13 The World Russian People's Council and Russo-Ukrainian Relations: From Forging Hegemony to Promoting Domination

Bojidar Kolov

> *From a spiritual and moral point of view, the special military operation [in Ukraine] is a Holy War in which Russia and its people defend the whole spiritual space of Holy Rus'*
> Decree of the XXV World Russian People's Council, March 27, 2024

The World Russian People's Council (hereafter WRPC or the Council) was founded in 1993 as a 'space for nationwide discussion on the fate of the Russian people and Russian statehood' (Kirill 1995). The WRPC's first forum was held in the Danilov Monastery in Moscow[1] by the initiative of the then-Metropolitan and current Russian Patriarch, Kirill, as well as various conservative public figures such as Valery Ganichev (at the time, the editor-in-chief of *Roman-Gazeta* and, since 1994, Chairman of the Board of the Russian Writers' Union) and Natalya Narochnitskaya (back then, a researcher and nationalist political activist). In 1995, the Council was officially registered with the Russian Ministry of Justice and began to function as a 'permanent nonpartisan platform' (Selbach 2002: 158) presided ex officio by the Moscow Patriarch and operating under the auspices of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). Most WRPC annual gatherings were held in the Hall of Church Councils of the rebuilt Christ the Savior Cathedral in central Moscow. Still, on occasion, they were taking place elsewhere, such as in the State Kremlin Palace, which hosted the Communist Party congresses before the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 2005, the WRPC was given a consultative status at the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

1 The Danilov Monastery is the patriarchal and synodal residence of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Council's annual meetings have been gathering representatives from the ROC, other 'traditional religions',[2] civil society organizations, political parties, and public institutions. Initially, it operated only as a platform where ecclesiastics and 'Orthodox-oriented' politicians and intellectuals shared their views (Verkhovsky 2003: 16). However, at least since the enthronement of Patriarch Kirill in 2009, the WRPC has been playing the role of 'the main Orthodox think tank' in Russia (Chapnin 2020: 128). The organization currently runs research and human rights centers, which publish their own reports and positions on sociopolitical matters.[3] By 2024, around 70 branches of the WRPC across Russia facilitate local meetings and initiatives through collaboration between diocesan bishops, governors, and regional civil society.[4] According to Natalya Shikher (2021: 602), the Council 'can rightfully be called one of the most important actors in modern [Russian] politics, influencing the key areas of social development'.

However, the existing research on the WRPC is rather scant. Some authors, like Christopher Selbach (2002), Sergey Chapnin (2020), and Aleksandr Verkhovsky (2003), whom I mentioned above, discuss it in passim in their respective analyses of church identity, traditional values rhetoric, and political Orthodoxy. Others, such as Natalya Shikher (2021) and Aleksandr Rudakov (2020), offer descriptive accounts on the Council's public role but provide little analytical and critical value to the topic. Two studies on the WRPC stand out: Gracjan Cimek's (2012) paper on the Council as a 'religious and political institution' and Alar Kilp and Gerry G. Pankhurst's (2023) thematic analysis of the patriarchal speeches at the Council's assemblies. While these two studies offer valuable insights, they do not focus sufficiently on the WRPC's representations of Russo-Ukrainian relations. This is the gap I want to fill with the present study.

The Council's representations of Russo-Ukrainian relations are articulated in various textual forms published on the WRPC website.[5] There, one can find collective statements, such as the 'decree' (*nakaz*) I quoted at the beginning, and other joint documents under various titles: 'resolutions' (*rezolyutsii*), 'final documents' (*itogovye dokumenty*), and 'council allocutions' (*sobornye slova*). In addition, the WRPC website publishes addresses by the Russian patriarchs Alexy (1990–2008) and Kirill (2009–), speeches given by politicians, religious leaders, and intellectuals, as well as (sometimes) transcripts/minutes of the Council sessions. The Council's website has been running since 2007, and its publications are regularly reposted on the official page of

2 The 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations distinguished between 'traditional' and 'non-traditional religions and sects', giving privileged positions to the former (Daniel/Marsh 2007: 7).

3 Tsentry VRNS, https://vrns.ru/o-vrns/tsentry.php.

4 Regional'nye otdeleniya VRNS, https://vrns.ru/regions/.

5 Vsemirnyy russkiy narodnyy sobor, https://vrns.ru/.

the Moscow Patriarchate.[6] Since around 2012, the Russian news agencies TASS and RIA Novosti have also reposted statements and documents published on the WRPC's website. From the beginning of the 2010s, the official channel of the Moscow Patriarchate on YouTube started sharing videos from the annual WRPC meetings.[7]

Considering this profile, in this study, I will treat the WRPC *as a medium* because of its function as a means of communication between church, state, and the conservative-revanchist civil society on the one hand and between these and the broader domestic and international audience on the other. I will also regard the Council as *a platform for coalition-building* because it has been instrumental in producing an Orthodox great-power nationalist alliance in Russia. This alliance united around (among other things) the idea of Russian hegemony in the former Soviet space and, in particular, Ukraine. In that sense, the Council has served as a producer of hegemonic knowledge, for it has dedicated considerable discursive efforts to produce a specific representation of reality that was supposed to be accepted as commonsensical in Russia, Ukraine, and other post-Soviet states. This project ultimately failed in Ukraine, and for that reason, the Council's discourse shifted from forging hegemony (that is, obtaining consensual recognition of Moscow's political and 'spiritual' leadership) to promoting Russian domination by military means.

In what follows, I will try to answer the question of *how the World Russian People's Council has represented the relationship between Russia and Ukraine since its founding in 1993*. I will trace these representations and examine how their sedimentation has made the legitimation of the full-scale invasion possible. I hypothesize that the Council has not only promoted Russian military domination over Ukraine after February 2022 but has also been actively involved in constructing the ideology behind the war ever since the early 1990s.

I will start by briefly outlining the study's theoretical and methodological framework. I will then proceed with the analysis of the WRPC's discourse, dividing it into three sections reflecting the historical development of the Council's representation of Russo-Ukrainian relations. I will conclude by synthesizing the main findings and discussing their implications.

Theory and Method

Central to my approach in this study is the concept of *hegemony*. As an analytical tool, hegemony was first developed by Antonio Gramsci, in whose *Prison Notebooks*

6 Programmy i dokumenty konferentsiy i forumov, Ofitsial'nyy sayt Russkoy Pravoslavnoy Tserkvi, http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/document/100050/

7 Videokanal ofitsial'nogo sayta Moskovskogo Patriarkhata, https://www.youtube.com/@russianchurch

(1929) it emerged as a distinctively post-Marxist departure from materialistic determinism. Unlike orthodox Marxism, which saw cultural *superstructures* ('ideology') as mere epiphenomena to the dynamic economic *base* ('mode of production'), Gramsci's hegemony foregrounded the importance of 'intellectual and moral leadership' in shaping political reality (Mouffe 1979: 179; Howarth 2000: 88–92). His emphasis on ideology as the terrain 'on which men [sic] move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle' (Ibid.: 185) provided later scholarship with theoretical grounds to postulate the ontological primacy of the *social production of meaning* (Laclau/Mouffe 2001: 107).

In short, hegemony can be conceptualized as a meaning-production operation that 'universalizes a particular, contingent representation of the reality' which 'fixes social norms, roles and identities, as well as the inside-outside divisions' (Morozov 2022: 90). When successful, hegemony establishes an order 'that comes to be accepted as true and natural by most members of the community' (Ibid.). This is precisely what the current study aims to analyze: the production of meaning at the WRPC and the ensuing hegemonic norms, identities, and subjectivities.

Two questions arise: *how* is meaning produced, and what exactly does the production of meaning do?

Combing Gramscian political theory, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and (post-)Saussurean linguistics in a non-essentialist fashion, Ernesto Laclau (2001: 406–408) maintained that hegemonic meaning-production involves three simultaneous and interrelated movements: (1) the establishment of *chains of equivalence* between distinct elements of a discourse, (2) the drawing of a *political frontier* that separates one chain of equivalence from another, thus forming an antagonistic relationship between 'us' and 'them', and (3) the emergence of *empty signifiers* which come to symbolize (and thus constitute) the 'totalities' of collective selfhood and otherness.[8] The simultaneity and interrelatedness of these three movements imply that the equivalence between distinct discursive elements is possible only because of their shared negation of the 'other' and their common representation by an empty signifier. Likewise, the empty signifier is possible only because it represents one equivalential chain standing against another.

To make this abstract scheme more intelligible, let me return to Gramsci's original conceptual framework, which operates on a more historically grounded level and from which Laclau's theorization originated. Analogous to the concept of an 'equivalential chain' is Gramsci's *historical bloc*. Here, the 'discursive elements' are some

8 Empty signifiers 'mean almost nothing by themselves until, through chains of equivalence, they are combined with other signs that fill them with meaning. "Liberal democracy" becomes liberal democracy through its combination with other carriers of meaning such as "free elections" and "freedom of speech"' (Jørgensen/Phillips 2002: 50).

specific social forces that unite politically and culturally to form a *collective will* (Martin 2023; Filippini 2017). In other words, through their unity, the joint social forces acquire new historical meaning and – given they achieve hegemony – can retroactively change the meaning of history itself.

That is accomplished when a multitude of dispersed, unsatisfied demands and identities come together as one to overcome what the united social forces articulate as the single hindrance to their *full* realization. Such a political and cultural alliance becomes possible through what Gramsci calls a *war of position*. Unlike the *war of manoeuvre*, which connotes the physicality of a social struggle, the war of position involves a 'long ideological and political preparation […] to awaken popular passions' (Gramsci quoted in Gerke 2019: 30). Constructing a historical 'us', drawing a rigid political frontier between 'us' and 'them', and finding appropriate language to symbolize collective selfhood and otherness are indeed the key components of that kind of preparation.

Hegemony's terrain is civil society (Boukala 2019: 63). In Gramscian terms, the latter consists of 'associations and institutions, such as schools, churches, the family, as well as culture more generally' (Howarth 2000: 90). As Salomi Boukala (2019) underlines, in the contemporary world, media proves to be the primary ground of civil society. Here, the *intellectuals* – all those whose social function is to communicate with and educate non-specialists (Martin 2023) – play the leading role, resonating with and modifying the *common sense*, that is, the 'popular attitudes and beliefs, frequently accepted as "eternal" truths by ordinary people' (Ibid.). A key component of that role is the (re)production of knowledge about the 'other' (Boukala 2019: 65–69). Indeed, through intellectual discourses about the 'other', the frontier between 'us' and 'them' is constructed and maintained, and the sense of collective selfhood, purpose and agency is affirmed (Neumann 1999, 2017).

The combination of the intellectual agency on the one hand and political, legal, and military agency on the other produces what Gramsci calls an *integral state*. In other words, civil society plus political society amounts to 'hegemony armoured with coercion' (Humphrys 2018: 37). In Gramsci's theorization, the concept of an integral state can serve both as a scheme for an emancipatory revolutionary project and as a heuristic device to understand better how existing models of domination function.

In the latter case, Gramsci describes the possibility of a *passive revolution*. That is, a process of political change that lacks 'the meaningful participation of popular classes in undertaking and consolidating social transformation' (Thomas 2006: 23). Put differently, for the purpose of their own self-preservation, the ruling elites could transform the ideological and institutional framework of governance by incorporating, co-opting, and/or displacing various emerging demands and identities so that none of them could disturb the general logic of the established socio-symbolic order. If the elites fail to do that in the face of systemic disintegration and anomie, an

organic crisis might take place; in other words, a situation in which 'the old is dying and the new cannot be born' (Gramsci quoted in Martin 1997: 47).

To sum up, in this study, I will examine the WRPC discourse, looking at how it articulates selfhood and otherness in the context of Russo-Ukrainian relations. Following Gramsci and Laclau's analytical frameworks, I will try to discern how the Council acts as a medium for coalition-building and as a site of hegemonic meaning production.

From the Collapse of the Soviet Union to the Orange Revolution

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Russia found itself in a state of organic crisis. Soviet ideology and geopolitics essentially lost their meaning, and no other hegemonic representation of reality emerged as a substitute. The hitherto reigning social norms, identities, and inside-outside divisions ceased to make sense, resulting in a breakdown of the image of the collective self. Unlike most other former Soviet republics, Russia's intellectual elites failed to fix the national 'us' in ethnic, civic, and/or territorial terms. What is more, in a typically post-imperial fashion, Russia experienced the 'phantom pains of the lost limb of Soviet greatness' (Sharafutdinova 2020: 175).

Against this background, some intellectual circles in and around the Russian Orthodox Church began cultivating organizational and ideological resources for building a 'unifying center' for the 'spiritual and intellectual' consolidation of the Russian people (Sobor 1993b). The *World Russian Council*, as the WRPC was called back then, was to serve this purpose.

At its first assembly in 1993, the Council issued several collective statements outlining the main parameters of its programme for Russia's future. At the center of the WRPC's vision was the idea of *unity*. Two interconnected aspects of this idea emerged as the structuring axes of the Council's overall discourse: (1) the unity of 'all forces standing for the creation of a strong Russian *derzhava*[9] regardless of their political and religious beliefs' (Sobor 1993c) and (2) the unity of the 'historical Russian state' (Sobor 1993a).

The first axis of unity involves building an alliance between various social forces, such as the intelligentsia, the army, and the church, under the slogan 'We need a United Great Russia' (Sobor 1993b, 1993c). The second axis, despite operating on different terrain, elucidates what the slogan means, namely, the preservation of Moscow's 'historical areal' for the sake of both protecting the 'divided Russian people' and performing Russia's 'geopolitical mission' to 'hold the balance between the West and the East' (Sobor 1993a). Indeed, for the WRPC,

9 *Derzhava* describes 'a strong state with the idea of a great power and protection from foreign threats' (Tsygankov 2022: 6).

> The priority area of interest for the Russian Federation should be its relationship with the states that were once parts of the historical Russian state […] [Russia has to aim at] the peaceful restoration of a unified state, should the peoples involved choose to pursue it. [T]his approach should […] entirely exclude the use of force and military methods […]. The task of maintaining and restoring unity is to be pursued exclusively through political, diplomatic, canonical, and spiritual means (Sobor 1993a).

Here, the idea of Russia's 'historical' unity serves as a surface of inscription of various other demands and identities. Thus, *unity* becomes an empty signifier that brings together into a chain of equivalence various discourses, such as the ones about (1) Russia's great power and historical continuity, (2) the protection of the Russian people who 'found themselves refugees in their own lands' (Sobor 1993b), and (3) the consolidation of the fragmented Russian elites. All these discourses merge in the practical goal of restoring 'the military-strategic space of the USSR as a zone of [Moscow's] strategic interests and responsibility' (Sobor 1993a).

The WRPC's discourse remains (strategically) ambivalent about which states should join the 'unified state' and which should remain 'only' within Russia's sphere of influence. However, we can see how the goal of reinstating hegemony in the former imperial domains provides a basis for hegemony at home, that is, at the level of the Russian Federation. The Council's call for refraining from open military domination in the so-called 'near abroad' and sticking to the 'political, diplomatic, canonical, and spiritual means' illustrates perfectly the doubly hegemonic move made here: to unite the political, intellectual, and moral leadership at home to reestablish Russia's hegemonic leadership in the former Soviet space.

By 1993, the WRPC had not yet named the United Great Russia's 'other', but such a figure, nonetheless, features vaguely in its discourse:

> The evident and short-sighted desire of *some forces in the world* to prevent the restoration of Russia as a great power pushes the world into a rivalry for the geopolitical redistribution of the Russian areal. It undermines the stability of the [global] balance [of power], leading to an unpredictable rivalry for spheres of influence and a clash of interests that could lead to a Third World War (Sobor 1993a, *italics added*).

Thus, practically everyone who opposes the restoration of Russia's hegemony is accused of participating in a 'scramble for the former USSR', as it were, and thus, of instigating a global conflict. Such imagery paves the way for constructing an opposing chain of equivalence, which would serve a consolidating role in defining the hegemonic 'us'. Indeed, against the background of a rhetorical focus on the ethnic Russians (and East Slavs, as we shall see), the WRPC's discourse manages to 'unite' them

with all the other nationalities in Russia through their supposedly shared negation of the 'other':

> The Western European model of development, imposed [on us] from the outside, corresponds neither to the Russian people's religio-ethical system of values nor to the value orientations of the other peoples of the Russian Federation (Sobor 1993a).

Furthermore, we can see already at this stage how the Council articulates Orthodox Christianity as 'the foundation of our civilization and state idea' (Sobor 1993a). Thereby, Orthodoxy simultaneously functions as the symbol of the historical continuity of the Russian people *and* as a cultural platform that 'made it possible for many peoples to unite in constructive cooperation' (Sobor 1993a). The uneasy tension between this stress on Orthodoxy and its allegedly unifying role for the Russians on the one hand and the unity of all peoples living in Russia's purported 'historical space' on the other would be later 'resolved' with the more elaborated discourses on Russian *civilization* and *tradition*. The images of Ukraine and Kyiv, in particular, would play a major role in building these narratives, as the first WRPC documents already suggest: 'to discern the fate of Russia […] we should consider the historical experience of our state's development from Old Russia, centered in Kiev, to the USSR' (Sobor 1993c).

Against the backdrop of two traumatic (for the great-power identity) political ruptures in the 20th century, the Council fiercely sought a narrative of continuity – a story that could provide the Russian 'self' with a sense of wholeness, stability, and certainty in time. Already by 1995, the myth of the *Baptism of Rus'* offered such a source of ontological security.[10] Referring to the Christianization of Kyivan Rus' by Volodymyr I Sviatoslavych around 988, one of the Council's collective statements from 1995 argued that the Russian people's 'historical path' was determined '1000 years ago' (Sobor 1995a). Furthermore, the transhistorical unity of the Russian 'self' was coupled later that year with a call for a transnational unity of the Eastern Slavs:

> We call for the restoration of the historical unity of the three brotherly peoples, whose spiritual tradition came out of the same Kievan baptismal font: the Belarusian, Russian and Ukrainian peoples (Sobor 1995b).

10 'Ontological security refers to "security as being", which Anthony Giddens contrasts to "security as survival". If the latter calls to mind the familiar security concern of physical safety, ontological security pulls our attention elsewhere, to subjectivity more than physicality, highlighting that all political subjects face the need to maintain a sense of biographical continuity' (Kinnvall/Mitzen 2016: 4).

Thus, the myth of the Baptism of Rus' foregrounds the image of ethnonational, ecclesiastical, and geopolitical oneness of what would later be called *Holy Rus'*. However, the emphasis here – and throughout the WRPC's discourse – is on the primary role of the Russian state. For the Council, it is contemporary Russia which is 'the main bearer of [Rus'] unique cultural and historical type' (Sobor 1995b); Russia is the 'heir to the great power of Kievan and Moscow Rus, the Russian Empire, and the Soviet Union' (Ibid.). Indeed, the transhistorical Russia depicted by the WRPC is first and foremost 'a gatherer of peoples' and only then, 'an ethnic and spiritual community', whose 'core is made up of Russians: Great Russians, Malorossians,[11] and Belarusians' (Ibid.).

Thus, in a single move, the Council articulates two concentric circles of 'intra-civilizational' hierarchy, as it were. The first circle contains the East Slavic Orthodox 'core', which constitutes the ethnocultural nucleus of the Russian civilization. Here, Ukraine is 'privileged' as the *diachronic* cradle of Russian statehood, culture, and identity, around which 'other peoples' were included on an allegedly 'equal voluntary basis' (Ibid.). In turn, the second circle is formed by the *synchronic* power relations between contemporary Russia and its neighbours, which are never represented as independent sovereign states in the Council's discourse. Instead, they are treated as 'parts of the historical Russian state' or, as in the case of Ukraine and Belarus, simultaneously as parts of Russia's historical heartland *and* as geopolitical peripheries to today's Russian Federation.

From the Orange Revolution to the Revolution of Dignity

These themes figured intermittently in the WRPC's discourse for a decade, when in 2004–06, against the background of the Orange Revolution and its aftermath,[12] the Council's representation of Russo-Ukrainian relations acquired new features. The framework within which these relations were now located took shape as the notorious 'Russian World' (*russkiy mir*). First introduced at the WRPC by Metropolitan Kirill in 2004, *russkiy mir* denoted 'not an ethnic concept' but a kind of space that

11 'The epithet "malo" or "small" in *Malorusy* was a calque from the Greek name for the parts of the Kyivan Rus that were located outside Muscovy: "Little Rus"—while the realm of the Moscow Tsar the Greeks called "Great Rus". Thus, the names of the regions had purely geographical origins and did not denote either the prestige or the size of the groups residing within them' (cf. Kolstø 2023: 3).

12 At the 2004 Ukrainian presidential election run-off, the pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovych declared victory. Mass protests erupted, demanding a revote due to electoral fraud. Eventually, the Supreme Court annulled the results of the original run-off and ordered a new election, which the pro-European candidate Viktor Yushchenko won (cf. Motyl 2008).

> Includes all the peoples who belong to other religions but share the same social values as the Russian people. Indeed, Russia is able to maintain the unity of different cultures precisely by recognizing itself as Orthodox. Over the centuries, Russia has developed a mechanism for the coexistence of different cultures and religions that accept the same social values but preserve their religious identities (Kirill 2004).

Thus, the 'Russian World' incorporates both the notion of 'historical Russia', that is, the geopolitical space shaped by Russian power throughout history, *and* the idea of shared 'traditional values', which 'have defined our way of life for centuries and are still the basis of the Russian civilization (Sobor 2002). Despite some vague attempts to pinpoint what exactly 'traditional values' means, the latter is best understood as an empty signifier. *Tradition* here is everything that could be articulated as uniting the Russian World, but also everything that separates it from the prospect of a 'unipolar world based on the dominance of only one of the civilizational models' (Sobor 2004).

Depending on the context, Orthodox Christianity could also be emptied of its spiritual particularities to assume the place of that 'traditional religion' which can represent all other 'traditional religions' in the Russian World by virtue of its historical role as a bearer of civilizational continuity, independence, and authenticity (*samobytnost'*). Thereby, as a 'universal' traditional religion, Orthodoxy signifies the Russian World's deeply-rooted axiological distinctiveness – a role that all traditional religions are expected to perform. However, as a particular spiritual tradition, Orthodoxy represents the (trans)historical Russianness that originated with the Baptism of Rus'. In both cases, Orthodoxy is reduced to its identitarian function, which cannot be performed without the symbolic space of Ukraine qua the mythological birthplace of Russian Orthodox identity. In short, Ukraine becomes essential for the WRPC's hegemonic narrative.

The Russian Orthodox Church's role is pivotal in realizing the hegemonic project. Represented as the cultural and institutional embodiment of the Russian World, the ROC acts as the living manifestation of Russia's unity across space and time. In spatial terms, the Russian Church occupies a 'canonical territory' largely overlapping with the borders of the Soviet Union,[13] appearing as a shadow of the former empire. However, in terms of concentration of parishes, key historical sites, and revered shrines, Ukraine again turns out to be at the center of the hegemonic space. Without Ukraine, the ROC can neither assert to be the largest Eastern Orthodox church

13 According to the ROC's Statute, the exclusive jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church encompasses all the post-Soviet republics except Georgia and Armenia (although in 2021, the Holy Synod established a Diocese of Yerevan and Armenia), as well as China and Japan. See *Ustav Russkoy Pravoslavnoy Tserkvi*, http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/133115.html.

nor claim historical continuity of such an impressive scale. Thus, in order to protect its temporal identity, the ROC has to maintain spatial control over its parishes in Ukraine. It comes as no surprise, then, that the WRPC has advocated for the integrity of the ROC's canonical territory since the 1990s (e.g. 1995b). During the presidency of Viktor Yushchenko (2005–2010), however, the emphasis on church unity became even stronger. Yushchenko sought to emancipate Ukraine from Moscow on various levels, including the ecclesiastical terrain (cf. Shlikhta 2016). In turn, fearing the possibility of losing the Holy Rus' mythical birthplace, in 2006, the WRPC made a strong appeal for the preservation of the ecclesiastical status quo:

> We hope that Ukraine's president, its newly elected parliament […] and all of its central and local authorities will, acting for the good of the Ukrainian people, take care to preserve the one and only canonical Church in the country and will strengthen the relations with the other brotherly Slavic peoples, bound together by the Kievan [baptismal] font and centuries-old common history (Sobor 2006).

This refrain would become part and parcel of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Kremlin's discourses, especially after 2019, when the independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine received canonical recognition from the Patriarchate of Constantinople and, thus, threatened ROC's monopoly in Ukraine.[14] Before that, however, the WRPC had to do a bit more ideological and coalition-building work. The 1020th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus' in 2008 proved to be a favourable opportunity to reiterate the narrative of the East Slavic 'eternal spiritual community' and to link this narrative to a call for geopolitical unity in the present day (Sobor 2008). Indeed, just several months before the anniversary, at a summit in Bucharest in April, NATO declared that Ukraine and Georgia would be welcome to join the alliance despite giving them no membership action plan. In July, Metropolitan Kirill made a celebratory visit to Ukraine, the sublime moment of which was a speech at a rock concert in central Kyiv. There, he solemnly proclaimed:

> Russia, Ukraine, Belarus: this is Holy Rus! […] And Holy Rus is not an empire, not a union of what once was, or what might be in the future. Holy Rus is the ideal of love, kindness, and truth. Holy Rus is invincibility. Holy Rus is beauty. Holy Rus is power. And we all together: this is the united holy Rus! (Kirill 2008 quoted by Griffin 2021: 204).

14 In his article 'On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians', Russian President Vladimir Putin declared, 'I would like to emphasize that the wall that has emerged in recent years between Russia and Ukraine, between the parts of what is essentially the same historical and spiritual space, to my mind is our great common misfortune and tragedy.' See http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181.

In 2008, Dmitry Medvedev became the Russian president, and Kirill assumed the patriarchal throne the following year. Unlike their more restrained predecessors, the two new leaders took decisive steps towards closer ties between the state and the church (cf. Papkova 2011). After 2012, when Vladimir Putin returned to the presidency for his third term and embarked on a comprehensive 'conservative turn' (cf. Kangaspuro 2021), the traditionalist-civilizationist historical bloc came into full force. With both the political society (the institutional and repressive apparatus) and the civil society (the official church, public media, and conservative intelligentsia) on board, the Orthodox great-power nationalism promoted by the WRPC since the 1990s acquired the position of a hegemonic ideology armoured with the state capacity for coercion. In short, Russia became an *integral state* determined to revive its perceived historical image of greatness and unity.

Meanwhile, the leader of the pro-Russian Party of Regions and a frequent guest at the WRPC assemblies, Viktor Yanukovych, won the 2010 presidential elections in Ukraine. The Russian World was winning on all fronts. Fittingly, in 2011, the Council declared: 'The main task of our peoples today is to integrate the state and public institutions of the [East] Slavic states into a single cultural and historical space' (Sobor 2011). That was to be achieved through a textbook hegemonic strategy: 'a unified curriculum based on the traditional spiritual, moral, cultural and historical values of East Slavic civilization' (Ibid.).

The image of the 'other' also solidified. The WRPC was constructing an antagonistic double to 'historical Russia' – a 'historical West', as it were. The Council statements praised Russia's 'heroic repulsions' of the continuous 'Western expansionist attacks that threatened the foundations of our civilization':

> In 1612, the soldiers of Minin and Pozharsky defended the […] Orthodox Faith from the Catholic onslaught. In 1812, the soldiers of Kutuzov defended the soul of Russia and Russian culture from the onslaught of the secularist culture of the West. Finally, in 1942 the heroes of Stalingrad saved Russia from physical destruction in Nazi slavery (Sobor 2012).

From the Revolution of Dignity to the Present Day

Following the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, the annexation of Crimea, and the beginning of the war in Donbas, WRPC's grand narrative on Russo-Ukrainian relations remained largely the same. If anything, the myth of the Baptism of Rus' only solidified. In 2015, the Council's annual meeting theme was 'The Legacy of Prince Vladimir and the Fate of Historical Rus'. The conciliar allocution read that Vladimir is 'the founder of Russian civilization' and that his leadership led to 'the formation of

a united Russian nation with a common language, faith and culture' (Sobor 2015).[15] Furthermore, the WPRC explicitly articulated (contemporary) Moscow as the heir of both Rome and Constantinople, alluding to the Third Rome myth (cf. Østbø 2016), while (medieval) Kyiv was relegated to a temporary stage in this 'historical lineage' (Ibid.)

Reduced to a heritage site of one of the phases of the Russian civilization's development, Ukraine continued to be denied subjectivity as a sovereign state, and its government was represented simply as an agent acting on behalf of the aggressive West. Ukrainian striving for emancipation from Moscow and the consequent Russian aggression were depicted, already at that time, as nothing but a local manifestation of a larger great power struggle. The 'historical West' was once again conducting an expansionist attack against the victimized Russian World:

> Nowadays, the global geopolitical confrontation assumes dimensions that are reminiscent of the antebellum period of the last century. We could not imagine that tanks, aviation, and artillery would be used against civilians, that peaceful cities would be shelled and bombed, and that old people, women and children would be killed (Sobor 2014).

However, in 2016, days before the US presidential election, which Donald Trump eventually won, the WRPC's annual meeting statement revised its hitherto rigid clash-of-civilizations mantra:

> We are convinced that the main contemporary clash is not the clash of civilizations declared by S. Huntington but the clash of the global, transnational elites with all the local civilizations of the world, including with the peoples of the West, who remain faithful to their Christian roots (Sobor 2016).

Thus, the WPRC opened the door to the possibility of a joint struggle together with the Christian conservative movements in the West against the cosmopolitan liberal-secularist class threatening traditional values all around the world. The Council's coalition-building expanded beyond the civilizational boundaries of the Russian World in an attempt to form an inter-civilizational historical bloc in opposition to the presumed anti-traditional globalist hegemonic project.

In the next few years, the WPRC discourse largely omitted references to great power competition and, to a great extent, ignored the developments in Ukraine under Petro Poroshenko's (2014–2019) leadership. To be sure, Patriarch Kirill did not forget to dismiss the Orthodox Church of Ukraine's canonical recognition in 2019 as

15 The following year (2016), a monument to Vladimir the Great was revealed in central Moscow, next to the Kremlin walls. President Putin, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, and Patriarch Kirill were among the top guests at the opening ceremony (cf. Bodin 2019).

a 'schismatic activity' devised by 'behind-the-scenes forces' (Kirill 2019). However, at least on a Council level, that theme was far from central. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the WRPC paused its activities for two years, and its next annual assembly was held in October 2022, almost eight months after the onset of the full-scale invasion.

In the context of a wartime *defensive consolidation* of Russian society (cf. Morris 2022), the Council stood firmly behind the Kremlin's war effort. Although the main elements of its post-February 2022 discourse were already developed, the WPRC's rhetoric became markedly more explicit. In its October 2022 statement, the Council made crystal clear how it sees the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in Moscow's would-be hegemonic space:

> We [the Russian people] are all responsible for our one and indivisible Church, for preserving its unity, because through this unity, the will of God is manifested to all our people, wherever they live – in Moscow, Kiev, Minsk, or other cities of the Russian World. This is a single spiritual community united by the single Russian Orthodox Church (Sobor 2022).

Furthermore, for the first time, the WPRC provided a full definition of the concept of the 'Russian World':

> The Russian World is the historical Rus, which includes the contemporary Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian lands, [the identity of] whose inhabitants [is] rooted in Orthodox culture and ethics. The Russian World is, first of all, not an administrative but a spiritual community united by the historical and moral ties of the Russian Orthodox Church. All of us – Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians – are one Orthodox people striving for the ideals of Holy Rus' (Ibid.).

Thus, the hegemonic project's memorial, geopolitical, ecclesiastical, and axiological dimensions were all intertwined to form a vision for a 'common sacred space of historical and mystical unity' (Ibid.). Drawing on this idea, in 2022 and 2023, the Council still called for ceasing the 'internecine strife' and restoring the 'brotherly love and peace in our hearts' (Ibid., Kirill 2023). However, in 2024, the WRPC went fully militant and declared the 'special military operation' a 'holy war' (Sobor 2024). Moreover, the Council argued that this (now openly designated as such) *war* is essentially a 'national liberation struggle of the Russian people against the criminal Kiev regime and the collective West behind it' (Ibid.).

But which Russian people did the authors of the 'decree' have in mind? "'The Russian people', they contended, 'consists of three branches (sub-ethnicities): Great Russians, Malorussians, and Belarusians' – all Eastern Slavs as descendants of historical Rus" (Ibid.). The logical conclusion of this narrative was an open call for com-

plete and utter domination over Ukraine: "After the completion of the special military operation, the entire territory of present-day Ukraine should be made part of Russia's zone of exclusive influence" (Ibid.).

The shift from hegemony to domination is, of course, not clear-cut, neither in practice, as in the WRPC representation of Russo-Ukrainian relations, nor theoretically. However, one should not fail to notice the discursive change from an emphasis on culture and identity in the previous thirty years to the direct valorization of the state in 2024. If the statist theme only lurked between the lines in the previous decades, now it appears to be central to the Council's discourse. Thus, it becomes clear that the main problem all along has been the very existence of independent Ukrainian statehood because it has been perceived as a challenge – in and by itself – to the realization of 'United Great Russia':

> Building the millennial Russian statehood is the highest form of political creativity of Russians as a nation. The division and weakening of the Russian people and the deprivation of its spiritual and vital forces have always led to the weakening and crisis of the Russian state. Therefore, the restoration of the unity of the Russian people, of its spiritual and vital potential, are the key conditions for the survival and successful development of Russia and the Russian world in the XXI century (Ibid.).

Russia, it seems, can exist only as this reified entity that holds the full hegemonic monopoly over its imagined historical time and space. Any perceived challenge to that fantasmatic integrity is immediately identified as a threat to Russia's ontological security. Therefore, Ukraine's emancipation and sovereignty indeed appear as an attack on the Russian World, essentially an assault on the core of Russia's mythological knowledge about itself and, thus, on its power. This explains why, when the hegemonic project failed, the Orthodox great-power nationalist historical bloc resorted to violence. To paraphrase Carl von Clausewitz, *war is nothing but the continuation of hegemonic policy by means of domination* (cf. Clausewitz quoted in O'Donovan 1998).

Yet, domination alone cannot achieve sustainable power. Russia's command over Ukraine has to be meaningful for both Russians and Ukrainians. To produce such a meaning, the WRPC constructed an 'other' reduced to pure negativity. In a strikingly apocalyptic narrative, the Council communicated Russia's identity crisis – if it is to 'lose' Ukraine – as a matter of (ontological) life or death. The 'other' is now nothing less but an instrument of the antichrist to subdue the last 'restrainer'[16] preventing demonic world domination. The 'restrainer' is, of course, Holy Rus' 'who protects the

16 Here, 'restrainer' refers to a 'this-worldly force (usually, an empire or an individual such as an emperor) whose actions, or "just being", somehow fends off the world from its last days, or from the reign of the Antichrist' (Suslov 2023: 90).

world from the onslaught of globalism and the victory of the fallen into Satanism West' (Ibid.). Ukraine is now a sacred arena where the forces of good and evil fight an eschatological battle for the fate of humankind.

Conclusions

In this study, I have shown how, since the early 1990s, the World Russian People's Council has served as a platform for building an Orthodox great-power nationalist alliance in Russia. Initially a peripheral initiative in the broader landscape of Russian politics, the Council soon acquired the status of a meeting point for great power nostalgics who saw in Orthodoxy a natural symbolic capital to revive Russia's 'historical unity' and power from the ashes of the Soviet collapse. By 2012, the WPRC had won the favour of the political establishment, and many of its propagated norms and identities had become an integral part of the official state discourse and policies. In Gramscian terms, a passive revolution has taken place.

The Council's narrative has gradually established a chain of equivalence between the dispersed demands for (1) internal political stability, (2) national unity, (3) restoring Russia's position as a great power, and (4) granting Orthodoxy its historically deserved status of state-forming religion. To satisfy these demands and overcome the late 1980s and 1990s organic crisis, the WRPC offered a new meaning to Russia's past, emphasizing the temporal continuity of 'traditional values' and the spatial integrity of the 'civilization' they bound.

Operating as empty signifiers at different stages and contexts of the Council's discourse, 'unity', 'tradition', and 'civilization' came to represent both the present (since 2012) symbolic order in the Russian Federation and the grounds for Moscow's future intellectual and moral leadership in the former Soviet space. All this would have been perfect and complete if it was not for the 'other' – *the historical West*. The latter has simultaneously prevented the Russian World from becoming true and whole and, on the level of meaning production, provided this 'world' with the necessary political frontier without which it could not be imagined.

Central to the WRPC's narrative of Russia's historical unity, continuity, and greatness is the symbolic space of Ukraine. None of the key identities the Council ascribed to its reified Russia could stay intact if Ukraine acted as an independent and sovereign country out of Russian hegemony. Without Ukraine, or rather, *with* independent Ukraine, Russia's transhistoricity, civilizational uniqueness, and special role in the world would all be lost to irrelevance. Thus, Ukraine's attempts for emancipation from Moscow have shaken the basis of Russia's symbolic order and have threatened its fragile ontological security.

With the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, Russia's geopolitical hegemonic project inspired by the WRPC proved to be a failure. For that reason, hegemony had to be

supplemented by means of domination. Hence, the annexation of Crimea, the War in Donbas, and finally, the 'Special Military Operation'. When it became increasingly evident that coercion would also fail to subordinate Ukraine, the Council found only one way to represent the situation so that it could save the imagined Russian 'self': the war in Ukraine is a *holy war* of apocalyptic significance. Russia would either win or will not be. What provides meaning to the Russian 'self' now is the war itself.

References

Bodin, Per-Arne (2019): "The Monument to Grand Prince Vladimir in Moscow and the Problem of Conservatism." In: Mikhail Suslov/Dmitry Uzlaner (eds.), *Contemporary Russian Conservatism Problems, Paradoxes, and Perspectives*, Leiden: Brill, pp. 304–19. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004408005_013.

Boukala, Salomi (2019): "Mass Media and Hegemonic Knowledge: Gramsci and the Representation of the "Other."" In: Salomi Boukala (ed.), *European Identity and the Representation of Islam in the Mainstream Press: Argumentation and Media Discourse*, Cham: Springer International, pp. 55–83. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-93314-6_3.

Chapnin, Sergey (2020): "The Rhetoric of Traditional Values in Contemporary Russia." In: Dmitry Uzlaner/ Kristina Stoeckl (eds.), *Postsecular Conflicts: Debating Tradition in Russia and the United States*, Innsbruck: Innsbruck University Press, pp. 128–138

Cimek, Gracjan (2012): "World Russian National Council as a Religious and Political Institution." In: *Anglojęzyczny Suplement Przeglądu Religioznawczego* 1, pp.101–14.

Daniel, Wallace L./Marsh, Christopher (2007): "Russia's 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience in Context and Retrospect." In: *Journal of Church and State* 49/1, pp. 5–18.

Filippini, Michele (2017): "Collective Organisms." In: Michele Filippini (auth.) *Using Gramsci: A New Approach*, London: Pluto Press, pp. 43–64. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1h64kxd.9.

Gerke, Daniel (2019): "The Long War of Position: Williams and Gramsci, Culture and Crisis." In: *Key Words: A Journal of Cultural Materialism* 17, pp. 29–47.

Griffin, Sean (2021): "Revolution, Raskol, and Rock "n" Roll: The 1,020th Anniversary of the Day of the Baptism of Rus'" In: *The Russian Review* 80/2, pp. 183–208. https://doi.org/10.1111/russ.12308.

Howarth, David (2000): *Discourse*, Buckingham: Open University Press.Humphrys, Elizabeth (2018): "Anti-Politics, the Early Marx and Gramsci's 'Integral State.'" In: *Thesis Eleven* 147/1, pp. 29–44. https://doi.org/10.1177/0725513618787638.

Jørgensen, Marianne/Phillips, Louise J. (2002): "Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory." In: Marianne Jørgensen/Louise J. Phillips (auth.) *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, London: SAGE, pp. 24 –59. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849208871.

Kangaspuro, Markku (2021): "Putin's History, Politics and Conservative Turn." In Katalin Miklóssy/Markku Kangaspuro (eds.), *Conservatism and Memory Politics in Russia and Eastern Europe*, London: Routledge, pp. 15–24.

Kilp, Alar/ Pankhurst, Jerry G. (2023): "The Role of Moscow Patriarchs in the Promotion of the Imperial Culture of Sobornost': Thematic Analysis of Religious Leaders' Speeches at the World Russian People's Council 1993–2022." In: *Religions* 14/4, p. 436. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14040436.

Kinnvall, Catarina/Mitzen, Jennifer (2017): "An Introduction to the Special Issue: Ontological Securities in World Politics." In: *Cooperation and Conflict* 52/1, pp. 3–11. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836716653162.

Kirill, Metropolitan (1995): "Slovo mitropolita Smolenskogo i Kaliningradskogo Kirilla, Predsedatelya Otdela Vneshnikh Tserkovnykh Svyazey Moskovskogo Patriarkhata, zamestitelya Glavy Vsemirnogo Russkogo Narodnogo Sobora pri zavershenii raboty III BPHC" ['Address by Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, Deputy Head of the World Russian People's Council at the conclusion of the III WRPC'], https://vrns.ru/documents/slovo-mitropolita-smolenskogo-i-kaliningradskogo-kirilla-predsedatelya-otdela-vneshnikh-tserkovnykh-/.

Kirill, Metropolitan (2004): "Doklad mitropolita Smolenskogo i Kaliningradskogo Kirilla na VIII VRNS" ['Report of Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad at the VIII WRPC']. https://vrns.ru/documents/doklad-mitropolita-smolenskogo-i-kaliningradskogo-kirilla-na-viii-vrns/.

Kirill, Patriarch (2019): "Slovo Svyateyshego Patriarkha Kirilla na plenarnom zasedanii XXIII VRNS" [Address by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill at the Plenary Session of the XXIII WRPC']. https://vrns.ru/documents/slovo-svyateyshego-patriarkha-kirilla-na-plenarnom-zasedanii-xxiii-vrns/.

Kiril, Patriarch (2023): "Doklad Svyateyshego Patriarkha Kirilla na plenarnom zasedanii XXV VRNS" [Report of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill at the plenary session of the XXV WRPC']. https://vrns.ru/documents/doklad-svyateyshego-patriarkha-kirilla-na-plenarnom-zasedanii-xxv-vsemirnogo-russkogo-narodnogo-sobo/.

Kolstø, Pål (2023): "Ukrainians and Russians as 'One People': An Ideologeme and Its Genesis." In: *Ethnopolitics* 24, pp. 139–58. https://doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2023.2247664.

Laclau, Ernesto/Mouffe, Chantal (2001 [1985]): *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London: Verso.

Laclau, Ernesto (2001): "Why Do Empty Signifiers Matter in Politics." In: Martin McQuillan (ed.) *Deconstruction*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 405–13. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474470919-047.

Martin, James (1997): "Hegemony and the Crisis of Legitimacy in Gramsci." In: *History of the Human Sciences* 10/1, pp. 37–56. https://doi.org/10.1177/095269519701000103.

Martin, James (2023): "Antonio Gramsci." In: Edward N. Zalta/Uri Nodelman (eds.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2023/entries/gramsci/.

Morozov, Viacheslav (2022): "Uneven Worlds of Hegemony: Towards a Discursive Ontology of Societal Multiplicity." In: *International Relations* 36/1, pp. 83–103. https://doi.org/10.1177/00471178211010321.

Morris, Jeremy (2022): "Russians in Wartime and Defensive Consolidation." In: *Current History* 121/837, pp. 258–63. https://doi.org/10.1525/curh.2022.121.837.258.

Motyl, Alexander J. (2008): "Three Years After: Theoretical Reflections on Ukraine's Orange Revolution." In: *Harvard International Review* 29/4, pp. 16–19.

Mouffe, Chantal (1979): "Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci." In: Chantal Mouffe (ed.), *Gramsci and Marxist Theory (RLE: Gramsci)*, London: Routledge, pp. 168–204.

Neumann, Iver B. (1999): *Uses of the Other: "The East" in European Identity Formation*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttv1zn.

Neumann, Iver B. (2017): *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations*, New York: Routledge. https://www.routledge.com/Russia-and-the-Idea-of-Europe-A-Study-in-Identity-and-International-Relations/Neumann/p/book/9781138182615.

O'Donovan, Oliver (1998): "War by Other Means." In: Roger Williamson (ed.), *Some Corner of a Foreign Field: Intervention and World Order*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 87–98. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-14443-3_9.

Østbø, Jardar (2016): *The New Third Rome: Readings of a Russian Nationalist Myth*, Stuttgart: Ibidem.

Papkova, Irina (2011): "Russian Orthodox Concordat? Church and State under Medvedev." In: *Nationalities Papers* 39/5, pp. 667–83. https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2011.602394.

Rudakov, A. B. (2020): "Vsemirnyy Russkiy Narodnyy Sobor Kak Platforma Politicheskogo Dialoga v 1990-kh gg." [The World Russian People's Council as a Platform for Political Dialogue in the 1990s], *Vlast' Istorii i Istoriya Vlasti* 6/4, pp. 555–60.

Selbach, Christopher (2002): "The Orthodox Church in Post-Communist Russia and her Perception of the West: A Search for a Self in the Face of an Other." In: *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 10/2, pp. 131–74. https://doi.org/10.1515/0035.131.

Sharafutdinova, Gulnaz (2020): *The Red Mirror: Putin's Leadership and Russia's Insecure Identity*, New York: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197502938.001.0001.

Shikher, Natalya D. (2021): "Political Implications of Orthodox Identity: An Example of the World Russian People's Council." In: *RUDN Journal of Political Science* 23/4, pp. 600–613. https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-1438-2021-23-4-600-613.

Shlikhta, Natalia (2016): "Eastern Christian Churches Between State and Society: An Overview of the Religious Landscape in Ukraine (1989–2014)." In: *Kyiv-Mohyla Humanities Journal* 3, pp. 123–42. https://doi.org/10.18523/kmhj73945.2016-3.123-142.

Sobor. 1993a. "Obrashchenie I Vsemirnogo Russkogo Sobora 'O ponimanii natsional'nykh interesov Rossii i russkogo naroda'" [Address of the First World Russian Council 'On Understanding the National Interests of Russia and the Russian People']. https://vrns.ru/documents/obrashchenie-i-vsemirnogo-russkogo-sobora-o-ponimanii-natsionalnykh-interesov-rossii-i-russkogo-naro/.

———. 1993b. "Stenogramma I Vsemirnogo Russkogo Narodnogo Sobora" [Transcript of the First World Russian People's Council]. https://vrns.ru/documents/stenogramma-i-vsemirnogo-russkogo-narodnogo-sobora/.

———. 1993c. "Rezolyutsiya tematicheskoy gruppy «Gosudarstvennoe razvitie Rossii»" [Resolution of the Thematic Group 'State Development of Russia']. https://vrns.ru/documents/rezolyutsiya-tematicheskoy-gruppy-gosudarstvennoe-razvitie-rossii/.

———. 1995a. "Obrashcheniya II Vsemirnogo Russkogo Sobora" [Addresses of the Second World Russian Council]. https://vrns.ru/documents/obrashcheniya-ii-vsemirnogo-russkogo-sobora/.

———. 1995b. "Dokumenty III Vsemirnogo Russkogo Narodnogo Sobora" [Documents of the Third World Russian People's Council]. https://vrns.ru/documents/dokumenty-iii-vsemirnogo-russkogo-narodnogo-sobora/.

———. 2002. "Sobornoe slovo VII Vsemirnogo Russkogo Narodnogo Sobora" [Council allocution of the VII World Russian People's Council]. https://vrns.ru/documents/sobornoe-slovo-vii-vsemirnogo-russkogo-narodnogo-sobora/.

———. 2004. "Sobornoe slovo VIII Vsemirnogo Russkogo Narodnogo Sobora" [Council allocution of the VIII World Russian People's Council]. https://vrns.ru/documents/sobornoe-slovo-viii-vsemirnogo-russkogo-narodnogo-sobora/.

———. 2006. "Sobornoe slovo X Vsemirnogo Russkogo Narodnogo Sobora" [Council allocution of the X World Russian People's Council]. https://vrns.ru/documents/sobornoe-slovo-x-vsemirnogo-russkogo-narodnogo-sobora/.

———. 2008. "Sobornoe slovo XII Vsemirnogo Russkogo Narodnogo Sobora" [Council allocution of the XII World Russian People's Council]. https://vrns.ru/documents/sobornoe-slovo-xii-vsemirnogo-russkogo-narodnogo-sobora/.

———. 2011. "Sobornoe slovo XV Vsemirnogo Russkogo Narodnogo Sobora" [Council allocution of the XV World Russian People's Council]. https://vrns.ru/documents/sobornoe-slovo-xv-vsemirnogo-russkogo-narodnogo-sobora/.

———. 2012. "Sobornoe slovo XVI Vsemirnogo Russkogo Narodnogo Sobora" [Council allocution of the XVI World Russian People's Council]. https://vrns.ru/documents/sobornoe-slovo-xvi-vsemirnogo-russkogo-narodnogo-sobora/.

———. 2014. "Sobornoe slovo XVIII Vsemirnogo Russkogo Narodnogo Sobora" [Council allocution of the XVIII World Russian People's Council]. https://vrns.ru/documents/sobornoe-slovo-xviii-vsemirnogo-russkogo-narodnogo-sobora/.

———. 2015. "Sobornoe slovo XIX Vsemirnogo Russkogo Narodnogo Sobora po teme 'Nasledie knyazya Vladimira i sud'by istoricheskoy Rusi'" [Council allocution of the XIX World Russian People's Council on the theme 'The Legacy of Prince Vladimir and the Fate of Historical Rus"]. https://vrns.ru/documents/sobornoe-slovo-xix-vsemirnogo-russkogo-narodnogo-sobora-po-teme-nasledie-knyazya-vladimira-i-sudby-i/.

———. 2016. "Sobornoe Slovo XX Vsemirnogo Russkogo Narodnogo Sobora po teme 'Rossiya i Zapad: dialog narodov v poiskakh otvetov na tsivilizatsionnye vyzovyy'" [Council allocution of the XX World Russian People's Council on the theme 'Russia and the West: Dialogue of Peoples in Search of Answers to Civilizational Challenges']. https://vrns.ru/documents/sobornoe-slovo-khkh-vsemirnogo-russkogo-narodnogo-sobora-po-teme-rossiya-i-zapad-dialog-narodov-v-po/.

———. 2022. "Sobornoe slovo XXIV Vsemirnogo Russkogo Narodnogo Sobora" [Council allocution of the XXIV World Russian People's Council]. https://vrns.ru/documents/sobornoe-slovo-xxiv-vsemirnogo-russkogo-narodnogo-sobora/.

———. 2024. "Nakaz XXV Vsemirnogo russkogo narodnogo sobora 'Nastoyashchee i budushchee Russkogo mira'" [Decree of the XXV World Russian People's Council 'The Present and Future of the Russian World']. http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/6116189.html.

Suslov, Mikhail (2023): "Messianic Discourses and the Ideology of Putinism." In: Mikhail Suslov (auth.), *Exploring Russia's Exceptionalism in International Politics*, London: Routledge, pp. 82–98

Thomas, Peter (2006): "Modernity as "Passive Revolution": Gramsci and the Fundamental Concepts of Historical Materialism." In: *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de La Société Historique Du Canada* 17/2, pp. 61–78. https://doi.org/10.7202/016590ar.

Tsygankov, Andrei P. (2022): *Russian Realism: Defending 'Derzhava' in International Relations*, London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003247647.

Verkhovsky, Aleksandr (2003): *Politicheskoe pravoslavie: russkie pravoslavnye natsionalisty i fundamentalisty, 1995–2001 gg.* [Political Orthodoxy: Russian Orthodox Nationalists and Fundamentalists, 1995–2001], Moscow: SOVA Centre