this was a slow but steady uptick in competition, initially within the systems of power and, particularly following the invasion of Georgia in 2008, direct and confrontational. Similarly, to 19th century France, this increase in aggression was generally welcomed domestically and designed at least partially to boost the popularity of the leader, be it Putin or Napoleon III. This pattern would continue until 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea and relations with the West truly began to deteriorate. Following this Russia also began to increasingly focus on its claims of security concerns vis-à-vis NATO expansion, just as France had done with the succession to the Spanish throne of a Prussian prince. Finally, in 2022, Russia initiated its invasion of its weaker neighbour with the aim of re-asserting its position as both a regional hegemon and a global superpower demanding respect and status. However, just as in the 19th-century France, Russia's overconfidence and lack of planning turned an expected quick victory into a humiliating quagmire of ever-increasing costs and humiliation. This was amplified for Russia by the increased unity of its opponent in the West following its invasion and the unexpectedness of its failure. Indeed, though some may argue that Western support diminishes the power imbalance between the two sides, it is already clear that Russia's status as a military superpower and diplomatic powerhouse is irreparably damaged.

Given then that the two cases were established to be similar enough for some inferences to be drawn about the present from the past, this thesis proposed that Russia may well turn to Outer Space in search of status, no matter the technicalities of how the conflict in Ukraine may end. Indeed, compared to other potential options discussed and despite its high costs, Outer Space provides one of the best avenues for Russia regardless of the outcome of the war. This is because its lack of extensive legal and normative regulation, combined with the absence of any effective enforcement mechanisms, makes Outer Space the perfect stage for a humiliated and somewhat isolated Russia to rebuild its image with, relative, impunity. Furthermore, Russia's existing ties to China in this field make it the natural choice for cooperation in the future as it allows both states to avoid accusations of belligerence and instead press claims of scientific innovation and exploration. However, above all, the importance of considering the possibility of a Russian turn towards Outer Space comes from what its consequences may be. Namely, the initiation of a new Space Race that could spiral into a Scramble for Space as other global powers such as the USA or Europe may see Russian expansion and follow suit in fear of being left behind and losing status, just as Britain, Germany and others did in Africa. Indeed, if left unchecked the impacts of such a race and the eventual conflicts it might lead to are themselves not only deserving but demanding of further research and investigation. This is because if it is not Russia today then it may be China tomorrow or the USA next week but eventually the constant need of states to maintain and heighten their status is likely to lead to such a race.

In conclusion, this thesis has shown that the use of status and its corollaries as a tool for both understanding and analysing state's behaviour is both valid and effective, particularly when combined with historiographic insights and case study-based research. With these methods it has been argued that there is a great deal to be learned from the French defeat and humiliation in the 19th century when considering the potential for Russia to scramble for Outer Space. While the historical comparison this thesis has employed may not be perfect, it does serve to highlight the enduring importance of status to states' decision-making throughout the ages. Indeed, the impact of status has been demonstrated to be so significant that states may be prepared to place its acquisition above other concerns such as security and economic prosperity. Furthermore, it argues that barring a dramatic and unforeseeable shift in the war's trajectory, a humiliated and weakened Russia is highly likely to turn to Outer Space, instead of following 19th century France to Africa, and, in doing so, it may unleash yet another international scramble for status competition, this time beyond the confines of our planet and onto the one stage where international cooperation had thus far managed to reign supreme.

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