

THE PROBLEM OF POLITICAL IDENTITY: THE MEANING OF GREAT PROJECTS POLITICS IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA

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Abstract

The problem of political identity is one of the most topical issues in constructivist IR theory. The understanding of identity construction as well as the adequate interpretation of its foreign policy implications can help explain the meanings behind the actions of major international actors. The work deals with the problem of political identity in contemporary Russia, by engaging with and extending the temporal scope of the constructivist analysis, conducted by Ted Hopf in his book *Social Construction of International Politics*. It suggests that the great projects politics of contemporary Russia, which is linked to the specificity of its political identity and seems to be similar to that of the late-Soviet period, can, in fact, be better understood, if another work on Russian identity (*The Ethics of Postcommunism: History and Social Praxis in Russia* by Sergei Prozorov) is also taken into account. Hopf's analysis, while providing a valuable theoretical framework and linking the state's identity to the great power status, does not trace the evolution of the latter status and confines itself to two years of Russia's development, namely, 1955 and 1999. Prozorov's book, while thoroughly analyzing the identity of contemporary Russian state, is limited within the domestic realm and fails to address the idea of great power, which Hopf believes to be an integral part of Russian political discourse and which is possible to interpret, only if the analysis extends beyond national borders. The research incorporates Prozorov's theoretical contribution into the framework of Hopf, thus merging the mentioned approaches and making them applicable to the contemporary Russian condition, both domestically and within IR.

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Introduction

Today, an IR scholar meets a claim that “Russia is back to the world stage”¹ with increasing frequency. Indeed, the vision of Russia as a resurgent power is, no doubt, present in the political discourse, “[i]rrespective of whether one refers to the recovery of Russia’s economy or its assertive foreign policy, the success of its sporting teams or the wealth of its oligarchy...”² On the international level, this vision can be supported by a number of works that address the problem of Russia’s revival. When in 2008 Edward Lucas published his *New Cold War: How the Kremlin Menaces both Russia and the West*, the book enjoyed unprecedentedly wide popularity and received a considerable number of positive reviews.³ In his view, Russia is reinventing herself as a milder version of the Soviet Union and hence should be seen as a serious threat to the West.

Such a comparison could also be found earlier in the book by Steven Rosefielde *Russia in the 21st Century: The Prodigal Superpower*. The author emphasizes the similarity between contemporary Russian policies and those of the USSR, thus virtually equating the two and prophesying the comeback of history unless the Russian Federation manages to alter its way, taking the path of genuine Westernization.⁴ During the last decade many IR scholars were yet again using the term ‘empire’ to refer to the contemporary Russian state.⁵ This once almost forgotten practice explicitly shows the concern that the renowned scholars and

¹ Angela E. Stent, “Restoration and Revolution in Putin’s Foreign Policy,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, 6 (August 2008): 1089.

² Sergei Prozorov, *The Ethics of Postcommunism: History and Social Praxis in Russia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), x.

³ See Edward Lucas, *The New Cold War: How the Kremlin Menaces both Russia and the West* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008).

⁴ See Steven Rosefielde, *Russia in the 21st Century: The Prodigal Superpower* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 2-3.

⁵ E.g. Georgi Derluguian, “The Fourth Russian Empire?” *PONARS Policy Memo* No. 411 (December 2006); Celeste A. Wallander, “Russian Transimperialism and Its Implications,” *Washington Quarterly* 30, 2 (Spring 2007): 107-122; Fiona Hill, *Energy Empire: Oil, Gas and Russia’s Revival* (London: Foreign Policy Center, 2004).

policymakers have regarding Russia's current status on the international arena and the prospects of its potential development.

Domestically, the seeming stability of Putin's presidency (as well as his premiership) is accompanied by the realization of various 'great projects' that are either closely intertwined with the commemoration of Russia's glorious history or aimed at modernization and economic growth. For instance, the excessive commemoration of the Great Patriotic War is a classic example of historical politics, along with many others that seem to be directed toward all poles, in their attempt to reestablish the country's important status. The powers that be build tremendously big cathedrals all over the country (in Kaliningrad, Voronezh, Moscow, etc.)⁶ and canonize state's former rulers,⁷ appealing to the Russian imperial past; they restore Soviet symbols and rehabilitate Joseph Stalin, addressing the Soviet great power legacy; they try to accomplish expensive modernizing projects in business⁸ and social spheres,⁹ as well as achieve big successes in sports,¹⁰ thus organizing domestic exhibition of power.

Yet, how is the evidence of Russia's comeback can be interpreted within IR? What is its true meaning, which theoretical approach could better account for these realities, and can the mentioned great projects policies, indeed, be compared to those of the Soviet Union, as Rosefielde and Lucas do? It is certainly tempting to fit the fact of Russia's revival into the realist paradigm, as it seems to be a mere correction of what should not have happened, and what have failed to be predicted, namely, the end of the Cold War and the subsequent

⁶ See Aleksandr Morozov, "Has the Postsecular Age Begun?" *Religion, State & Society*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (2008): 39.

⁷ In 2000, the last Russian emperor, Nicholas II, and his family were recognized as martyred saints by the Russian Orthodox Church.

⁸ E.g. the construction of Okhta-Centre in Saint-Petersburg.

⁹ E.g. The President Committee for the Realization of the Projects of National Priority, "Prioritetnye Natsional'nye Proekty" (Projects of National Priority), <http://www.rost.ru/> (accessed May 14, 2010).

¹⁰ See Mail.ru News, "Ofitsial'no svernuta federal'naya programma razvitiya Sochi na 2006-2014 gg." (The Program of Sochi Development for 2006-2014 Is Officially Closed), <http://news.mail.ru/economics/1562296/> (accessed May 14, 2010).

collapse of the Soviet Union.¹¹ One could, together with John Mearsheimer, argue that the bipolarity of the world politics was, paradoxically, ensuring peace and stability on the European continent, and that “the demise of the Cold War order [was] likely to increase the chances that war and major crises [would] occur in Europe.”¹² Hence, the states, being rational actors, who are aware of their external environment, try to ensure their safe survival and pursue strategies that more effectively maintain the existing international balance.¹³ However, just as Mearsheimer would have difficulties with explaining the drastic reorientation of the Russian state in 1991, when “the fate of the Cold War ... was mainly in [its] hands,”¹⁴ and it was more beneficial for it to maintain the balance, so he would also be unable to account for the fact that, despite this reorientation, Russian political elites never stopped seeing the country as a great power, since even during the hardest years of transition Boris Yeltsin insisted that Russia “always was and remains a great world power.”¹⁵ Even today, when “[Russian] consumers still aren’t economically sovereign, its government isn’t democratically responsive to the electorate, and Russian society is blatantly unjust,”¹⁶ the country, for some reason, is characterized as “*a colossus with feet of clay*” [emphasis added].¹⁷ Why is it that after ten years of disintegration and economic decay, after sanguinary internal conflicts and political confusion within the ruling elite, Russia necessarily has to be seen not simply as a recovered state, but as a not yet fully recovered great power? It seems that simply remaining within the realist paradigm it is problematic to explain the events of the last two decades, as well as the ever-present Russian great power identity. Hence, it is

¹¹ A detailed account of this failure was given in Michael Cox, ed., *Rethinking of Soviet Collapse: Sovietology, the Death of Communism and the New Russia* (London: Pinter, 1998).

¹² John J. Mearsheimer, “Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War,” *International Security*, Summer 1990 (Vol. 15, No. 1): 52.

¹³ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York, 2001), 31.

¹⁴ Mearsheimer, “Back to the Future,” 52.

¹⁵ Boris Yeltsin’s 1992 speech quoted in Thomas Ambrosio, “The Geopolitics of Demographic Decay: HIV/AIDS and Russia’s Great Power Status,” *Post Soviet Affairs*, 22, 1 (January-March 2006): 4.

¹⁶ Rosefielde, 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

necessary to engage with the theories that are able to explain the construction of state's identity.

Since the great power identity is dependant on the international recognition and hierarchical identity structures,¹⁸ perhaps, one could look for the answer within the realm of systemic constructivism. However, it is important to remember that, as a rule, systemic constructivists, Alexander Wendt being a deserving representative, treat identification as “a continuum from negative to positive - from conceiving another as anathema to the self to conceiving it as an extension of the self.”¹⁹ Consequently, such an approach can dangerously oversimplify the situation, excluding the possible existence of, say, a great power, which is backward at the same time (the way Russia is frequently labeled today), or an enemy, which has a similar ideology. What is more, those who believe in purely systemic construction of the great power status will face difficulties explaining why in the beginning of the 1990-s Russian leaders were happy to follow the West and were eagerly accepting western assistance, which, in its turn, appeared to be unexpectedly insufficient, and still considered Russia to be a great power. They are also unlikely to answer why Vladimir Putin was widely misunderstood by the population, when during his first rather successful years in Kremlin he started comparing Russia with tiny Portugal, emphasizing that the former had to work hard in order to reach the latter's level of economic development.²⁰ Therefore, one has to grant this a more careful investigation, as, apparently, the idea of the great power status is not rooted exclusively within the aspirations of a ruling elite or the international system as such. It seems to reach deeper grounds. In this light, perhaps, the black box of state has to be opened and the answer should be sought for on the level of popular discourse.

¹⁸ Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics. Identities & Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 & 1999* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 290.

¹⁹ Alexander Wendt, “Collective Identity Formation and the International State,” *American Political Science Review* 88, No. 2 (June 1994): 386.

²⁰ See Ladno.ru, “Putin i Portugaliya” (Putin and Portugal), <http://www.ladno.ru/opinion/2882.html> (accessed May 12, 2010).

Precisely the latter was attempted by Ted Hopf in his book *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999*. Hopf, trying to be as inductive as possible, develops a theory of social identity and traces the implications of competing identities on Soviet and Russian foreign policy making in the critical years of the country's development. In the course of analyzing the discourse he singles out eight distinct identities "that were distributed most broadly and deeply across and within the most texts [which he chose to deal with]"²¹ - four for each studied period. Hopf then follows their interaction and tries to explain certain foreign policy moves through the corresponding domination of this or another identity in a given case. In other words, through interpreting these domestic social identities he shows "how they made possible Soviet and Russian understandings of Others in world politics [and how the] constructivism [could] work all the way down, rather than having [to] stop at the level of interstate interactions."²²

It becomes apparent in Hopf that, both in 1955 and 1999, the idea of great power was essential for every identity that he believed to be distinct and was indeed rooted on the level of popular discourse. During both historical periods there was a clear discursive demand for Russia's great power status - the alternative of losing this status was altogether unthinkable for the population. Thus, Hopf showed that not only the decision-makers were, as Thomas Ambrosio put it, 'obsessed'²³ with the great power status, but that such a vision was also embedded into the social discourse, and the powers that be could not but comply with what was expected from them.

However, Hopf also understood that, in spite of internal roots of the mentioned identity, it is impossible to analyze it, focusing exclusively on the domestic level. A great power would never become one without any international recognition of its status. Therefore,

²¹ Hopf, 41.

²² Ibid, 261.

²³ Ambrosio: 3.

he emphasizes its dual nature, by giving some credit to the systemic and normative constructivisms in what concerns the great power recognition. Then, if I have to understand the current Russia's revival (which is invariably expressed through the great power rhetoric), what type of discourse can I focus on, while analyzing the great power politics employed by the country. I believe this might be the discourse related to the previously mentioned great projects, as the justification of their realization, on the one hand, would necessarily have to bear the signs of the great power identity and, perhaps, reflect the discursive demand for it, and, on the other hand, would have to articulate vision of Russia, being a great power within the international system, as, due to a great scale and considerable expenditure, the purely domestic practicality would fail to become a satisfying justification.

Since it has been decided to focus on analyzing the great projects politics, one could pick an example of a contemporary great deed as an occasion of great power politics and, just like Hopf, analyze the discourse surrounding it in order to trace the great power identity and prove or disprove its presence in the contemporary Russian popular discourse. One of the recent and most 'discursively well-covered' projects was the attempted construction of the so-called "Okhta-Centre" in St. Petersburg - a 396-meter-tall skyscraper intended for the 'Gazprom' headquarters.²⁴ Ratification of the project immediately caused unprecedented public discontent: among those who officially disapproved were the Russian Union of Architects,²⁵ UNESCO World Heritage Centre,²⁶ the Russian Ministry of Culture²⁷ and some

²⁴ Okhta-Centre Website, "Obshchestvenno-delovoy rayon" (Social and Business District), http://www.okhta-center.ru/ru/about/plan/social_business/ (accessed May 28, 2010).

²⁵ Architectural News Agency, "Soyuz arkhitektorov Rossii vykazal protest protiv neboskryoba 'Gazprom-siti'" (The Russian Union of Architects Protests Against 'Gazprom-City' Skyscraper), http://www.archi.ru/agency/news_current.html?nid=2904 (accessed May 28, 2010).

²⁶ UNESCO World Heritage Committee, *Decisions Adopted at the 31st Session of the World Heritage Committee* (Christchurch, 2007): 116, <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/2007/whc07-31com-24e.pdf> (accessed May 28, 2010).

²⁷ Kommersant.ru, "Zaklyucheniye" (Final Report), <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?docid=1256204> (accessed May 28, 2010).

political parties.²⁸ They all believed that a glass skyscraper built close to the historic city-centre could spoil the harmonious architectural ensemble of the Russian cultural capital. And this concern does not seem to be unfounded. City officials, however, were determined to erect the tower. On repeated occasions, ‘Gazprom’ administration, supported by the Governor, had to defend their right to build the business centre in court. Today, after almost five years of heated confrontation between ‘Gazprom’ and the city officials on the one side, and the public of St. Petersburg in the person of cultural intelligentsia and political activists on the other, the problem is far from being resolved. The latter fact, however, appears to be particularly fruitful for a constructivist scholar, who tries to study the Russian political identity, as the mentioned conflict gives birth to abundant discourse, which includes opinions and justifications of both supporters and opponents of the project. Therefore, let us try to trace the mentioned great power identity in the texts of the interviews, given by the project supporters.

Without engaging with substantial empirical analysis, one could simply give the relevant discourse a look in order to see, whether or not the demand for the great power status is still there. For this one could, following a preliminary investigation of the discourse, “develo[p] analytical categories that [will] be used to construct a coding frame that is then applied to the textual data.”²⁹ In other words, it is necessary to construct a ‘glossary’ of classes and then, after a more thorough research, to refer different words or phrases to one of these thematic categories (i.e. attempt to do what Hopf performed in his research). An important condition for the choice of the classes is that they have to be indicative for the main theoretical underpinning mentioned earlier, i.e. the idea of great power. A number of

²⁸ RIA-Novosti, “Peterburgskiy sud rassmotrit isk o stroitelstve ‘Okhta-tsentra’” (Court of St. Petersburg Will Examine the Suit Against ‘Okhta-Centre’ Construction), <http://www.rian.ru/society/20091109/192575131.html> (accessed May 28, 2010).

²⁹ Cynthia Hardy, Bill Harley, and Nelson Phillips, “Discourse Analysis and Content Analysis: Two Solitudes?” *APSA Newsletter*, Spring 2004, Vol. 2, No. 1: 20.

interviews referred to on the official web-site of the project³⁰ and the news portals “Fontanka.ru”³¹ and “Vesti.ru”³² were chosen to be the sources of analysis. The choice was conditioned by the fact that all people, being important public figures (actors, directors, politicians and musicians), seem to represent the popular discourse, which, as argued by Hopf, reflects the self-understanding of the society. The latter is particularly influential for and helps better interpret domestic and foreign policy actions and reactions of a given state.

While trying to trace the great power identity, one can focus on the following thematic classes: *the role of St. Petersburg in the world; the project as a normal practice; the consequences of the project’s rejection; the consequences of the project’s acceptance & the new image of St. Petersburg.*

The role of St. Petersburg in the world: The analysis of this class of content explicitly shows that the great power identity is still dominant in the popular discourse. The city is often referred to as “the world cultural and political centre, [whose] significance steadily grows,”³³ compared to London, Paris, and New York. The ‘Okhta-Centre’ is presented as a “project worthy of the city.” The alternative vision of “a city with provincial destiny” is mentioned just once and is treated as a very unfortunate thing that has to be corrected.

The project as a normal practice: This class directly refers to the justification of the project and can potentially support the previous conclusion. Apparently, the project is often presented as normal practice that all great cities (and great powers) have to employ (New York, Paris, and London). The old vision of St. Petersburg as a northern counterpart of Amsterdam (which can no longer be seen as a truly important European capital) vanishes from the discourse completely. Another traditional comparison with Venice is now presented

³⁰ Okhta-Centre Website, <http://www.okhta-center.ru> (accessed May 26, 2010).

³¹ Fontanka.ru - St. Petersburg News, “Okhta-Tsentr” (Okhta-Centre), <http://www.fontanka.ru/gpcity/> (accessed May 26, 2010).

³² Vesti.ru, <http://www.vesti.ru> (accessed May 26, 2010).

³³ Categorized translations of the relevant phrases of the interviews can be found in Appendix 1.

as an opposition. On the other hand, the supporters also address the discourse of the past, inspiring authorities to “leave the mark in history, by building [their] own ‘St. Isaac’s’,” which clearly is a due thing for a great power to perform

The consequences of the project’s rejection: This category reveals the discursive demand by engaging with the logics of thinkable alternatives to the modernization of the city. Paradoxically, without distortion of the historic harmony the latter is seen impossible to be preserved. The rejection of this project means the alternative of remaining in its place, which is a disaster that leads to the unavoidable decay, be it “a swamp,” “a beautiful ruin,” “a city-museum,” or “a primitive society.” A virtual obsession with moving ahead and standing “in the avant-garde” is a customary component of all the interviews. Such an obsession indicates that in the view of the project supporters, St. Petersburg will either become a globally important modernized city, or will die off completely (i.e. stop living), having turned into a lifeless memorabilia.

The consequences of the project’s acceptance & the new image of St. Petersburg: The acceptance of the project is always seen as a “logical phase in the city’s development.” However, when one tries to find out what this will mean in practice, it comes to a mere economic benefit and an increase of the investments. The latter, however, can justify neither the enormous height of the tower, nor its central location. What is more, the tower “will become the centre of culture,” i.e. it will become a cultural place in a cultural capital. Explicitly emphasizing the demand for the creation of a new city, the supporters cannot but address the need for preservation of what St. Petersburg, in their opinion, always was, i.e. they paradoxically argue that the preservation of the cultural heritage is a “step forward” and the ‘road to decay’ simultaneously. Moreover, the vision of new St. Petersburg is never articulated. The supporters either yet again address its cultural status, or employ the axiologically indefinite rhetoric. In this light, the relevant teleology can only be formulated in

terms of *eventually becoming* what we always were. In contrast, *remaining* what we always were will necessarily lead to a catastrophe, which will make the life of the city stop. It seems, in the absence of any meaningful teleology, the only way of conceptualizing development is to shift this process into the past, so that it would have the realization of potentiality of the present as its final goal. Hence, it becomes apparent why pure remaining in its place is so disastrous - the present proper has now become the past, remaining in which the city ceases to live.

While the first three classes seem to support Hopf's findings by explicitly showing the discursive demand for the great power status, the last two appear to give somewhat unexpected results. If this project seems to every supporter like a dew thing for a great power to accomplish, then why is it that the actual outcome would be a mere realization of the potentiality of the present? Furthermore, can there at all be a great power without any meaningful teleology or political project? Even if it potentially can, than it is, at least, certain that over the last hundred years this has not yet happened - all great powers, be it the USSR, the US or, say, Nazi Germany, invariably had a particular political teleology, which triggered their development and conditioned their international actions.

Then, how should one treat the mentioned digressions? Perhaps, they could be discarded as occasional odds, since it is individual interviews that undergo the analysis, and individuals can make mistakes and do not always think about the long-term perspective. Alternatively, they could be taken seriously, as it might help understand the nature of power in Russia today better and answer the main question of this research, namely, what the meaning of the great projects politics in contemporary Russian really is.

To accomplish the latter, one could address a deserving example of theoretical interpretation of the direction-less politics in contemporary Russia, which was given by Sergei Prozorov. Drawing mainly on Giorgio Agamben and Alexandre Kojève, the author

analyzes late Soviet, Yeltsinite and contemporary periods of Russian history in an attempt to “bring the experience of ... postcommunism into the discourse of political theory by re-engaging with the ‘end of history’ thesis from an alternative theoretical perspective.”³⁴ Thus, the ‘end of history’, in Prozorov’s view, is not a triumph of any teleological project (as argued by Fukuyama³⁵), but rather a suspension of the teleological dimension as such. By disengaging from the public sphere and making the whole system utterly inoperative, the Russian society not only triggered the demise of the Soviet system, thereby resisting the most ambitious historical project, but also managed to undermine “every possibility of the recommencement of history during the 20 years of postcommunism.”³⁶ What is more, like Hopf, Prozorov traces the mentioned process on the level of popular discourse (rock poetry of Boris Grebenshikov in Prozorov’s case), thereby countering all possible objections, raised earlier. Another important feature of his analysis is that his theory actually accounts for the domestic manifestations of power, and thus, potentially, it is able to explain the pursuit of great projects politics in the context of the complete absence of any teleological normativity.

On the other hand, Prozorov limits his analysis within the domestic realm and does not address the idea of great power, which Hopf believes to be an integral part of Russian political discourse and which is possible to effectively interpret, only if the international system is also taken into account. Yet, merged together, the frameworks can potentially compliment each other to give an unambiguous answer to the main research question. For this, however, they have to be addressed in much more detail. The next two chapters of the present research are going to treat both mentioned frameworks more attentively. In conclusion, I will try to provide an answer to the research question, incorporating Prozorov’s findings into Hopf’s theoretical approach, as well as attempt to give some predictions

³⁴ Prozorov, *The Ethics of Postcommunism*, xi.

³⁵ See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

³⁶ Prozorov, *The Ethics of Postcommunism*, 248.

regarding the prospects of Russia's political development, given the nature of its contemporary political condition.

Chapter 1: Social Constructivism and the Great Power Identity

1.1 Social constructivism and the great power as a customary discursive component in Russian and Soviet foreign policy making

This chapter addresses Hopf's social constructivism. First, I focus on the explication of his theoretical framework, paying special attention to the way his research is constructed. Then I discuss the conclusions he reaches, emphasizing the importance of societal self-understanding and the ever-present discursive demand for the great power status, which he traces in both studied periods. The second section aims at analyzing the process, only briefly mentioned in Hopf, namely, the historical change of the great power concept. The latter is needed, since the explanation of the great projects politics in contemporary Russia cannot be full without the understanding of how a great power of today is likely to perceive itself. One also needs to trace the change the concept underwent since the Soviet and Yeltsinite periods of country's development, i.e. it is necessary to define the set of norms that has won legitimacy in the contemporary world (or, at least, to show the way contemporary Russia sees it). Finally, I try to make use of Hopf's theoretical findings and examine the domestic and international political discourses of contemporary Russia in attempt to relate them to the great power politics in the condition of the present days' normative crisis.

In opposition to those, who believe that a state's identity can be constructed exclusively as a result of systemic interactions on the international level (e.g. Alexander Wendt), and also those, who treat states as rational actors that try to support the existing international balance for their own benefit (e.g. John Mearsheimer), Hopf effectively domesticizes his approach and claims that "every individual society has many identities,

[each of which] has associated with it a collection of discursive practices.”³⁷ In his research he opens up the black box of state and demonstrates how the domestic discourse can simultaneously enable and limit thinkable political practices of a given country (the USSR and the Russian Federation in Hopf’s case), thereby recovering the social origins of identity. He performs the latter by carrying his analysis through three important stages.

Firstly, Hopf empirically reconstructs the “identity topography”³⁸ of the state in a given year, i.e., trying to free himself of any presupposed ideas about Soviet and Russian identities, he goes through relevant social discourse, which had been chosen according to the author’s ideas of variety and representativeness,³⁹ and creates an unsorted and not yet fully coherent list of textual evidences that could form multiple identities within a *socium*. He, however, suspends the imposition of categories until the analysis goes far enough, and the identities naturally “settle into a particular set of meanings.”⁴⁰ Only in this way, he argues, the “meanings remain what they mean and do not become what researcher needs to test a hypothesis.”⁴¹ Secondly, the author synthetically creates the discursive formations “that bring various identities together in a more coherent structure than pure induction can supply.”⁴² That is, he categorizes the found textual evidence, in order to form a set of identities and single out a number of those that were spread most broadly and, arguably, could influence the society’s understanding of the Self and the Others. Finally, Hopf states that in any decision-maker’s understanding of himself (only himself in the Soviet and Russian cases), the latter is guided and limited by the specificities of a social cognitive structure he belongs to. Hence, the complicated structure of his social Self and the discursive representation of the external

³⁷ Hopf, 1.

³⁸ Ibid, 20.

³⁹ More precisely, Hopf tried to choose the textual data that, on the one hand, was not heavily censored and, on the other, was read by the vast majority of Russian and Soviet citizens as well as policymakers.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 25.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid, 20.

Others necessarily influences his understandings of other states and, therefore, his foreign policy making.

Consequently, the author moves the process of identity construction to the social level, thus claiming that international relations cannot be properly understood, if one focuses on the international system per se without going deeper into the understandings of Self and Others that appear to be dominant within a given society. To illustrate the validity of his claim, Hopf compares his own explanation of certain policies employed by the USSR and Russia with those given by neorealists, systemic constructivists, and normative constructivists. Apparently, the oddities of balancing behaviour from 1989 onwards that neorealists cannot account for, the weakness of the logics of consequentialism and appropriateness that normative constructivists adhere to and that could overestimate the significance of international norms for the decisions made by statesmen, and the complexity of the Soviet visions of Others⁴³ that systemic constructivists would be unable to explain, given their too hierarchically linear international identification, can all be overcome, when the society is 'brought back in.' By interacting with each other, becoming dominant or being discredited in the context of certain international or domestic processes different identities of a given society make the state's foreign policy comply with or go against the balancing logic, obey or disregard the international norms, prove relevant or neutralize certain visions of Others within the international system.

However, this is not to say that any identity can be created at home only. Rather, this implies that the border between the international and the domestic realms is not as solid as it seems to many IR scholars. For instance, moving to an important subject to be expanded on below, the construction of the great power identity that is important for Hopf and plays a significant role in his conclusions is always twofold. On the one hand, the idea of it has to

⁴³ E.g., as Hopf put it, "Soviets saw both danger and opportunity in Yugoslavia, a great power and backwardness in China, and periphery and promise in India." (Hopf, 285).

comply with the dominant domestic identities, as it did with almost every identity of 1955 and 1999 in the Russian case. In this context, it does not even matter when this conflicts with the international distribution of material (or other) capabilities and seeming hierarchical structures that, according to neorealist and systemic constructivist paradigms, have to be the only sources of the great power status. For example, it strikes an observer of Russian politics throughout the 1990s (when neither the international hierarchy, nor poor economic capacity indicated the greatness of Russia) that the country's leaders never saw Russia as anything else than the great power, which had to be reckoned with. On the other hand, Hopf admits that "identities that are uniquely dependant on other states for validation, such as being a great power or having sovereign legitimacy, [may lie within] the realm of systemic constructivism."⁴⁴ That is, no state can become a great power proper without being recognized as one on the international level. Therefore, in order to interpret the great power politics, employed by a state, one first needs to account for both dimensions of the great power identity - domestic and international.

As for the domestic realm, it becomes apparent in Hopf that the idea of great power is indeed essential for every identity that he believes to be distinct and does belong to the level of popular discourse. In order to illustrate this, the author engages with the logics of thinkability and imaginability. In 1955, when Khrushchev spoke about India and the decolonizing world more generally, for him and for many other Soviets, "the predominant discourse had already excluded all other alternative ways of thinking about premodern societies on the road to socialism."⁴⁵ Of course, this is not to say that a different world (and hence, a different ideological path from the one which the Soviet Union was comparatively advanced on) was unimaginable, but the probability of this was very low. In 1999, when Russia had many potential ways to go, "it was [still] hard for any discourse to imagine Russia

⁴⁴ Hopf, 290.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 266.

as anything other than a great power, even if a regional one, within the former Soviet space.”⁴⁶ Possible Russian decline and disintegration was altogether unthinkable. Instead, the choice of potential ways was limited by either becoming the United States, or the Soviet Union, or a powerful international actor, having its unique way, among other great powers that had their ways as well. Then, if domestically the great power status was invariably present in the Russian political discourse, what was the situation on the international level?

As was mentioned previously, Hopf gives credit to systemic and normative constructivisms in what concerns the great power identity on the international level. For him a great power proper is a state that first and foremost complies with a “set of oughts and ought nots”⁴⁷ in its conduct *vis-à-vis* other countries, a state that is constrained and empowered by the existing normative framework. In 1955, the Soviet great power identity was “an example of an instrumental use of a norm ... Recall that the recognition of the sovereign equality norm both constrained Soviet exercise of its power with respect to Belgrade and at the same time reduced the danger of the Soviet great power identity with respect to weaker states more generally.”⁴⁸ By supporting and sticking to the existing international norms the Soviet Union promoted its image as a traditional great power. In 1999, the recognition of sovereignty, nonintervention, and territorial integrity as international norms “imposed a constraint on Russia’s thinkable reactions to other states’ treatment of the Russian diaspora, especially in the Baltic states.”⁴⁹ Thus, a state’s actions that accord with the international norms are essential for preserving the great power identity.

This, of course, does not imply that by simply following the norms an actor becomes a great power - in the achievement of this status many factors may come into play - yet, the adherence to these norms is believed to be appropriate for a great power, and hence, to

⁴⁶ Hopf, 267.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 282.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 283.

remain a great power, the state would generally prefer to comply with the expectation, as well as blame the norms' violation (such was, for example, Russia's reaction to NATO's actions in the former Yugoslavia in 1999; the rector of Moscow State Institute of International Relations, Anatoly Torkunov, characterized NATO's actions as "an attempt of recurrence of 'power politics' and undermining the whole system of modern international law").⁵⁰ This is also not to say that great powers immediately stop being great, when they violate internationally accepted norms. Although their status might be significantly challenged (consider, for example, the American policies towards Iraq), one also has to consider the fact that the compliance with the international standards is subject to a judgment made by a 'standard committee,' which, in its turn, consists of various not always equally influential great powers. In this sense, it is clear, for example, why "the elections in Iraq complied with the international standards, and the elections in Ukraine did not."⁵¹ The thing is that for then-current 'standard committee,' the elections could be truly democratic, only if the winner was a more democratic candidate.

All in all, as was demonstrated in Hopf's analysis, the idea of being a great power was the one the USSR and Russia tried to adhere to both domestically and on the international level. In this sense, the belief of being great was more important for the construction of the relevant identity than, say, objective distribution of capabilities, or actual relative position *vis-à-vis* other states in the international system (the factors that neorealists and systemic constructivists would pay attention to). Instead, this identity was presented as a complex phenomenon that obliterated the border between the domestic and the international. As for the present days, it was demonstrated in the introduction that the brief look at the empirical

⁵⁰ Anatoly Torkunov quoted in Viatcheslav Morozov, "Sootnosheniye ponyatiy 'Zapad' i 'Evropa' v sovremennom rossiyskom vneshnepoliticheskom diskurse" (The Relation of the Notions 'West' and 'Europe' in the Contemporary Russian Foreign Policy Discourse) in P.Sh. Ganelin, A.V. Gogolevsky, V.V. Noskov, V.N. Pleshkov ed. *Rossiya v kontekste mirovoy istorii* (Saint-Petersburg: Nauka, 2002), 401.

⁵¹ Alexei Chadaev, *Putin. Ego ideologiya* (Moscow: Evropa, 2006), 143.

evidence from today shows that the idea of great power remains unchallenged, and that the discursive demand for this status is still present. At the same time, one cannot but notice another interesting phenomenon, namely, the utter absence of any teleological normativity, i.e. the absence of norms a state must adhere to in order to become what a great power of today ought to be. Since the normative framework always lies in the realms of normative and systemic constructivisms, one could try to trace the change the internationally accepted norms might have undergone, placing the analysis on the international level. In other words, in order to understand the great projects politics in contemporary Russia and relate it to the great power politics proper, it is necessary to answer the question how the international normative framework is constructed and when it is subject to change.

1.2 The changing of the great power concept

I purposefully avoid giving a definition of a great power. I see no use in enumerating the factors which, put all together, eventually constitute a great state - the sole idea of changing implies the evolution of the concept. Let alone the fact that different theoretical paradigms are likely to provide qualitatively different definitions, depending on their understanding of power.⁵² Instead, I try to theorize on the most general level and focus on two aspects, namely, normative actions and normative change. Through the former an actor can manifest its compliance with or disregard of the international norms, thereby confirming or challenging its great power status, the latter alters the normative framework, thus changing the ‘rules of the game.’

In the opening chapter of his book, Hopf gives an account of Weberian types of social action: “The first, usage, convention, and fashion, involves the desire to gain social

⁵² E.g. see different definitions given in: Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (McGraw-Hill, 1979); Arnold Toynbee, *The World After the Peace Conference* (Humphrey Milford and Oxford University Press, 1926); Barry Buzan, *The United States and the Great Powers* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity Press, 2004).

acceptance and is similar to complying with the norm. The second is instrumental rationality. The third is custom...”⁵³ When individuals are concerned, Hopf emphasizes that “there is a bias towards tradition and stability. One does certain things not because they work [consequentially], but because they are right - right in terms of ultimate definitions of reality.”⁵⁴ However, when one analyzes the behaviour of states, identities and rational interests intertwine, i.e. “if a particular identity or collection of identities within a discursive formation were to constitute a state, [it would necessarily define] the interests of the state *vis-à-vis* other states.”⁵⁵ Therefore, as mentioned above, a state’s actions that accord with the international norms are essential for preserving the great power identity. However, how are these norms constructed, and when do they change?

Naturally, in his theoretical framework Hopf places the construction and alteration of international norms on the level of discourse, suggesting that the latter can “provid[e] both its own limits and also the practices capable of redefining those limits in interaction between society and the state.”⁵⁶ To illustrate this point, he shows how in the beginning of the 1990s one of the Russian identities got delegitimized according to its own discursive practices, giving way to another identity, that subsequently became dominant and remained one up until the end of the decade. Hopf writes:

Having constituted itself according to market and democratic identities at home and the hegemonic order of Washington abroad, the perversions of the former and violent acts of the latter combined to discredit the NWR [New Western Russian] according to its own discursive practices.⁵⁷

In other words, he argues that decisions of a statesman are embedded in and can be heavily influenced by the national discourse. The latter, altering, possesses the potential of changing the rules of the game, and hence, commonly accepted norms.

⁵³ Hopf, 14.

⁵⁴ Berger and Luckmann quoted in Hopf, 14.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 19.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 283.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

To give another example, which can show better, how this works on the international level, one can address a theorist of resistance, Roland Bleiker, who in his article “Political boundaries, poetic transgressions” convincingly demonstrates how poetic discourse, as one of the dissident practices, is able to reframe global politics. As Bleiker put it, “[poetry] seeks to undermine the linguistic and discursive foundations that have already normalized political practices ... [it] unfolds its power through a gradual and largely inaudible transversal transformation of values.”⁵⁸ Put simply, seemingly apolitical discourse can create a new language that becomes available for international actors to speak. The norms, having been created anew, can be picked up by political agents and, thus, projected to the realm of global politics, in this way influencing international consensus and great power recognition.

Having provided a powerful tool for explaining and tracing the normative change, Hopf, however, did not actually use it fully in the book, resorting to a mere enumeration of taken for granted categories (e.g. material capabilities, territorial integrity, nonintervention, etc.). Perhaps he did not do this, as this would require a research of a hardly imaginable scope. In relation to this work, it seems to be necessary to trace this change at least superficially - without getting into the causes and the process itself, but accounting for the consequences - since the understanding of the norm is crucial for the analysis of the great power politics, which enjoys primacy in this chapter.

After abandoning its initial historical mission of prevailing in the global class-struggles and settling with the doctrine of ‘peaceful coexistence,’ the devotion to which Khrushchev tried to demonstrate by attending international peace conferences (e.g. 1955 Geneva Summit)⁵⁹ and traveling internationally, the Soviet Union, arguably, accepted a new image of world great power that redirected its attention from world ideological domination to

⁵⁸ Roland Bleiker, “Political boundaries, poetic transgressions,” in Louise Amoore ed. *The Global Resistance Reader* (London: Routledge, 2005), 420.

⁵⁹ See Gunter Bischof, *Cold War Respite: The Geneva Summit of 1955* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

the increase of material capabilities and domestic modernization. As Hopf put it, “[g]reat power reinforced the modern appreciation for material power in world politics while reproducing the recognition of international norms of sovereignty” [emphasis original],⁶⁰ or also “[t]he Soviet great power identity in its relation to modernity implie[d] an abiding tension between an acknowledgement of great power status and the need to maintain a balance of power *vis-à-vis* the West...”⁶¹ From then on, the international normative discourse constrained the pursuit of interests, which were formulated purely in class terms - “understandings of the external world that included respect for sovereign rights were more likely,”⁶² and the vision of traditional great power included the adherence to those rules, while, at the same time, promoting military and scientific preponderance.

The metaphor of ‘race’ is rather telling in this respect. Arms and Moon ‘races’ were the projects in which then-current great powers were involved. Still inspired by the confrontation of existing ideologies, the US and the Soviet Union were racing neighbouring tracks, which led to different ideological end-points - the triumph of liberal democracy and communism respectively - but those tracks hardly intersected in the long-run. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the ideological confrontation completely lost its meaning. Instead, the new values of economic prosperity and international human rights were brought through the social discourse. Two tracks merged into one in the unipolar world, and Russia found itself in almost catastrophic lag. This was the time of Russia’s western orientation and arguable domination of a pro-Western identity, which, nevertheless, rejected “the deployment of any kind of hierarchy of states beyond the expectation that Russia was a modern great power or on the way to that status,”⁶³ i.e. the country was obviously lagging behind without willingness to abandon the idea of being a great power. The latter, however, implied

⁶⁰ Hopf, 105.

⁶¹ Ibid, 150.

⁶² Ibid, 105.

⁶³ Ibid, 214.

complying with the norms of high economic development, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and all other liberal democratic features, including human rights, the freedom of speech, etc. Consequently, due to its domestic perversions and the contradictory actions of the United States, as Hopf showed, in 1999, social discourse bore signs of the pro-Western identity's delegitimization, and a more nationalistic one was becoming dominant.

By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the global economic crisis, as well as the continuation of the US aggressive actions worldwide, challenged what had become known as 'Washington Consensus' and opened the way for a renegotiation and a redefinition of internationally accepted normative framework,⁶⁴ giving a chance to take an active part in this process to those, who strived for the status of a great power. This brings us to the need of answering the question: What happens to great powers, when the internationally accepted normative framework is in crisis? How, given the clear discursive demand for remaining a great power, do they articulate the idea of being one in the absence of the clear norms to adhere to, and hence, without undoubted international recognition? The next section of this chapter looks into what happens to the great power identity in the times of normative crises and the crises of international recognition.

1.3 Domestic great projects and historical politics as a compensation for the crisis of internationally recognized 'greatpowerness'

The problem of normative crises is twofold. Firstly, it is important to understand what can potentially happen to the great power discourse on the international level; and secondly, what will it mean for the societal self-understanding at home. Internationally, the crisis of norms is also the crisis of recognition. The pattern, according to which the system itself is being

⁶⁴ See Gleb Pavlovsky, "Konsensus ischet stolitsu" (Consensus Looks for the Capital), *Russian Journal* (March 26, 2010), <http://www.russ.ru/Mirovaya-povestka/Konsensus-ischet-stolicu> (accessed May 14, 2010).

constructed, is in flux. Then, how would a great power perceive itself, if the alternative of losing the status is simply unthinkable for the dominant discourse (as Hopf demonstrated for the Russian case), and if there is no such a thing as a great power without international recognition (recall the utter necessity of the status validation within the system)? The choice seems to be limited by two possibilities: it will either perceive itself as guarantor of the existing (though, somewhat delegitimized) normative framework, or as an actor, who prefers to adhere to a different normative framework, which would be an alternative model to the one, undergoing systemic problems. On the level of the discourse, the first possibility is likely to mean the discursive support for the existing norms and the criticism of their violation. This is what happens when, for instance, some of the international actors, employing normative language, express their dissatisfaction with the policies of a transgressor, who violates the norm.⁶⁵ The second option is only viable when the new language becomes available for political actors to speak (e.g. when a new set of metaphors comes into being with the help of social movements, altering the discourse, and is picked up by the decision-makers to be used strategically).⁶⁶

At home, the great power identity can also be challenged. Despite the fact that it is rooted on the level of social discourse, it cannot fulfill its true potential, since it is still 'uniquely dependant'⁶⁷ on the international system. Therefore, in the context of clear discursive demand for the great power status, an actor, undergoing the crisis of international recognition might need to compensate for the impossibility of proper manifestation of its international great power status by shifting the category of greatness to the domestic level.

⁶⁵ E.g. Robin Cook, a British politician, in his resignation speech criticized American invasion in Iraq, through appealing to the necessity of international consensus about the world order: "Our interests are best protected not by unilateral action but by multilateral agreement and a world order governed by rules" (taken from BBC, "Cook's resignation speech," BBC News Web site (March 18, 2003), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/2859431.stm> (accessed May 14, 2010)).

⁶⁶ An example of this process is given by Karin Fierke, while she answers the question: How an alternative to the Cold War became possible? in Karin M. Fierke, *Changing Games, Changing Strategies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 41-43, 154-209.

⁶⁷ Hopf, 290.

Arguably, this could be done either through the discursive rehabilitation of the great power's past that would work as a reminder about the status, or, more importantly, through pursuing various domestic great projects that substitute the international ones and make the greatness visible.

The former discursive practice becomes an occasion of historical politics. Interestingly enough, it does not seem to require the choice of particular direction. Functioning as a mere compensation, having no distinct political goals to achieve in the long-run, it can function well even in the complete absence of any teleology, since historical politics does not legitimize anything in the conventional sense of the word, it simply reminds of various historical periods, during which the great power status was unquestionable. Taking advantage of the irrationality of a subject, it can, for example, rehabilitate Stalin and pity the victims of Katyn, built Orthodox churches and restore Soviet symbols.

As for the great projects politics, their scale and the amount of funds invested normally exempt them from immediate domestic practicality. Instead, they might be justified discursively as 'great deeds' worthy of a great power, and thus, can effectively link the domestic and the international levels together. However, if the historical politics can function without legitimization in its traditional sense, and hence be devoid of teleological normativity, the justification of the great projects politics has to articulate the developmental direction to become the great power politics proper, as it necessarily has to promote this or another way that the project is advancing the state on. For instance, in the Soviet case some of the great projects were purposefully aimed at the urbanization of the country.⁶⁸ The ideals of modernity as well as the need for scientific and military preponderance for becoming a then-current great power, dictated the preferable teleology. Yet, the empirical case mentioned in the introduction digressed from this assumption. While reflecting the discursive demand

⁶⁸ See Hopf, 50-51.

for the great power status, it did not bear signs of any teleological normativity. If this is taken seriously, the nature of contemporary great projects politics can appear to be not as straightforward as it seems from Hopf. Since the evidence of teleology comes into play, when one abstracts away from the purely domestic realm and tries to posit a state within a wider international system, I will take an empirical example of the international political discourse and, again, without too thorough practical investigation, will give it a look in attempt to find the trace of teleological normativity.

Perhaps, Vladimir Putin's famous Munich Speech of 2007 could be taken as an instance of the Russian political discourse, which obtained international significance. Evidently, the problem of tracing its teleology is twofold. On the one hand, it could contain the manifestation of Russia's loyalty to the existing normative framework, and hence, its satisfaction with the present model of international system. On the other hand, the speech could reveal the country's dissatisfaction with the norms, which would imply the criticism of the existing model and an appeal for an alternative (existent, but not dominant, or not yet existent).

As for the first option, in the very beginning of his speech Putin heavily criticizes the existing normative order and the US as its flag-ship:

...what is a unipolar world? However one might embellish this term, at the end of the day it refers to one type of situation, namely one centre of authority, one centre of force, one centre of decision-making. It is world in which there is one master, one sovereign. And at the end of the day this is pernicious not only for all those within this system, but also for the sovereign itself because it destroys itself from within ... What is even more important is that the model itself is flawed because at its basis there is and can be no moral foundations for modern civilization.⁶⁹

This criticism is a sustained note throughout the text, which allows one to conclude that Putin consciously demonstrated his strong dissatisfaction with the existing international model.

However, when one tries to find the articulation of an alternative to the existing normative framework, it appears to be more difficult to accomplish. As Gleb Pavlovsky

⁶⁹ Vladimir Putin, *Speech at the 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy* (October 2, 2007), <http://wakeupfromyourslumber.com/node/646> (accessed May 31, 2010).

wrote in *Russian Journal*, Putin's Munich speech, which could have been an attempt to introduce the 'Moscow consensus,' failed to be one, as "it was not the language of values, it was not the language of new standards. Doctrinal weakness of the Munich speech is not in the radicalism of its rhetoric, but in the underdevelopment of the standards for politics of the new, post-American world."⁷⁰ But how does this doctrinal weakness have to be interpreted?

If Russia is not satisfied with adhering to the 'Washington normative model,' one could assume that they, in fact, belong to (or wish to create) an alternative model, as it is essential for any great power to receive international recognition in relation to the dominant normative framework. Then, what would this 'new Russian model' be? Apparently, the Munich Speech is not the right example to seek for its articulation. Why was this opportunity missed out by the Russian political elites? One can, indeed, think that Putin could have articulated the 'standards for the post-American world,' but for whatever reason preferred not to on this particular occasion. However, if a broader political discourse is addressed, it becomes obvious that the absence of teleology is something more complex than just Putin's unwillingness to articulate it. In his book *The Ethics of Postcommunism: History and Social Praxis in Russia* Sergei Prozorov argues that the whole of Putin's presidency could have been characterized by "the utter indifference to the contents of ideological maxims."⁷¹ In this Putinism differed from all other known forms of "authoritarianism of the left and the right, which limit[ed] themselves to the repertoire of *some* ideological orientations that [were] deployed against *others* in a Schmittean friend-enemy distinction."⁷² That is, the president was consciously refusing to formulate his teleo-ideological position, emphasizing his role as a 'manager,' who simply tried to fix the highly unstable and economically destitute condition of the 1990s. Therefore, the absence of teleological normativity has to be understood in this

⁷⁰ Pavlovsky, <http://www.russ.ru/Mirovaya-povestka/Konsensus-ischet-stolicu> (accessed May 14, 2010).

⁷¹ Prozorov, *The Ethics of Postcommunism*, 205.

⁷² *Ibid*, 204.

case not as a mere unwillingness or a dull inability, but as a conscious strategy or, perhaps, a systemic constraint of the domestic regime.

Apparently, while looking at the great power politics in contemporary Russia, one faces a situation, in which the authorities extensively employ the great projects and historical politics at home, in order to comply with the present discursive demand for the great power status, but at the same time they cancel all possible teleological ways of the country's political development. This becomes evident, when one looks at the discourse related to Russia's great projects as well as its international standing. On the other hand, according to Hopf, the idea of great power is a complex phenomenon and its articulation is only possible when one accounts for both domestic demand and international normativity. In the Russian case the second condition is clearly not fulfilled. Then, how is the articulation of this idea being performed, given the specificity of the situation? What is the true meaning and nature of the great projects politics in the contemporary Russian state? Unfortunately, Hopf's theoretical framework, being simply projected to the realities of today, cannot give a satisfactory answer. Hence, his theory will need to be developed, accounting for the latter theoretical findings. In an attempt to understand the nature of this process, I will address the previously mentioned work by Sergei Prozorov, which offers a theoretical interpretation of the direction-less politics of the contemporary Russian state, while still being able to explain the realization of great projects domestically.

Chapter 2: The Condition of Postcommunism and the Nature of the Great Projects Politics

2.1 '*Bespredel*' and the '*true end of history*': Russian politics in the 1990s

In this chapter I analyze Sergei Prozorov's reading of the postcommunist condition in the post-Soviet Russia, in attempt to explain the meaning of the great projects politics pursued by the Russian political elite and aimed at attaining the great power status, as well as the utter absence of any teleological normativity, which becomes apparent, if the relevant political discourse is being analyzed. I start with characterizing the specific (and truly post-historical in Prozorov's reading) condition of *bespredel*, which the Russian society found itself in at the beginning of the 1990-s. This is necessary, as, in Prozorov's view, the contemporary state of Russian politics came as a direct reaction to the peculiarities of the Yeltsinite epoch. Then, I look into the Putinite response to the mentioned condition. Finally, I try to incorporate Prozorov's theoretical findings into the framework of Hopf, in order to reveal the true meaning of the great projects politics in the post-historical Russian state.

In 1992, Francis Fukuyama argued that with the disappearance of ideological confrontation after the collapse of the Soviet Union, History witnessed the triumph of liberal democratic ideology, and thus, effectively came to an end. A mere 'catch-up' that was to be performed by all the other not yet fully democratic actors, was more a matter of time than of truthfulness. Having witnessed the defeat of communist ideology, no one was to question the truth that won a victory in the Cold War. However, after a short period of self-satisfying confidence, "the economic crises, societal degradation and political instability of the 1990s quickly made the 'end of history' thesis the object of a rather crude ridicule."⁷³ The fact of

⁷³ Prozorov, *The Ethics of Postcommunism*, x.

Russia's revival, which was combined with the authoritarian tendencies in the style of its contemporary leadership, made some observers of Russian politics address the narratives of the past.⁷⁴ Few noticed that in this way they confirmed that “the historical process has actually come to an end and no new knowledge [was] possible...”⁷⁵

Sergei Prozorov, in his turn, tries to tackle the question of how the Russian postcommunist condition actually has to be understood. Drawing mainly on Giorgio Agamben and Alexandre Kojève, the author analyzes late Soviet, Yeltsinite and contemporary periods of Russian history in an attempt to “bring the experience of ... postcommunism into the discourse of political theory by re-engaging with the ‘end of history’ thesis from an alternative theoretical perspective.”⁷⁶ Thus, the ‘end of history’, in Prozorov’s view, is not a triumph of any teleological project (as argued by Fukuyama), but rather a suspension of the teleological dimension as such. By disengaging from the public sphere and making the whole system utterly inoperative, the Russian society not only triggered the demise of the Soviet system, thereby resisting the most ambitious historical project, but also managed to undermine “every possibility of the recommencement of history during the 20 years of postcommunism.”⁷⁷ In other words, it was not the visible superiority of the liberal democratic way that *defeated* the ideological alternative, offered by the Soviet Union, but the general societal disengagement, which undermined the system from within and which (like in Hopf) could be effectively traced on the level of the cultural discourse (rock poetry of Boris Grebenshikov in Prozorov’s case). The mentioned disengagement is explained by Prozorov through Agamben’s reading of the Master-Slave paradox and his idea of ‘profane messianism,’ “realized in the figure of the Workless Slave ... who, by ‘simply’ ceasing to

⁷⁴ E.g. Paul du Quenoy, “Putin as Mussolini Redux: Leadership Style in 21st Century Russia,” (lecture, Central European University, Budapest, May 17, 2010).

⁷⁵ Prozorov, *The Ethics of Postcommunism*, x.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, xi.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 248.

work, breaks out of the struggle for recognition and thus breaks down the dialectical logic of Hegelian history as such.”⁷⁸

Prozorov finds the Russian word *bespredel* very apt for the purpose of describing the Russian postcommunist condition. The literal meaning of the term is ‘limitlessness’. However, “[o]riginally this term emerged as part of the criminal slang, in which it referred to the practices that violated the tacit rules of conduct in the hierarchical structure of Soviet underworld.”⁷⁹ It is important to mention that it does not designate ‘illegality’ (as any acts within the underworld were already illegal). “[R]ather [it indicated] the disappearance of the very framework in which the legal and the illegal could be distinguished ... In the late-Soviet and postcommunist period *bespredel* became the favourite term to describe the socio-economic disorder and rampant criminality that characterized the later years of Perestroika and particularly the ‘market reforms’ of the Yeltsin presidency.”⁸⁰ It becomes even more interesting, when one realizes that the mentioned limitlessness was actually limited within the solid borders of a nation state, i.e. it was localized, and yet the distinction between the legal and the illegal was an impossible one to make. In order to understand how the latter worked, I will address the Schmittian account of the functional political order with its two main founding principles, and then apply it to the realities of postcommunist Russia.

For Carl Schmitt, a political order can only work when it is founded on law (legitimacy) and is localized. Legitimacy in this case is grounded on the original act of land-taking (*Landnahme*) and grows out of the preexisting and pre-sovereign order. A sovereign political decision can be effectively made only when the law is applied to a limited political

⁷⁸ Alexander Astrov, “The janitor? Could be!” review of *The Ethics of Postcommunism: History and Social Praxis in Russia*, by Sergei Prozorov, *Radical Philosophy* (January/February 2010): 61.

⁷⁹ Prozorov, *The Ethics of Postcommunism*, 148.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

entity, which the sovereign takes the effective control of.⁸¹ Put simply, the law for everyone is law for no one, as, first, without the act of authoritative political decision, i.e. land-taking, the law, as a normative element, loses the anomic element of authority,⁸² and hence, its relation to life, thereby turning into ‘dead letter’ (in Agamben’s words, “[w]ithout a concrete decision the law is dead”),⁸³ and, second, the rule always has to be grounded in exception (or exclusion of the other), since the identity of the one, who is subject to the rule, can only be constructed in opposition to the one who is not. This principle gave birth to the post-Westphalian political order and the phenomenon of a nation-state. Despite the fact that the order was never as clear cut as it seemed (indeed, a nation, a culture and a state never coincided in reality),⁸⁴ this understanding, nevertheless, has become firmly rooted.

In the case of post-Soviet Russia, the state remained effectively localized - it did not try to extensively project its power across the national borders by violating the principle of non-intervention, up until the 2008 Russian-Georgian conflict; moreover, it fiercely protected its territorial integrity by all possible means, from Yeltsin’s bloody Chechen campaign to Putin’s advocacy of the doctrine of sovereign democracy.⁸⁵ It seemed the Russian elites were trying to ‘freeze’ the post-Soviet territorial boundaries, despite the fact that those limits were, actually, hardly historical, if not altogether artificial (e.g. in *The Russian Question at the End of the Twentieth Century* Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote “the [Soviet] breakup occurred mechanically along the false Leninist borders, usurping from us entire Russian provinces”).⁸⁶ But, according to Schmitt, the condition of localization alone is not enough for a viable

⁸¹ See John P. McCormick, “Fear, Technology, and the State: Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss, and the Revival of Hobbes in Weimar and National Socialist Germany,” *Political Theory*, 1994, 22/4: 621-2.

⁸² Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 86.

⁸³ Giorgio Agamben, “The State of Exception - Der Ausnahmezustand” (lecture, European Graduate School, Leuk-Stadt, Switzerland, August 2003).

⁸⁴ Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, “Beyond “Culture”: Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference,” *Cultural Anthropology*, 7, 1992: 6-8.

⁸⁵ The main points of the doctrine can be found in Derek Averre, “‘Sovereign Democracy’ and Russia’s Relations with the European Union,” *Demokratizatsiya* 15, 2 (Spring 2007): 177-182.

⁸⁶ Alexander Solzhenitsyn quoted in Igor Zevelev, *Russia and its New Diasporas* (Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 2001), 54.

political order to function properly. There has to be an ordering authority that would impose legitimacy. Precisely the latter appeared to be impossible to accomplish in the condition of Yeltsinite *bespredel*.

In order to understand why it was impossible to legitimize the order, one has to look deeper into the process of sovereign legitimization. For Hobbes, “[sovereign] power is not simply a means or an objective capability ... [I]t is a result of the resolution of fundamental problems and dilemmas in the construction of a potentially fragile and contingent political order ... it cannot be viewed in isolation from constraints and considerations surrounding its genesis and continued legitimacy.”⁸⁷ A Hobbesian sovereign has to possess the monopoly in imposing legitimacy on the subordinate elements, the monopoly in defining true and false, right and wrong, as “[f]or Hobbes, it is truth in the conventional sense that is absent. Without agreement upon what is good and bad, true and false ... the condition that he terms the ‘state of nature’ is inevitable.”⁸⁸ Therefore, any sovereign must never “allow any residual authority other than its own.”⁸⁹ Together with the impossibility of any international ‘social contract’,⁹⁰ it also means that any authority has to be absolute; it needs a pretention to universality. Figuratively speaking, it is a poor sovereign that never wants to conquer the world. Therefore, for an authority to be legitimate not only it has to be objectively able to impose an order, but also it needs a teleology, which would lead to its ultimate and universal truth. In other words, a sovereign can control and shape the space of its ‘dwelling’ only through advocating the truthfulness of the teleo-ideological direction of state’s development, since the legitimization of any political order is only possible when a certain conceiving strategy is

⁸⁷ Michael C. Williams, “Hobbes and International Relations: A Reconsideration,” *International Organization*, 2, 1996: 223-224.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 230.

⁸⁹ Kees Van der Pijl, *Global Rivalries from the Cold War to Iraq* (London: Pluto Press, 2006), 6.

⁹⁰ See Williams, 232.

presented as a means of meeting the ends of the chosen teleological way. That is, a sovereign must decide what the ultimate truth is and what ideological path the state is willing to accept.

In the Russian case, the sovereign decision was not impossible, but rather it was utterly inefficient. On the one hand, this was happening because of the mentioned non-relation between the Russian society and the state. As Prozorov put it, “The exodus of the society from the space of value-based political antagonism left Russian politics to its own devices, so that it increasingly resembled a spectacle with an ever-diminishing audience ... the anti-communist revolution ... was manifestly not democratic, let alone liberal, but rather *perfectly nihilist...*” [emphasis original].⁹¹ In the context of this nihilist revolution, any political decision was suspended as such, as, due to the mutual exclusion of the state and society from their respective abodes, it failed to be meaningful, being de-semantized instead. On the other hand, the author envisions Yeltsin as a defender not of “any specific form of order but the very possibility of trying out various courses of political development that, however, could always be played back, suspended or reversed with no consequences for the country.”⁹²

Therefore, the negation of the former socialist values and the suspension of all possible political projects, lead to a situation in which the positive content (as well as the ideological dimension) of the Yeltsinite regime, which could have provided the orientation for the further development, was simply withdrawn from politics.⁹³ In Prozorov’s words, “[i]t is evident that the postcommunist *bespredel* is precisely a materialization of this constitutive

⁹¹ Prozorov, *The Ethics of Postcommunism*, 54.

⁹² Prozorov, *The Ethics of Postcommunism* quoted in Astrov, 61.

⁹³ Even in his resignation speech on December 31, 1999, Yeltsin articulated his main mission (which, as he thought, he managed to accomplish during the 1990-s) not as making something out of the new Russia, but as closing the way back to the past (Boris Yeltsin, *Resignation Speech* (December 31, 1999), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUp4Z0eGV4o> (accessed June 3, 2010)).

void of the law as that which remains when the teleo-ideological normativity, by which power legitimizes itself, has been rendered inoperative.”⁹⁴

The previously mentioned ‘materialization of void’ led to a situation in which the understanding of ‘normal’ political order rapidly vanished from the political space. This is not to say that all political parties became colourless, rather this distinction appeared to be profoundly meaningless. For instance, during the Constitutional Crisis of 1993 the Communist Party fought for the salvation of parliamentarism, when the democrat Yeltsin advocated a more authoritarian constitution and used tanks to shoot at the Russian White House in the name of democratization. Furthermore, defeated and imprisoned leaders of the parliamentary opposition were not prosecuted, but, instead, were set free and could continue their political careers. In this historical (or, rather, post-historical) condition, everything became potentially ‘normal,’ and hence, nothing could claim the rightfulness of its norm.

Remaining localized, Russia underwent complete cancellation of inner normative limits, and thus, reduced its political sphere to Arendtian ‘public sphere’. The latter, still being limited by the ‘city walls’ (national borders), was no longer limited by the commonly accepted norms. In the absence of normative limits (i.e. shared legitimacy, which in the context of *bespredel* never managed to emerge) the actors tend to act bravely, but wildly. It is an utterly misbalanced space, dangerous and unpredictable.⁹⁵ In the Russian political discourse this time is remembered as the ‘dashing nineties’. This is a loose translation of the Russian phrase *likhie devyanostye*, which not only emphasizes the rather vigorous and inconsequential character of the country’s development, but also bears an explicitly negative connotation of the ‘dangerous times.’

⁹⁴ Prozorov, *The Ethics of Postcommunism*, 201.

⁹⁵ See Arendtian distinction between public and political spheres in Ancient Greece in Hannah Arendt, “Introduction into Politics,” in Jerome Kohn ed. *The Promise of Politics* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 93-153.

2.2 ‘Dictatorship of law’: Putinite era and the lack of political identity

The rise of Putin’s Russia, according to Prozorov, came about through the reappropriation of the condition of Yeltsinite *bespredel* and creation of a space “to which no historical telos can lead and which we have never left,”⁹⁶ a space with no identity or direction. This part of the chapter provides theoretical grounds that underlie the mentioned process, and demonstrates its practical implications, as were prophesied by the author.

While trying to understand Putin’s response to the anomic inoperocity of the Yeltsin period, Prozorov concludes by saying that the transformation became possible through the reappropriation of the space of *bespredel* “as the new abode of the postcommunist subject.”⁹⁷ For this, Putin introduced a rather oxymoronic principle of the ‘dictatorship of law,’ which is interpreted by Prozorov through the Agambenian framework:

‘[D]ictatorship of law’ ... supplements the ‘proper’ (legal) power of the law with its very opposite (‘dictatorship’) that reveals that the former has been rendered inoperative and requires the facilitating force of the latter to maintain the semblance of the existence of the law ... [it] exemplifies a ‘commissarial type’ of dictatorship, in which the application of the law is suspended to salvage the concrete order that the law inscribes.⁹⁸

Thus, Putin tried to save the law by suspending its application, thereby introducing a generalized ‘state of exception,’ which could ensure the survival of the law in a state that is inoperative. However, can the legitimacy be reclaimed through its merging with dictatorship, and most importantly, to what extent does the Putin strategy change the nature of the previously described regime?

To answer the first question one has to address Agamben and mention the distinction he makes between legitimacy and authority, as well as the way they interact. In *State of Exception* he writes:

⁹⁶ Prozorov, *The Ethics of Postcommunism*, 248.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 199.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 202-203.

The normative element [i.e. law] needs the anomic element [i.e. authority] in order to be applied, but, on the other hand, *auctoritas* can assert itself only in the validation or suspension of *potestas* ... As long as the two elements remain correlated yet conceptually, temporally, and subjectively distinct their dialectic - though founded on fiction - can nevertheless function in some way. But when they tend to coincide in a single person, when the state of exception ... becomes the rule, then the juridico-political system transforms itself into a killing machine.⁹⁹

This, of course, does not mean that the generalized state of exception unavoidably brings death and tyrannical brutality; however, there is no mechanism within such a system that can prevent the latter from happening. Legitimacy and authority, being bound and blurred together, fail to resume the dialectic that necessarily has to be present and, consequently, both fail to acquire their meaning. Prozorov's answer to the second question is unambiguous:

Reconstituting what is already *destitute*, the contemporary regime remains as post-historical as Yeltsin's in its evacuation of all historical tasks from the sphere of politics, yet, unlike the Yeltsin presidency, ventures to order the field of postcommunist *bespredel* through the proliferation of purely ritualistic manifestations of authority that maintain a semblance of order amid the generalized state of exception [emphasis original].¹⁰⁰

These crucially important quotations help understand, how, first, Putin managed to encounter and stabilize the situation of *bespredel*; and, second, how he, while doing so, failed to resume the historical process and did not acquire any distinguishable identity or meaningful political authority.

This order introduces an unusual situation of the rule of power, which appears to be devoid of any ideological content. The power *as such* is colourless, it can take any side and, as long as there is nothing for it to achieve, it remains there for its own sake. To use Andrei Fursov's fortunate neologism, one can call it *cratocracy*.¹⁰¹ The impossibility to counter *cratocracy* from any perspective becomes apparent, as there is nothing it can be put in opposition to. It seems that, remaining technically illegitimate in the absence of any historical project, which might have helped establish legitimacy for the sake of meeting the ends of

⁹⁹ Agamben, *State of Exception*, 86.

¹⁰⁰ Prozorov, *The Ethics of Postcommunism*, 203.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 207.

state's development, *cratocracy* is left with formalized rituals that are devoid of any historical content. It acts like the Kojévian *snob*, who leads the life “according to totally formalized values - that is, values, completely empty of all ‘human’ content in the ‘historical sense’,”¹⁰² who “tirelessly reproduces [rituals] with no developmental or progressive effects whatsoever.”¹⁰³ Then, what happens, when a state becomes the Kojévian *snob*, incapable of political decision and devoid of any meaningful teleology? In order to answer this question I will address another article by Prozorov that can potentially give an explanation.

2.3 Contemporary great projects and the ritual of being a great power

It seems, when a political system is rendered inoperative, when power is left with no meaningful ideology and can only manifest itself through reproducing the rituals that do not advance it towards anything but simply let it stay in power, nothing makes the state cease to exist. Potentially, it can support the illusion of being a ‘real’ political actor for however long, despite the fact that the conduct of politics proper is no longer possible. Having nothing to achieve in the long-run, it can simply focus on the immediate practicality and pursue its own benefit by working out the problems as they arise. This, arguably, can be one interpretation of Prozorov's account of the Russian foreign policy from 2008 onwards. In his later article Prozorov analyzes the 2008 Russian-Georgian conflict in the context of the post-Soviet spatial order and, in his words, tries to “identif[y] the logic of Russia's foreign policy orientation in the post-Soviet space in the aftermath of Georgia war.”¹⁰⁴ Drawing on Walter Benjamin's theory of baroque sovereignty, the author argues that contemporary Russian foreign policy complies with the role, which Benjamin called *Intriguer* (Intrigant). More

¹⁰² Alexandre Kojève quoted in Prozorov, *The Ethics of Postcommunism*, 71.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 71.

¹⁰⁴ Sergei Prozorov, “From *Katechon* to *Intrigant*: The Russian-Georgian War and the Breakdown of the Post-Soviet Nomos” (forthcoming).

precisely, the current realities (the mentioned conflict being one of them) suggest that Russian policymakers, balancing between the roles of *tyrant* (who would accumulate power lacking any sort of restraint) and *martyr* (who would fall victim to the “disproportion between the unlimited hierarchical dignity with which he is divinely invested and the humble estate of his humanity”¹⁰⁵) employ the policy of ceaseless plotting and scheming.

So far, this works fine for them because of two factors. On the one hand, instead of reintroducing ideology the policymakers, being entirely aware of the nature of their political identity, as well as of the utter impossibility of enacting their transcendence, can well resort to purely immanent governance that consists of short-term plots and conspiracies and that does not bear any signs of a meaningful long-term political project.¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, in order to pursue this strategy, Russia as a rather influential and important political actor can afford making certain political moves that would be unthinkable for a less powerful state (e.g. to intervene in Georgia, if needed).

Prozorov is also right when he argues that the anomic condition, which appeared to be rather stable, being localized within the borders of a nation state, might eventually fail to maintain itself as an entity *in time and space*, while projected to a wider post-Soviet political realm, since it was precisely the localization that allowed it to exist as “an entity distinct from others.”¹⁰⁷ The author compares this political body with the Agambenian camp, inside which the norms are suspended and everything becomes possible, and reminds us that the latter “only exists by virtue of a prior delimitation that transforms it into a zone of confinement, marked by a fundamental impossibility of flight. It is only due to these limits that the camp can function as the space of the horrifying experiment with the limitless.”¹⁰⁸ Then he suggests

¹⁰⁵ Benjamin quoted in Prozorov, “From *Katechon* to *Intrigant*.”

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

that “the ‘corrupt energy of schemers’ in Russia may find itself severely limited by the removal of the limits that contain its limitless anomie.”¹⁰⁹

However, leaving the latter constraint aside, is it indeed the case that any state can follow the logic of *Intriguer* and function well without articulating its teleology? As was mentioned previously, a *cratocracy* cannot but perform formalized rituals that are devoid of any historical content and, consequently, become just occasions of cratocratic exhibitionism.¹¹⁰ Evidently, there is a variety of those rituals - that of a democratic ally, of an opponent of unipolarity etc. One would assume that a particularly important ritual for Russia is that of being a great power, given the ever-present discursive demand demonstrated by Hopf. Any Russian sovereign to remain in power cannot just follow the international routine without trying to act like the leader of a great power. Yet, is it possible to conduct great power politics in a mere ritualistic manner?

It follows from Hopf that a great power necessarily has to articulate its teleological normativity, as in the absence of one it ceases to obtain the great power status on the international level, since the international recognition is its essential component. But the only possible way of conduct for a state, which lives in the post-historical condition of postcommunism, is direction-less scheming presented by Prozorov in his later article. Indeed, in this case all other policies are systemically constrained. Therefore, Russia faces the need of being recognized as a great power domestically, but it becomes evident that it is unable to pursue the great power politics proper, which requires a transcendental goal of its political development that Russia cannot possibly articulate, given the nature of its identity-less domestic regime. Then, how can it solve this paradox? Apparently, there is nothing left for it in this situation except for a mere simulation of the mentioned status. In an attempt to perform the latter Russian political elites simply have to shift the idea of greatness into the

¹⁰⁹ Prozorov, “From *Katechon* to *Intrigant*.”

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

domestic realm and realize various great projects that create the illusion of the country's great status and comply with the domestic demand. In this light it becomes clear what the meaning of the great projects politics in contemporary Russia is. By pursuing this policy the faceless Russian power engages in the domestic simulation of being a great power, thereby fulfilling the need of being perceived as one. Nevertheless, it is needless to say that this illusion remains an illusion, and the discursive digressions, discovered in the introduction to this work are worthy confirmations. Perhaps they appear because of the fact that the ritual of a great power seems to be an oxymoronic combination. The acute need in articulation of Russia's prospective international standing, given that the studied great project (the 'Okhta-Centre') is realized, conflicts with the ritualistic nature of its actual implementation. Therefore, this articulation is suspended, which makes it possible for an attentive observer to uncover the illusionary nature of its justification.

All in all, this work demonstrated that, still being extremely valuable apart, both theoretical frameworks, if merged together, can advance a researcher in his/her understanding of the specificities of postcommunist political identity even further, and give an unambiguous answer to the main research question: what is the meaning of the great projects politics in contemporary Russia? The attempted theoretical integration helped overcome the limitations of both approaches, namely, Hopf's inability to account for the absence of teleological normativity, when the great projects politics is concerned, and Prozorov's focus on the domestic realm as well as the absence of the idea of great power, which, is, indeed, an integral part of the Russian political discourse.

Conclusion

The research addressed the problem of Russia's revival and the nature of its present political identity. It demonstrated that the realist reading of the country's comeback as a milder version of the USSR seems to be somewhat superficial and cannot account for certain features of its contemporary political standing (namely, the persistent need of envisioning Russia not as a recovered state, but as a not yet fully recovered great power, even during the hardest times of transition). When Hopf's social constructivism was considered, it became apparent that the mentioned status was, in fact, firmly embedded within the multiple identities of the Russian society and the alternative of losing it was altogether unthinkable for both policymakers and the population. It simply did not comply with the societal self-understanding. This helped explain the ever-present discursive representation of Russia being a great power.

In an attempt to extend Hopf's framework into the present days, I went further to examine a real life example, which could potentially demonstrate that the discursive demand remained unchanged. I decided to focus on one of the great projects that the Russian political elites try to implement today (the 'Okhta-Centre'), as, given the necessary duality of the great power identity (i.e. its domestic roots and the need of systemic recognition), it could make the check account for both levels, thereby ensuring its theoretical validity. Despite the fact that the analysis confirmed the presence of the discursive demand for the great power status, it also revealed the utter absence of any teleological normativity in the project's justification. The latter detail raised questions about the nature of Russia's great power politics, since for Hopf the great power identity proper, due to the need of a normative component, always had to be defined in teleological terms.

Trying to answer the question, what the true meaning of the great projects politics in contemporary Russia is, and thus, attempting to explain this digression, I addressed the theory of Sergei Prozorov. He interpreted the Russian postcommunist condition as the Kojévian ‘true end of history,’ which did not designate a triumph of any teleological project, but rather a suspension of the teleological dimension as such. The author argued that, having disengaged from the political sphere in the late 1980s, the Russian society rendered the whole system inoperative and “left Russian politics to its own devices.”¹¹¹ The latter led to the cancellation of all historical tasks and meaningful political projects, and hence, to the suspension of the teleo-ideological dimension. This conditioned the impossibility of defining sovereign legitimacy and deprived Russia’s power of any political identity. As a result of this, in the 1990s, the country found itself in a situation of *bespredel*, which implied the localization of the absence of legitimate order. Subsequently, president Putin, trying to deal with the mentioned condition, introduced the principle of ‘dictatorship of law’ that, nevertheless, remained as post-historical as the Yeltsinite epoch in its evacuation of all long-term political projects, but led to the necessity of ordering the mentioned condition through purely ritualistic manifestations of authority. Putinite *cratocracy* (or power that remains in power for its own sake), having no teleological goals to achieve and no ideological stands to be opposed from, maintains “a semblance of order amid the generalized state of exception”¹¹² - creates a state of exception that becomes the rule.

In this condition, the ritualized actions of an actor substitute the politics proper, thereby relegating its policies from those directed towards a transcendental goal to purely immanent governance, normally characterized by immediate practicality. Consequently, it becomes impossible for such an actor to pursue the great power politics in its traditional sense, since the latter always requires the articulation of teleological normativity. Therefore, a

¹¹¹ Prozorov, *The Ethics of Postcommunism*, 54.

¹¹² Ibid, 203.

state, whose political identity bears a clear demand for the great power status (such as Russia, for instance), cannot but simulate the mentioned type of politics by resorting to the rehabilitation of various historical narratives and the implementation of domestic great projects that would work as a substitution for the ‘real’ great deeds. However, this ritualized great power politics always fails to express teleology, and thus, uncovers its illusionary nature, making it possible for an attentive observer to understand the true meaning of those great projects.

Thus, the present research provided an insight into the problem of identity construction in the condition postcommunism. It gave an account of Hopf’s theory of social constructivism and projected it into the present day. While doing so, I emphasized Hopf’s inability to interpret the absence of teleological normativity in the justification of the Russia’s contemporary great deeds. In order to solve this problem, I addressed Prozorov’s reading of postcommunist condition. The latter, however, was limited within the domestic realm and lacked the account of the Russian great power identity, which, according to Hopf, can never be overlooked, due to its permanent presence the social discourse that shapes the Russian political identity. The merging of the mentioned approaches, made the resulting theoretical construct applicable to the contemporary Russian condition and capable of explaining the nature of the country’s great projects politics.

As for the cratocratic condition itself, it seems, at the first sight, that, without any possibility of meaningful ideological opposition, it can remain in power for however long. It would just support the illusion of being a ‘real’ political actor through the implementation of the mentioned ritualized practices, and if some practices appear to be unfeasible, than it can simply construct its false identity along somewhat different lines. At least, it is certain that “there is ... little sense in opposing the postcommunist cratocracy with an alternative project

that it will ... incorporate into its ritualized edifice...”¹¹³ However, one also has to remember that the generalized state of exception is a very specific condition where there is no possible way to distinguish between right and wrong, legal or illegal, there are no embedded mechanisms that can establish a moral ground or prevent horrifying inhumanity. On the one hand, of course, it gives the *cratocracy* a potentiality of slipping into a disaster. But at the same time, it opens up a way for the pure facticity of human action to prevail over whatever the regime would be able to come up with. When everything is potentially normal and, yet, nothing truly is, an activity can exhaust itself in the mere fact of its being performed, and hence, anything that happens can be equal in its performative strength (or weakness). Therefore, provided that the facticity of the action is manifested as its conceptual extremity at the same time, this action can potentially break away from the paradox of the anomic inoperocity.

The signs of resistance can already be visible, if one looks closer at the realities on the ground. Interestingly enough, the less ideologically coherent the Russian opposition becomes, the more it matters and the stronger resonance it provokes. It seems, teleologically incompatible entities unite in the name of pure action, and in the absence of any explicitly political claims they struggle for the realization of the potentiality of the present (31st article marches being one example).¹¹⁴ Protesters meet for the sake of the right to meet, thus positing the fact of their action as its ultimate result. Yet, remaining somewhat political they fall victims of the ritualistic fight with extremism. When the apolitical discursive opposition is concerned, no doubt, one could address the studied case of the ‘Okhta-Centre’ and look at those, who manifest their discontent (by the way, rather successfully). However, the analysis

¹¹³ Prozorov, *The Ethics of Postcommunism*, 217.

¹¹⁴ Radio Free Europe – Radio Liberty, “Russian Police Break Up ‘Article 31’ Protests,” http://www.rferl.org/content/Russian_Police_Break_Up_Article_31_Protests/2000057.html (accessed June 3, 2010).

of the mentioned mode of resistance cannot be possibly covered within the limits of the present research. Therefore, I will leave it until the further investigation.

Appendix 1: Classes of Content

1. The role of St. Petersburg in the world:

“In my view, this is the first project in many years which is worthy of the city itself” (Dmitry Meskhiev)¹¹⁵

“St. Petersburg is a cultural capital, we try to be in the avant-garde of everything new and progressive” (Dmitry Meskhiev)

“We believe that [after the erection of the tower] St. Petersburg will in practice become the world cultural capital. This is needed in order to let internationally important events happen in the city” (Andrei Konstantinov)¹¹⁶

“St. Petersburg is a unique phenomenon in the world culture, it is far more important than the history of separate buildings” (Sergei Korneyev)¹¹⁷

“The significance of St. Petersburg as a world cultural and political centre steadily grows” (Sergei Korneyev)

“We have already got into the world trend of city-tourism” (Sergei Korneyev)

“I serve art for thirty years in order to redound the fame of the city” (Yuri Alexandrov)¹¹⁸

“St. Petersburg, unfortunately, remains a city with provincial destiny in the eyes of many city-dwellers” (Yuri Alexandrov)

“It is impossible to live in a five-million megapolis, the largest city of the Baltic Sea region and one of the biggest cities in Europe like in a museum” (Vladimir Bortko)¹¹⁹

2. The project as a normal practice:

“In my opinion, it is high time to realize on the banks of Neva a number of great, ambitious and in all respects innovative architectural projects - like those that were accomplished by Peter the Great, while he was building a new Russian capital” (Dmitry Meskhiev)

“Do we indeed need the second Peter, who would have stopped all meaningless arguments and said “Let the project be!” He knew what the modern thinking was” (Dmitry Meskhiev)

¹¹⁵ Dmitry Meskhiev, “Po stopam Petra Velikogo” (Following Peter the Great), <http://www.ohta-center.ru/ru/comments/?id=97> (accessed May 26, 2010).

¹¹⁶ Andrei Konstantinov, “Novatorskomu iskusstvu - sovremennye zaly” (Advanced Stages for Advanced Art), <http://www.ohta-center.ru/ru/comments/?id=83> (accessed May 26, 2010).

¹¹⁷ Sergei Korneyev, “Istoriya eshcho ne dopisana” (The History is Not Yet Written), <http://www.ohta-center.ru/ru/comments/?id=87> (accessed May 26, 2010).

¹¹⁸ Yuri Alexandrov, “Pryzhok v vysotu” (A Jump into the Height), <http://www.ohta-center.ru/ru/comments/?id=71> (accessed May 26, 2010).

¹¹⁹ Vesti.ru, ““Okhta-tsentr” raskolol Sankt-Peterburg” (‘Okhta-Centre’ split St. Petersburg), <http://www.vesti.ru/videos?vid=247313> (accessed May 26, 2010).

“Important for St. Petersburg (but not always unambiguous in the eyes of the contemporaries) were the constructions of Peter and Paul’s Fortress with its spire, St. Isaac’s Cathedral, and later the building of ‘Singer’ company with its famous dome, which was breaking the linear horizontal of Nevsky Prospect ... Isn’t it the time to leave our mark in history, creating our own ‘St. Isaac’s’?” (Dmitry Meskhiev)

“Last year, London was recognized to be the most visited tourist centre of the world. It overtook Paris. It is true, that the Tower of London remains the historic heart of the British capital. A lot of tourists visit this place, and none of them are troubled with the fact that there are a couple of skyscrapers around the fortress, including the famous buildings by Norman Foster” (Sergei Korneyev)

“London is a modern and ever-changing city. This is what attract a lot of tourists” (Sergei Korneyev)

“Paris also has new districts. Although, they are not situated next to the Louvre or Notre-Dame de Paris. One has to build wisely” (Victor Lebedev)¹²⁰

“I used to be fond of the French literature - Zola, Maupassant - and I remember what they wrote about the Eiffel Tower. They were not the most stupid people in France. And now it is not the Louvre or Arc de Triomphe that are widely recognized to be the symbols of Paris, it is this ‘ugly’ tower” (Boris Eifman)¹²¹

“When one looks at the famous Hearst Tower by Norman Foster in New York and also the creations of other talented architects, it is possible to call them whatever - a corn, a melon, a lamp. But first and foremost, these are the unique exemplars of the architectural thought, which people from all over the world come to visit. Likewise, they will come to St. Petersburg to visit the ‘Okhta-Centre’” (Yuri Alexandrov)

“It was mentioned not once: any architectural innovation first received an ambiguous treatment from the dwellers of all world capitals, including London and Paris” (Boris Mironov)¹²²

“We cannot live according to the laws of tiny Venice” (Viatcheslav Semenenko)¹²³

3. The consequences of the project’s rejection:

“The life of a modern city cannot be like dead-water. Dead-water is a swamp” (Andrei Konstantinov)

“The breaking of regulations is a condition of civilizational development. If we had not been

¹²⁰ Victor Lebedev, “‘Okhta-tsentr’ ukrasit depressivny rayon” (‘Okhta-Centre’ Will Decorate a Depressing District), <http://www.okhta-center.ru/ru/comments/?id=82> (accessed May 26, 2010).

¹²¹ Boris Eifman, “Bashnyu ‘Gazproma’ podderzhal ne radi pomoshchi vlastey” (I Supported the ‘Gazprom’ Tower Not Because of the Help of the Government), <http://www.okhta-center.ru/ru/comments/?id=75> (accessed May 26, 2010).

¹²² Boris Mironov, “‘Okhta-tsentr’ v tryokh rakursakh” (‘Okhta-Centre’ in Three Perspectives), <http://www.okhta-center.ru/ru/comments/?id=65> (accessed May 26, 2010).

¹²³ Viatcheslav Semenenko, “Peterburg ne mozhet zhit’ po zakonam malenkoy Venetsii” (St. Petersburg Cannot Live According to the Laws of Tiny Venice), <http://www.fontanka.ru/2010/04/27/040/> (accessed May 26, 2010).

breaking them, we would have lived in a primitive society” (Boris Eifman)

“In the worst case it [the city] will turn into a beautiful ruin (this is what already happens because of the peculiar features of our climate and the lack of financial capabilities for the restoration), in the best case - it will become a city-museum, a tourist Mecca, which will, unfortunately, be of a little avail for those who live in it” (Alexei Nilov)¹²⁴

“We cannot allow the Northern Capital to turn into a city-museum” (Yuri Alexandrov)

4. The consequences of the project’s acceptance:

“To go forward along the way of St. Petersburg development” (Dmitry Meskhiev)

“The ‘Gazprom Tower’ will become a giant step forward for the city, if the economic development is concerned. The ‘Okhta-Centre’ means money to the city treasury and a big amount of workplaces” (Dmitry Meskhiev)

“This unique construction ... will transform the whole district” (Dmitry Meskhiev)

“The construction of an architecturally unique business-centre with a new altitude dominance seems to be a logical phase in the city’s development” (Sergei Korneyev)

“I think this project is not only a symbol of power, but also of a new thinking and energy that St. Petersburg needs for quite a while” (Andrei Konstantinov)

“The construction of the ‘Okhta-Centre’ - the headquarters of the biggest Russian company - will trigger the development of St. Petersburg, not only economic (I mean the unprecedented investments that ‘Gazprom’ is ready to provide), but also cultural” (Andrei Konstantinov)

“‘Okhta-Centre’ will become the centre of culture” (Andrei Konstantinov)

“The project that might become a decoration and a new symbol of the city” (Alexei Nilov)

“With the realization of the project, the city will get a new, major and up-to-date cultural centre with a museum and a few theatre and music venues”

5. The new image of St. Petersburg:

“We believe that [after the erection of the tower] St. Petersburg will in practice become the world cultural capital” (Andrei Konstantinov)

“Those are the fundamentals of the philosophy ... of the way of life, which has to reach a new qualitative level” (Andrei Konstantinov)

“It is evident that the business tourism will develop” (Sergei Korneyev)

“The city cannot freeze in its development for centuries” (Alexei Nilov)

¹²⁴ Alexei Nilov, “Iz bolot - k nebesam” (From Swamp to Heaven), <http://www.okhta-center.ru/ru/comments/?id=74> (accessed May 26, 2010).

“The progress is always connected with a theory of a great leap forward” (Yuri Alexandrov)

“Innovations that would become the symbols of the new time” (Yuri Alexandrov)

“Will our city develop further? What should the new St. Petersburg be like? This has to be decided by those who live and work here - by us, the city-dwellers” (Vladimir Barkanov)¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Vladimir Barkanov, “Kakim budet gorod - reshat' gorozhanam” (It Is Up to the Dwellers What the City Should Look Like), <http://www.ohta-center.ru/ru/comments/?id=66> (accessed May 26, 2010).

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