

Saving the Self

Post-Soviet Russia's Search for Ontological Security

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Abstract

When the Soviet Union collapsed, Russia became embroiled in turmoil. Its economy crashed, and Russians' dreams of becoming a normal, Western country did not come to fruition. In the international arena, initially, Russia strove for cooperation with the West, yet as its attempts to integrate within the Western liberal world order failed, it resumed perceiving the West as a threat. Under Putin, Russia resumed cooperation with the West in order to restore its great power status and improve its economy. When it was important for its interests, it continued, however, to balance against the West. Yet some of its actions balancing the West have undermined its soft power without bringing material benefits, thus appearing irrational. Mainstream theories are able to explain certain aspects of Russian foreign policy, yet their analysis is sometimes incomplete. This thesis aims to explain Russia's behavior as a response to ontological security and identity needs of its domestic society, which seeks to restore a coherent historical narrative of itself. It argues that to understand the shift, it is important to consider the experiences of the Russian people and the socialization of its elites. This thesis seeks to add to existing scholarship by Anthony Giddens, Ayse Zarakol, Jennifer Mitzen, and Brent Steele, among others, on ontological security by examining Russian domestic society and Russia's foreign policy during the transition. To explore views of the West in Russia's domestic society, it introduces an interdisciplinary approach and seeks insights on Russian publics by analyzing Russian films of the era.

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Introduction

“I cannot forecast to you the action of Russia. It is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.”

-Winston Churchill

If we accept the dominant propositions that states are only interested in power and advancing their interests, the Dima Yakovlev Law is confusing. The law was passed on December 28, 2012, by the Russian Duma as a response to the Magnitsky Act, which identifies individuals seen as responsible for the death in prison of lawyer and whistle-blower Sergei Magnitsky, prohibits their entry to the United States and blocks them from using American banks. Russian leaders saw the Act as an attempt to intervene through economic pressure in Russia’s internal affairs. The Dima Yakovlev Law reciprocates the Magnitsky Act by banning certain individuals from entering Russia. A more controversial aspect of the Law is the ban on adoptions of Russian children by American citizens. That provision undermines Russian interests without providing any clear benefits. As U.S. Senator Mary Landrieu stated, the Law doesn’t hurt the United States; “instead of taking their outrage [with the Magnitsky Act] out on the United States, they punish their own children.”¹ The law makes Russian government appear capricious, willing to undermine its image and its interests without actually hurting any of America’s national interests. While an argument could be made that the Dima Yakovlev Law enjoys support among the Russian public,² the reason most commonly cited for supporting law is a desire to see Russian children grow up in Russia. Furthermore, there have been marches and rallies in Moscow to protest the law, causing embarrassment for the Russian government.³ A Kremlin insider was quoted in *Forbes* stating that “I have not met one person in the White House who defended this law.”⁴ Ironically, the law passed on the day when *Russia in Global Affairs* published an article by Foreign Minister Lavrov, in which he states that soft power is “obviously one of the main components of countries’ international influence” and that “Russia is well behind other countries in this respect.” The law undermines Russian soft power in two ways: it

¹ Landrieu, Mary “The Dima Yakovlev Law Does Not Hurt the United States, It’s Cruel to Russia’s Own Children.” Institute of Modern Russia. <http://imrussia.org/en/us-russia/425-us-senator-mary-landrieu-the-dima-yakovlev-law-does-not-hurt-the-united-states-its-cruel-to-russias-own-children>.

² Itar-Tass. “Opros VZIOM: Bolshinstvo Rossiyan poderjalo “zakon Dimy Yakovleva.”” <http://www.itar-tass.com/c1/624530.html>.

³ “Marsh za otmenu ‘zakona Dimy Yakovleva’ v centre Moskvyy.” Interfax. <http://www.interfax.ru/russia/txt.asp?id=284862>.

⁴ “Putin i deti: kak ‘zakon Dimy Yakovleva’ raskolol rossiyskoe rukovodstvo.” *Forbes.ru*. <http://www.forbes.ru/sobytiya/231431-putin-i-deti-kak-zakon-dimy-yakovleva-raskolol-rossiiskoe-rukovodstvo>.

discredits Russian government as a rubber stamp for Putin, who appears as both petty and weak while exposing the miserable state of Russia's orphanages.⁵ Russian policy here and in other instances, such as the rhetoric during the Georgia War or the arrest of Pussy Riot, does not seem rational, as it fails to bring clear benefits to Russia and undermines its soft power. Thus, we need to seek other reasons for Russia's behavior.

Purpose, Theory, and Case Selection

My main purpose in this thesis is to show that these actions are not simply capricious but respond to certain identity and ontological security needs of Russian public. I do that by examining the discourse in Russian film, using it to gain a better understanding of discourse in Russia. I have chosen Russia as Russian foreign policy toward the West can seem erratic, shifting from cooperation to balancing, and traditional IR theories of realism and liberalism provide insufficient explanations. A constructivist approach using ontological security as a theoretical lens has the potential to supplement existing explanations of Russia's foreign policy. Additionally, looking at Russia through an ontological security lens has particular promise, as it has traditionally struggled with defining its identity, oscillating between Eurasian and West-centric discourses.⁶ Lastly, an important aspect of the theory deals with routinization of behavior in order to maintain a sense of familiarity of the self through interactions with others.⁷ The Cold War discourse created a routine that was threatening to the physical security of Russians but that also created a sense of ontological security and an awareness of agency of Russia's international behavior. With the end of the Cold War, Russia sought to increase its physical security by working with the West in the hopes of integrating in a liberal international environment, yet this approach failed and violated Russia's historical continuity, disrupted its perception of agency and undermined a familiar routine of 'othering' the West. This resulted in ontological insecurity.

⁵ Fisher, Max. "The real reason Russia wants to ban adoptions by 'dangerous' American families." Washington Post. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2012/12/28/the-real-reason-russia-wants-to-ban-adoptions-by-dangerous-american-families/>.

⁶ Tsygankov, Andrei P. *Russia's foreign policy change and continuity in national identity*. 2nd ed. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010. 5-8.

⁷ Giddens, Anthony. *Modernity and self-identity: self and society in the late modern age*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991. 36.

Flemming Splidsboel Hansen has described Putin's Russia through the lens of ontological security and suggested that more research is needed to trace the development of Russia's ontological insecurity.⁸ Ayşe Zarakol has looked at it as well, yet her work looked primarily at state interactions. I examine the presence of ontological security in Russian society by looking at interactions between policy and mass culture, namely Russian cinema. During the *perestroika* and the 1990s, Russia's international behavior changed several times, from a pro-Western orientation, to containment, to occasional cooperation while preserving geopolitical interests. This has occurred under the same elites and thus is particularly difficult to rationalize. Thus, this period is uniquely appropriate for an examination of Russia's domestic culture and how it influenced the perception of itself and its 'other'.

Society, Culture, Foreign Policy

In what follows I will examine the ontological security debate and apply it to Russian foreign policy by examining Russia's domestic society through its cinema. I don't claim that other theories are wrong or that analyzing states on the structure level or elite level lacks the ability to describe Russia. Rather, I claim that there are additional details that are available to the IR scholar from analysis of popular culture and domestic society, and that ontological security can provide an additional lens of understanding. I accept Ted Hopf's proposition that state identity and its impact on international relations (IR) is most visible at the domestic level, rather than on the level of structure and interaction between states,⁹ and Iver Neumann's call for use of popular culture to supplement analysis of IR.¹⁰ While traditional IR theories have been averse to interdisciplinary approaches, this has been changing as constructivist and post-structuralist voices arrive to the discipline. Cinema is particularly revealing in the Russian case as most Soviet citizens had minimal interaction with the West and their view of it as the 'other' was primarily constructed through films and literature. Additionally, Russian film industry follows a similar trajectory to that of the Russian state. Exuberant with its sudden freedom to make movie without the restraints of censorship, thus joining the Western

⁸ Hansen, Flemming Splidsboel. "Russia and the search for ontological security." Audio blog post. Carnegie Endowment for National Peace, Nov 18 2010. (accessed Jan 23, 2013).

⁹ Hopf, Ted. *Social construction of international politics: identities & foreign policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002. XIV.

¹⁰ Nexon, Daniel H., and Iver B. Neumann. *Harry Potter and international relations*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006. 8-9.

world of filmmaking, Russian film makers quickly found that without state funding making movies suddenly became more difficult. The movie industry, like the country, struggled to come up with a coherent cinematic identity that would answer the question what is Russian film.

In what follows I will examine the concept of ontological security, how it was expressed in films and what these expressions reflect about Russia's identity and foreign policy. Chapter 1 will examine the concept of ontological security in IR. Chapter 2 will look at the crisis that destabilized the Russian narrative during the *perestroika*. Chapter 3 will look at the search for ontological security under the Yeltsin and Putin.

Chapter 1: IR Theory and Ontological Security as a Theoretical Lens

There are several dominant theoretical approaches in the study of IR. In what follows, I will reflect on dominant theoretical lenses examining IR and will provide an overview of ontological security.

Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism

For many years the dominant paradigm of IR has been realism and its variations. According to realist scholars, the behavior of states can be understood purely through examination of interests and power balance; context, history, and domestic society are unimportant.¹¹ States' interests are unchanging and consist of maximizing power relative to other states in the system.¹² States are seen as rational and their primary interest is survival.¹³ The world is a continuous security competition, with the threat of war always in the background.¹⁴ When we examine events such as the collapse of the Soviet Union, along with Gorbachev's rise to power and his willingness to sacrifice geopolitical interests and work with the West, neo-realist theory fails to offer a satisfying explanation. Robert English, for example, traces Gorbachev's new thinking to the revival of cultural links with the West in the 1950s and 1960s and to domestic problems, such as Chernobyl.¹⁵ I accept Christer Pursiainen's proposition that asserts that structural realist explanation simply cannot explain Soviet collapse, as here was a case where domestic level causes in the Soviet Union brought about structural changes in the international system.¹⁶

Another important mainstream theory is liberalism, which accepts the premise of anarchy and the search for security but argues that globalization empowered international structures. There are domestic groups that stand to benefit from cooperation, prompting states to value absolute over

¹¹ Pursiainen, Christer. *Russian foreign policy and international relations theory*. Aldershot, [Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2000. 105.

¹² Waltz, Kenneth Neal. "The Anarchic Structure of World Politics." In *Theory of international politics*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1979. 79-106.

¹³ Mearsheimer, John J. *The false promise of international institutions*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, 1994.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ English, Robert D. "Power, Ideas, And New Evidence On The Cold War's End: A Reply To Brooks And Wohlforth." *International Security* 26, no. 4 (2002): 70-92.

¹⁶ Pursiainen, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 122-123.

relative gains.¹⁷ If states and domestic institutions are connected through a web of interdependence, their interests lead to cooperation rather than balancing.¹⁸ Liberal theories can provide strong explanations about the reasons for the Soviet Union's collapse. The attractiveness of the democratic, free market model clearly played a role in the transition. Yet Andrei Tsygankov notes that just as realism struggles to explain changes in interests and identities that prompt greater cooperation, so does liberalism fails to explain Russia's move away from cooperation and back toward balancing the West. Additionally, liberalism is ethnocentric in its assumption that Western democracy reflects universal values and correlates with progress. Liberal theories fail to take into consideration Russia's unique history and its complicated relationship with the West and are unable to fully explain Russia's move away from the West.¹⁹

Alexander Wendt is the most prominent advocate for structural analysis that rejects rationalist theories of constant interests and examines the intersubjective constitution of interests and identities.²⁰ Wendt argues that when interests and identities are stable, realist models have significant explanatory value, yet identities can change through cooperation. Identities, which include the sense of self against an 'other', develop through interaction.²¹ Hopf views identity as necessary to ensure a level of predictability and order. He writes that "durable expectations between states require intersubjective identities that are sufficiently stable to ensure predictable patterns of behavior,"²² and that "a world without identity is a world of chaos, a world of pervasive and irremediable uncertainty, a world much more dangerous than anarchy."²³ A constructivist analysis can help explain Russia's foreign policy, by showing how its identity shapes its interest and what that interest is.²⁴

¹⁷ Moravcsik, Andrew. "Liberal Theories of International Relations: A Primer." www.princeton.edu/~amoravcs/library/primer.doc (accessed June 2, 2013).

¹⁸ Pursiainen, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 133.

¹⁹ See Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 8-14.

²⁰ Wendt, Alexander. "Anarchy Is What States Make Of It: The Social Construction Of Power Politics." *International Organization* 46, no. 02 (1992): 391.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Hopf, Ted. "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory." *International Security* 23, no. 1 (1998), 174.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

Elite Identities in Russia

Russian elites' national identity has many facets, yet there are three major types of identity. The Westernizers accept Western economic, cultural, and political values as being superior and believe that Russia needs to adopt these values in order to prosper.²⁵ They view Russia as a culturally European power that due to retarded development has to and is capable of catching up with the West. Statists adhere to a realist world-view of maintaining a great power status through military capabilities.²⁶ Statists do not seek hegemony and are not inherently anti-Western, but they demand that Russia is respected as a great power and emphasize the need for stability, security, and autonomy.²⁷ Civilizationists and Eurasianists view Russia as a state with a unique national destiny. They seek to challenge Western hegemony, protect traditional values, and expand to gain control over strategic resources, especially toward what are seen as traditional areas belonging to the Russian empire, such as the South Caucasus and Central Asia.²⁸ These three ideologies are not rigid, and political leaders would occasionally switch loyalties to appeal to different constituencies.²⁹

Ontological Security: Overview

According to dominant theories of IR, the primary interest of the state is to ensure its survival and security. The Copenhagen School of security studies has expanded the debate on what security means.³⁰ Old, military-geopolitical threats like invasion still exist, but the threat experienced by individuals and societies is now seen to have more to do with economic crises, political oppression, and environmental issues, among others.³¹ The emphasis on individual security and the rise to prominence of constructivist approaches render sociological and psychological approaches studying interaction useful for IR scholarship.

²⁵ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 5.

²⁶ Ibid, 5-7.

²⁷ Ibid, 5-7.

²⁸ For example, see: Laruell, Marlène. "Neo Eurasianist Alexander Dugin on the Russia-Georgia Conflict." *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst* | Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst. <http://old.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4928> (accessed June 2, 2013).

²⁹ For a more complete examination of these identity types, see Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 4-8, and Tsygankov, Andrei. "From International Institutionalism to Revolutionary Expansionism: The Foreign Policy Discourse of Contemporary Russia." *Mershon International Studies Review* 41, no. 2 (1997): 247-268.

³⁰ Peoples, Columba, and Nick Williams. *Critical security studies: an introduction*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2010. 9-10.

³¹ Booth, Ken. "Security and Emancipation." *Review of International Studies* 17, no. 4 (1991): 313-326.

The concept of security is complicated when we examine a state like Russia that is trying to sever its links with a recent past and join a system of established Western states. Eugene Rumer notes that Russia cannot have a consistent long term security strategy until it answers the question of "what Russia is without the Soviet Union and without the Russian Empire."³² Russia has always had a conflicted identity of being both East and West, Asian and European, barbarian and Christian, seeking modernization yet often mired in stagnation.³³ The collapse of the Soviet Union has challenged Russians to seek a new identity. After decades of socialization in the Soviet Union, the nation suddenly collapsed, transitioning from socialist identity that stands in opposition to the West to a new identity, rendering old routines of interaction with the world useless. The violation of routines and the inability to recognize one's place in the environment is at the heart of ontological security theories.

What is Ontological Security

The term was introduced by Scottish psychiatrist R.D. Laing, who defines ontological as an "adjectival derivative of being."³⁴ Ontological security here is given as an indicator of a person's ability to socialize and integrate in the world in a holistic way, encountering the other without loss of own identity. A person experiencing ontological insecurity, on the other hand, does not possess a degree of confidence in his autonomous existence in the world; "his identity and autonomy are always in question."³⁵ The ontologically insecure person interprets everyday occurrences in his environment through a different symbolic hierarchy, and is unable to envision the world of his experience as being shared by others.³⁶

Laing's psychological theory was reexamined in 1991 by Anthony Giddens. Giddens applies the concept to an examination of society and its responses to modernity. He argues that while reflexive awareness, and the rational behavior associated with it, is an important component of the individual's existence in modern society, it is complemented with "a practical consciousness,

³² Quoted in Tsygankov, "International Institutionalism," 248.

³³ Tsygankov, Andrei "Self And Other In International Relations Theory: Learning From Russian Civilizational Debates." *International Studies Review* 10, no. 4 (2008): 762-775.

³⁴ Laing, R. D. *The divided self*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1969. 39.

³⁵ Ibid, 42

³⁶ Ibid.

incorporated within the continuity of everyday activities.”³⁷ This consciousness, rooted in the daily routines and behavior of individuals, protects them from what is outside their known experience in the world. Outside, there is chaos, a “loss of a sense of the very reality of things and of other persons.”³⁸ Giddens argues that interaction between people requires a shared but “unproven and unprovable framework of reality.”³⁹ To be ontologically secure is to have a feeling of “biographical continuity” that individuals internalize and project to others.⁴⁰

When there is a disruption in the ability to rely on these shared practices, a chain of anxieties sets in.⁴¹ Anxiety differs from fear by being diffused, rather than dependant on a particular threat, and it is manufactured by a lack of trust in the stability of the surrounding world. Trust in the everyday reality and in the identity of self in relations to others, as achieved through routinized interaction, has a critical role for the individual’s continuous and stable sense of self. When trust is threatened, the agent experiences shame, stemming from lack of confidence in its biographical narrative.⁴² Modernity and globalization, with their complex networks of economic, political, cultural, and social agents and practices, undermines the ability to trust and relate our self-identity to that of others, undermining ontological security.⁴³

Ontological Security in IR

Jef Huysman introduces the concept to international relations. He suggests that states have “a fear of the unknown,”⁴⁴ which sometimes is more threatening than a clear threat to security. He suggests that identity is defined against a certain threat.⁴⁵ When that threat disappears, and an enemy becomes a stranger, an element of uncertainty is introduced, undermining ontological security.⁴⁶ Jennifer Mitzen takes the concept further and uses it as a theoretical lens, looking at how states

³⁷ Giddens, Anthony. *Modernity and self-identity: self and society in the late modern age*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991. 36.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 54.

⁴¹ Ibid, 37.

⁴² Ibid, 66.

⁴³ Ibid, 183-208.

⁴⁴ Huysmans, J. "Security! What Do You Mean?: From Concept To Thick Signifier." *European Journal of International Relations* 4, no. 2 (1998), 235.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 240.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

maintain routines to preserve a consistent sense of identity. She offers a structural explanation for state behavior that seems irrational but is in fact rational, if we acknowledge ontological security seeking as a need.⁴⁷ This is because ontological insecurity undermines agency, as identity is the nexus “from which action flows and in turn sustains identity.”⁴⁸ States often persist in conflict due to identity needs; when identity is deeply tied to a conflict, resolution of said conflict can “generate ontological insecurity, which states seek to avoid.”⁴⁹ At an extreme, states do not know how to behave at a time of peace and “only through conflict do they know who they are.”⁵⁰ By treating the state as individuals, Mitzen is able to create a vivid metaphor for describing the international system. However, she locates ontological security as being formed within state interactions yet identity vis-à-vis the other often forms endogenously, within collectives. Her approach of viewing states as singular units ignores the importance of historical narratives in the agent’s ontological security.

Widening the Gaze

Ayse Zarakol, Brent Steele, and Catarina Kinnvall employ a more contextual analysis when studying ontological security in IR. Steele looks at how policy responds to crises that threaten ontological security; he acknowledges that policy makers differ from one another yet treats them as socialized in the same habitus, sharing a similar commitment to state identity.⁵¹ Kinnvall examines domestic society and how globalization while encroaching on ontological security of society members draws them to familiar religious or nationalist structures; Zarakol attempts to negotiate Mitzen’s macro perspective of states as agents while using historical analysis, focusing on hierarchical differences of the international system as causing the shame and anxiety due to ontological insecurity.

Steele critiques the idea that collective identities are formed only through interaction with the ‘other’. The inner self is a “dialectical community – where the anxiety of agents is simultaneously confronted and ignored.... It can be what we make of it – a comforting cocoon or a dire prison.”⁵²

⁴⁷ Mitzen, J. "Ontological Security In World Politics: State Identity And The Security Dilemma." *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (2006): 343-344.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 344.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 343.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 361.

⁵¹ Steele, Brent J. *Ontological security in international relations self-identity and the IR state*. London: Routledge, 2008, especially 17.

⁵² Steele, *Ontological Security*, 34.

Kinnvall concurs, and uses psychoanalytical literature to theorize that the other is both created by the self and is a former part of the self.⁵³ The construction of 'other' "reduces anxiety and increases ontological security."⁵⁴ Steele, Kinnvall, and Zarakol follow Giddens in locating modernity and globalization as a trigger for ontological insecurity (albeit at different levels of analysis) as the new global environment threatens established routines, habits, and values.⁵⁵

Crisis, Shame, Rational Action, Stigma

Steele, Kinnvall, and Zarakol also engage with Giddens' role of a crisis that disrupts routines and ontological security. Crisis is described as a radical, unpredictable event effecting a large number of individuals while disturbing "institutionalized routines."⁵⁶ The crisis results in a threat against identity and leads to anxiety (unlike a crisis that threatens the physical survival of the state and results in fear).⁵⁷ Kinnvall looks at crisis from a wider perspective of the processes of globalization draining meaning from traditional values.⁵⁸ For Zarakol, the perceived defeat of late modernity adopters by the West is the crisis causing ontological insecurity,⁵⁹ while for Steele a crisis, or a critical situation is an event that threatens an agent's image of the self.⁶⁰ If Zarakol looks at agents being ontologically insecure due to their hierarchical position and lacking the agency to change it⁶¹, Steele focuses on how agents, elites in particular, pursue ontological security and avoid actions incompatible with an internally held identity, even if this pursuit may undermine certain material interests.⁶² Yet the motivation for both is avoiding shame, an "anxiety about the adequacy of the narrative by means of which the individual sustains a coherent biography."⁶³ Shame is produced when threats to ontological security are ignored. Steele cites Kratochwil's suggestion that to "have explained an action often means to have made intelligible the goals for which it was undertaken."⁶⁴ There are various types of

⁵³ Kinnvall, Catarina. "Globalization And Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, And The Search For Ontological Security." *Political Psychology* 25, no. 5 (2004): 753.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Steele, *Ontological Security*, 43; Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism."

⁵⁶ Steele, *Ontological Security*, 12.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 51.

⁵⁸ Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism."

⁵⁹ Zarakol, Ayse. *After defeat: how the East learned to live with the West*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 38.

⁶⁰ Steele, *Ontological Security*, 12-13.

⁶¹ Zarakol, *After Defeat*, 63-108.

⁶² Steele, *Ontological Security*, 5.

⁶³ Quoted in Steele, *Ontological Security*, 13.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Steele, *Ontological Security*, 6.

rational behavior, as delineated by Max Weber, who differentiates between instrumentally rational actions and value rational actions that may be perceived as irrational.⁶⁵ Yet normative interests based on intrinsic identity values of a community are in fact interests and they are pursued through self-help policies as a form of rational interest.⁶⁶

Zarakol attempts to bridge the gap between system oriented scholars like Wendt and Mitzen and more nuanced examination of ontological security provided by Kinnvall.⁶⁷ She looks at ontological insecurity in states that occupy the border of Western imaginary, and thus seen as only partially belonging to the hegemonic Western normative discourse. She traces this process to the beginning of the Westphalian system, which created a linked identity among European states, from which late comers were excluded.⁶⁸ Newcomers, situated on the periphery of modernity were expected to internalize the norms of the community they wanted to join, yet they could not escape the stigma that was attached to them as not being truly developed, and thus moral.⁶⁹ This leads to ontological insecurity, as shame becomes associated with national characteristics that keep states from becoming truly Western.⁷⁰ Drawing from psychology, Zarakol notes that stigma, especially one that is acquired through childhood socialization, becomes a driving force for the agent's behavior.⁷¹ James Richter notes that Russia is a new state with new borders in a new environment, and it lacks "authoritative history of foreign relations upon which to define its international role,"⁷² thus making the stigma more influential and alive in Russia's view of itself and its environment. Zarakol examines how states attempt to overcome this ontological insecurity and regain a sense of belonging and agency. One approach treats the stigma as an "external, inauthentic imposition that can be easily shed."⁷³ Another approach national narratives take is embracing the stigma. This is especially prevalent in states that were great powers and are struggling to fit in a community of states where they

⁶⁵ Quoted in Steele, *Ontological Security*, 36-37.

⁶⁶ Steele, *Ontological Security*, 45.

⁶⁷ Zarakol, *After Defeat*, 18.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 66.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 60.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 95.

⁷¹ Ibid, 96.

⁷² Quoted in Tsygankov "International Institutionalism," 248.

⁷³ Zarakol, *After Defeat*, 97.

are seen as lacking agency. Embracing the stigma leads to rejection of the norms the environment tries to promote as foreign and reconfiguration of the self as possessor of an alternative morality.⁷⁴

From here, I use the still nascent literature on ontological security in IR to look at Russia's foreign policy influencing and being influenced by the domestic feeling of ontological insecurity. Mitzen provides the starting point, yet her argument (by omission) that domestic society has little impact on the role a state takes removes a great amount of possible details from the application of ontological security theory. Brent Steele also notes that by "reifying ontological security to all members of a society we miss out on the very interesting political process of self identity contestation."⁷⁵ While the Soviet Union under Gorbachev and the U.S. under Reagan and Bush found it difficult to break away from their roles and continued to contain each other, Gorbachev did succeed in reconfiguring this role. Kozyrev stated in 1992 that the Western countries, were "natural allies of Russia,"⁷⁶ yet only seven years later, Putin told security officials that "several years ago we fell prey to the illusion that we have no enemies. We paid dearly for that."⁷⁷ Treating states as abstract agents simplifies the analysis but undermines a theory's explanatory power.

Ted Hopf argues that constructivism "has remained far too long at the systemic level of analysis."⁷⁸ A constructivist approach could "expose those features of domestic society, culture, and politics that should matter to state identity and state action in global politics."⁷⁹ For Hopf, looking at the state level is insufficient, because a state identity is constituted through social practices first, and these "constrain and enable state identity, interests, and actions abroad."⁸⁰ While a post structural or critical constructivist account may see the domestic population lacking agency and the "other" being manufactured by the elites,⁸¹ I believe that such 'other' will not be accepted by the domestic population unless its presence is justified by a historical national narrative.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 104.

⁷⁵ Steele, *Ontological Security*, 17.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Tsygankov "International Institutionalism," 250.

⁷⁷ Zarakol, *After Defeat*, 230.

⁷⁸ Hopf, "Promise of Constructivism," 194.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 195.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid, 195-196

Kratochwil notes that “those who cannot recall the past from the ever-changing problems of the present and connect it meaningfully to a future are impaired in their agency.”⁸² It is that lack of agency that is at the heart of ontological insecurity. Steele’s focus on ontological security seeking as self-help suggests why Russia would undermine its power to maintain a certain view of its identity. Zarakol’s focus on the stigma is important as well. While Russia’s Westernizers initially accepted their inferiority, this resulted in a deep sense of shame within Russian society, empowering nationalists and communists to present counter narratives that emphasize Russia’s unique history as a Eurasian power and suggesting that it could be restored. The shift in Russian foreign politics toward greater balancing of the West was accompanied by greater emphasis on post-Soviet States, emphasizing Russia’s great power past and its historical continuity with its former empire.

National identity, Ilya Prizel claims, serves not only to link the individual to society but also society to the world, with foreign policy serving the role of anchoring national identity and creating political cohesion.⁸³ Nicole Jackson notes a shift in IR scholarship toward examining domestic politics and society, because this is where politicians are socialized.⁸⁴ Much had been made from Putin’s KGB background, and that certainly influenced his socialization, but he has also been socialized in the turbulent 1990s, and had an understanding of how Russians yearned for a coherent identity.

The routines on both the state and society level have been informed by socialist ideology, carried out by a strong, paternalistic state, charged to protect the nation against the ‘other’, the West. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian society had to adapt to a new, unfamiliar environment. It needed a new ‘other’ that would define the self. Initially it was the communist past. However, as the new environment started to appear threatening and unstable, these groups experienced ontological insecurity due to a new source of anxieties: the corrupt state, ruled by oligarchs with Yeltsin at its helm and American advisors charting the course of action.

⁸² Quoted in Steele, *Ontological Security*, 56.

⁸³ Prizel, Ilya. *National identity and foreign policy nationalism and leadership in Poland, Russia, and Ukraine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. 19.

⁸⁴ Jackson, Nicole, *Russian foreign policy and the CIS: theories, debates and actions*. New York: Routledge, 2003. 19.

Max Weber connects ideas with policy, noting that while policy is driven by interests, the world images created by ideas determine "the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interests."⁸⁵ Prizel notes that states draw their authority by using a certain "legitimizing mythology" that appropriates national and historical symbols.⁸⁶ If the state fails to define a coherent self and 'other', another societal agent will appropriate these symbols, undermining the state's authority as protector of the national.⁸⁷ Miroslav Hroch charts the creation of a national identity as a three stage process, particularly in states where elites are no longer willing or able to represent and guard national mythology. The process begins with the local intelligentsia reexamining national symbols and traditions that identify the distinction of the national self. Then, these formulations are disseminated among the masses within the nation. The final stage sees these symbols and cultural artifacts coalesce in society.⁸⁸ It is this process that I intend to trace in what follows and how ontological insecurity was expressed within Russia's domestic society through film.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Prizel, *National identity*, 15.

⁸⁶ Prizel, *National identity*, 26.

⁸⁷ Neumann, Iver B. *Uses of the other: "The East" in European identity formation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, 11-12.

⁸⁸ Prizel, *National identity*, 14; Hroch, Miroslav. *Social preconditions of national revival in Europe: a comparative analysis of the social composition of patriotic groups among the smaller European nations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. 22-23.

Chapter 2: Identity Search in Russian Society: a Study of Russian Films

In the following chapter, I examine the rational for using cinema to examine Russian society. I then examine Russia's foreign policy and identity crisis during the *perestroika* era and how Russian identity, socialized through a powerful ideological apparatus, ruptured when that ideology became empty of meaning. I look at how Gorbachev's move toward greater freedom discredited the stagnant system but failed to provide an alternative and examine what films can show about the crisis in Russian society during that time.

Film and Politics

By looking at cultural artifacts we can learn more about the development of the discourse about Russian identity vis-à-vis the world and the way it influences and is influenced by behavior in the international arena. Various scholars have advocated analysis of everyday life in order to gain new understandings of global politics.⁸⁹ Iver Neumann argues that an investigation of cultural representation is necessary for a better understanding of world politics.⁹⁰ He notes that popular culture provides a representation of social and political life, both mirroring it and constituting reality by generalizing certain real world events through more stereotypical representations.⁹¹ A Soviet citizen (and even an average Russian citizen in the 1990s) was unlikely to have ever visited America, and thus their only access to knowledge about it was through its representation in society. Popular culture may directly impact politics.⁹² Pussy Riot, for example, see themselves not simply as dissidents but as artists,⁹³ and their art directly influenced Russia's politics. Stanislav Govorukhin identifies two main culprits for the horrors of the Soviet regime, whom he vilifies in *The Russia We Lost* - Lenin and Gorky, whom he views just as guilty. Neumann notes that cultural artifacts can serve as a mirror, which can further support a particular interpretation of events.⁹⁴ They can expose particular values, identities, and norms in the society that produces them, often "better than elite

⁸⁹ For example, see Weldes, Jutta, and Christina Rowley. "The evolution of international security studies and the everyday: Suggestions from the Buffyverse." *Security Dialogue* 43, no. 6 (2012): 513-530.

⁹⁰ Nexon, Daniel H., and Iver B. Neumann. "Introduction." In *Harry Potter and international relations*, 5-36. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006. 9.

⁹¹ Ibid, 6-7.

⁹² Ibid, 11.

⁹³ Tolokonnikova, Nadezhda, Yekaterina Samutsevich, and Maria Alyokhina. "Pussy Riot Closing Statements." N+1. nplusonemag.com/pussy-riot-closing-statements.

⁹⁴ Nexon and Neumann, *Harry Potter*, "Introduction," 12.

discourse.”⁹⁵ Neumann evokes Hopf’s argument that understanding of a domestic identity can help understand and predict a state’s foreign policy behavior.⁹⁶ These kinds of representations are particularly telling in a society going through a crisis, nursing a collective wound, struggling with ontological insecurity, attempting to make sense of what it is, where it is, where it came from and where it is going.

It is no wonder that Lenin quipped that “of all the arts the most important for us is the cinema.”⁹⁷ Unlike text, which is clearly a construct, film appears as a recognizable reality, treating the viewer as a subject, a participant in a closed gaze.⁹⁸ Roland Barthes compares cinema to hypnosis, healing and dangerous; the image is “coalescent (its signified and signifier melted together), analogical, total, pregnant; it is a perfect lure.”⁹⁹ Cinema constructs reality and at the same time mirrors reality, whether that of its production, the sociological upbringing of its director, etc. On one hand, cinema, like other cultural products, presents an ideological object as if it was natural and indisputable.¹⁰⁰ On the other hand, according to Shklovsky, it has the potential to defamiliarize reality, make it strange and unrecognizable and, by doing so, draw attention to something we fail to notice in our daily lives.¹⁰¹

Perestroika: Down with the Old (Not Really)

Brezhnev’s Soviet Union focused on promotion of the West as a threatening ‘other’ as a constitutive part of Soviet identity. Brezhnev and his cadre resisted economic and political reforms, leading to negative economic growth in the late years of his regime.¹⁰² When Gorbachev came to power, economic, political, and social concerns pushed him to redefine the discourse on the Soviet

⁹⁵ Ibid, 13.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 14.

⁹⁷ Lenin, Vladimir. "Directives on the Film Business." Marxists Internet Archive. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1922/jan/17.htm>.

⁹⁸ Magrini, J.M. "On the System of the “Suture” in Cinema." Other Cinema. http://www.othercinema.com/otherzine/?issueid=15&article_id=33.

⁹⁹ Barthes, Roland. "Leaving the Movie Theater." Scribd. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/105717490/Leaving-the-Movie-Theater-Barthes>.

¹⁰⁰ See Allen, Graham. "Semiology." In *Roland Barthes*, 33-52. London: Routledge, 2003. 34.

¹⁰¹ See Ginzburg, Carlo. "Making Things Strange: The Prehistory of a Literary Device." *Representations* 56, no. 1 (1996): 8-28.

¹⁰² Malia, Martin E. *The Soviet tragedy: a history of socialism in Russia, 1917-1991*. New York: Free Press, 1994, 363.

Union's relationship with the West into one of interdependency and cooperation.¹⁰³ Gorbachev certainly did not envision the collapse of Soviet Union as a goal or even a possibility.¹⁰⁴ Rather, New Thinking's goal was the "fundamental reappraisal of traditional Soviet perceptions and ideological assumptions about the outside world."¹⁰⁵ Ideologically, Gorbachev was a liberal Westernizer, and he sought Western support to promote his domestic reforms. Gorbachev proposed disarmament measures, including a proposal to eliminate all nuclear weapons by 2000.¹⁰⁶ In 1987, he began considering withdrawal of all troops from Eastern Europe. While rhetorically, Gorbachev continued castigating US foreign policies, he acknowledged that in the Cold War, part of the blame lay with the Soviet Union as well.¹⁰⁷ Yet Gorbachev's concessions were hardly reciprocated. Reagan and Bush hesitated on disarmaments measures and mistrusted Gorbachev's statements on Eastern Europe.¹⁰⁸ In the late 1980s, Eastern European anti-communist movements were rising while the Soviet economy was mired in crisis. Perceiving this as weakness, the West extracted more and more unreciprocated concessions.¹⁰⁹ Critics note that while Gorbachev has been a visionary in his view of the new reality, he struggled implementing his ideas and creating appropriate institutions to do so.¹¹⁰ Gorbachev's failure resulted in fractures within the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, weakening him domestically.¹¹¹

Gorbachev's main concerns, however, were domestic. By 1982, most products in the Soviet Union were significantly more expensive than in the West, while the per capita GDP was much lower.¹¹² Additionally, the Soviet government spent a huge portion of its GNP on armaments to maintain parity with the United States. Tat'iana Zaslavskaya pointed out that the economic system has never experienced a *perestroika*, a radical restructuring, and was inappropriate for modern times.¹¹³

¹⁰³ Gorbachev, Mikhail. "Excerpts of Address by Mikhail Gorbachev." temple.edu.
isc.temple.edu/hist249/course/Documents/gorbachev_speech_to_UN.htm.

¹⁰⁴ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 33-35.

¹⁰⁵ Miller, Robert F. *Soviet foreign policy today: Gorbachev and the new political thinking*. London: Unwin Hyman, 1991. 1.

¹⁰⁶ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 41.

¹⁰⁷ Miller, *Soviet foreign policy*, 70-75.

¹⁰⁸ Miller, *Soviet foreign policy*, 77-78; Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 40-42.

¹⁰⁹ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 45.

¹¹⁰ Miller, *Soviet foreign policy*, 163.

¹¹¹ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 4551-53

¹¹² DeBardeleben, Joan. *Russian politics in transition*. 2nd ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997. 74-75.

¹¹³ Zaslavskaya, Tatyana. "O Sovershenstvovanii Proizvodstvennyh otnoshenii socializma i zadachah ekonomicheskoy sociologii." Center for Democratic Culture. http://cdclv.unlv.edu/archives/articles/zaslavskaya_manifest.html.

Perestroika was intended to modernize the industry and economy while fusing socialism with democratic values.¹¹⁴ Gorbachev also introduced *glasnost*, which introduced new freedoms in discourse and removed much of the censorship from mass media, literature and cinema. Yet the ideological apparatus remained stagnant, reproducing a language whose meaning was becoming less and less connected with reality.¹¹⁵ Socialist discourse has been described as “goal oriented,” where text was constructed to portray a certain role.¹¹⁶ During *glasnost* alternative types of discourse were introduced, making official socialist speak seem like a parody on communication. *Glasnost*, coupled with the harsh economic climate and a new awareness about Western societies, undermined socialist ideology even further for intellectuals and the masses. Self-identity became one mired in shame. Russian citizens suffered not just material pain but also saw the system in which they were socialized collapse, with no clear alternative. By 1989, few people believed in the utopia promoted by the perestroika and felt that the dystopia around them was a dead end.¹¹⁷

***Glasnost* and Film**

On 13 of May of 1986, in the presence of leaders of the Communist Party and the Soviet government, the "hysterical-historical," in the words of famous Russian film critic Victor Matizen, 5th Congress of Filmmakers took place.¹¹⁸ Matizen argues that Gorbachev's new ideas were influential but tepid, and it was that Congress when the *perestroika* passed the point of no return.¹¹⁹ The seminal event was the unheard of suggestion by one critic to add new candidates to the elections, ones not chosen by the party. This resulted in "an almost unprecedented real elections in the USSR."¹²⁰ The films of *glasnost* embraced their newly found freedom and produced a new vision of society. Portrayals of socialist stability were replaced by images of a dystopian society. Suddenly, the absurdity of the system was exposed, the ills of society like poverty, crime, insecurity and prostitution

¹¹⁴ Ries, Nancy. *Russian talk: culture and conversation during Perestroika*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997. 16.

¹¹⁵ See Yurchak, Alexei. "Soviet Hegemony Of Form: Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 03 (2003): 480-510.

¹¹⁶ Gibbs, Joseph. *Gorbachev's glasnost the Soviet media in the first phase of perestroika*. College Station, Tex.: Texas A & M University Press, 1999. 4.

¹¹⁷ Ries, *Russian talk*, 16.

¹¹⁸ Matizen, Victor. "Perevorot." <http://www.kinopressa.ru>. <http://www.kinopressa.ru/news/26.html>.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

laid out bare, while the West was portrayed as a fantasy. The films reflected the growing alienation of Soviet society while exposing the web of lies surrounding everyday life.

***Intergirl* – Soviet Life as a Sad Caricature**

Intergirl (1989) was one of the two biggest hits of the *perestroika* era, seen by 44 million people.¹²¹ The film is a melodrama about Tanya, a nurse who also works as a *valyutnaya prostitutka*, a prostitute whose clients are foreigners, paying in foreign currency. An older Swede falls in love and wants to marry her. After struggles with Soviet bureaucracy, the heroine manages to leave the Soviet Union; she learns Swedish yet fails to fit in. She misses Russian company, language, and most of all her mother. The story ends tragically; the mother learns of her daughter's past and attempts suicide; the heroine, on her way back to Leningrad, crashes her car.

The *perestroika* era is portrayed as a time when the dilapidated socialist past is a caricature. Early in the film, several prostitutes are taken to the police station. They openly mock the police officers, using word play on socialist jargon and taking jabs at Soviet life. When asked about her father, one prostitute says that "he's a professor, an expert on Africa, although, he has never been to Africa. He teaches his students, then comes home and laughs about what he told them." When she gives "her word as a Komsomol member" that she will never engage in prostitution again, the cops and prostitutes all laugh. The cops similarly ridicule socialist realities. When the prostitute says she found the foreign currency in an elevator, one cop jokes that she must have been on her way to return it. "I can see the headline in *Pioneer Truth*: a 10th grader returns to the government 100 Finnish Marks that she found," he quips. When the prostitutes are released, one notes that "the chain of lawlessness thus continues." When told there is no law against prostitution, she responds that had the government wanted them gone, they would destroy them without any need for law.

Tanya wants to leave because she wants a house, a car, to see the world. She smokes Camel cigarettes and drinks Johnny Walker whiskey. The subtext of prostituting oneself for material, often foreign, goods is clear yet not judged. In the absurd socialist reality, that is all that can be done. Historical myths are made fun of. When an older woman tells Tanya that in Stalin's time people lived

¹²¹ "Interdevochka." Telekanal Rossiya. http://russia.tv/brand/show/brand_id/5498.

poorly but with dignity, she responds that “now we have no dignity but roll in wealth.” There’s little attempt to hide the contempt younger characters hold for their reality.

In Russian, the word homeland can be associated with the mother, *rodyna*, evoking a place where one is born, and father, *otechestvo*, which has more political connotations. The mother represents the familiar yet naïve. She has no idea her daughter is a prostitute. The father, on the other hand, has abandoned them decades ago, yet when Tanya asks him for a signature of consent, required by the communist government to leave the country, he demands money; the only way to get what the father and the fatherland are asking for is through prostitution. Yet the interaction with Western life is not idealized either. The prostitutes only serve foreigners, connoting exploitation of Russia’s weakness by the West, although this is blamed primarily on socialist realities. The Japanese client spews clichés about the mysterious Russian soul. The Swedish friends of her husband ridicule her for her past as a prostitute; one even tries to rape her, recognizing her weakness. Sweden represents a fantasy for Tanya and her Russian friends, but, when attained, it appears hollow.

This is, thus, a portrayal of Russia’s crisis. By showing a reality recognizable yet strange the film exposes the viewer to certain understandings about socialist life. Soviet identity is no longer possible and the routine is broken. Giddens describes this as a situation when the discrepancy between accepted routines and the biographical narrative creates a false self, allowing the individual to “witness the activities of her body with neutral detachment, cynicism, hatred, or ironic amusement,”¹²² as an attempt to transcend dangers. This is a state when ordinary routines become false performances and ontological security is disrupted, resulting in shame.¹²³ “We live in a lie” says Tanya, “we think one thing, we say another.” Identity is disrupted, yet the West is also portrayed as a place of ontological insecurity. Language plays an important role: the heroine speaks with a rich, ironic Russian, but her communication with Swedes is wooden, unexpressive. She lacks agency in that society: her Russian nursing degree is not recognized. When the Mother’s neighbor, also a prostitute, comes home with a charming Italian client, smells gas, breaks in and finds the mother unconscious,

¹²² Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity*, 58-59.

¹²³ Ibid.

she begs the Italian for help, yet he runs away. Russia is in decay and needs Western help, yet help is not forthcoming, and the only possible outcome is tragedy.

This Is No Way to Live – Socialist Dystopia

What *Intergirl* hints at is made very explicit in Stanislav Govorukhin's polemic documentary *This Is No Way to Live* (1990). Initially, the movie explores the brutality of crime in Soviet society, using photographs of nude, often mutilated bodies to shock the viewer, while also showing footage of the murderers – unrepentant and arrogant. Images of dilapidated churches as sites of violence and drug abuse show the decay of Soviet society. The police are unequipped and uninterested to ensure public safety. The film then shifts to New York and Hamburg, showing wealth, order, and fraternity between people. Govorukhin talks to several cops, who are shown to be well trained and equipped. They interact with civilians with authority and respect. Govorukhin then shows recent crime statistics and asks a rhetorical question: “how did we become this way?” For Govorukhin, the answer is that 70 years of Soviet rule, founded on the murder of millions, cannot breed a healthy society. As the film shows children learning about Soviet symbols, Govorukhin condemns a system that keeps lying to its people. “How one must hate their people if instead of schools they build statues of Lenin,” he asks. The metaphors are not very subtle and are then spelled out. The camera follows people training attack dogs, and Govorukhin opines that training a violent dog is easy: “keep it tied, barely feed it, humiliate it. How similar it is to the treatment of Soviet citizens.” The film explores Russia's periphery, landscapes associated with traditional life that are often used in nationalist imagery to evoke attachment to the homeland. Here, however, the scenery appears polluted, dilapidated, evoking shame, not national pride. Juxtaposed with footage of the Berlin Wall, Govorukhin notes that “here the world of reason ends and the world of socialism begins.”

The film, which was immensely popular in Russia, advocates for the rapture of the socialist narrative, while undermining the image of the West cultivated by socialist discourse. It both reflects and constructs an acute sense of shame of Soviet identity. This allows for a better understanding of how Yeltsin successfully shifted the ‘other’ of Russian self-identity from the West to Russia's own communist past. The freedom to create such stark portrayals of society created ontological dread,

exposing the chaos lurking outside the daily socialist routine.¹²⁴ The films also support Steele's proposition that the inner self sometimes develops endogenously, though the greater proliferation of images from the West certainly contributed to Russia's anxiety. Yet, to paraphrase Steele, these films show how the comforting cocoon of socialism became a prison for the self-identity of the Soviet citizen.¹²⁵

This Is No Way to Live is interesting for two additional reasons. Sergey Stankevich, a close advisor of Yeltsin during the early 1990s, recalled the trouble Yeltsin had in getting elected as chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR. Stankevich ordered a screening of the film for the members of the Soviet. The film had an "overwhelming impact on the delegates, especially those from the periphery. The next day, Yeltsin was elected as chairman with a substantial majority."¹²⁶ Additionally, Govorukhin and his worldview can give some hints on the trajectory of Russia's identity development. His later film in 1992, *The Russia We Lost* was also immensely popular and even more aggressive towards communism. The film suggested an alternative self-identity. If the positive image of society to be contrasted with Soviet decay in his earlier film was shown to be the West, in the 1992 film, he portrayed Tsarist Russia as a modern, successful state, thus suggesting a possible continuity in Russia's biography. In 1991, he claimed that the Iron Curtain still exists, only it is now golden, yet an honest working person can still never break through it. In 1996, he supported Gennady Zyuganov against Yeltsin in the runoff. He ran for president in 2000, joined United Russia in 2005, and became a Duma member in 2007. He was the first to suggest in 2011 that Putin should run as president and headed his 2012 election campaign bureau.¹²⁷ In a recent interview, he exclaimed that "people are capable of great achievements, as long as they believe their rulers."¹²⁸ He has stated that Putin's opposition is supported by American NGOs and that he is ashamed that

¹²⁴ Ibid, 37.

¹²⁵ Steele, *Ontological Security*, 34.

¹²⁶ Stankevich, Sergey. "Yeltsin byl v svoey stihii." *Vzglyad*. <http://vz.ru/politics/2011/8/16/512213.html>.

¹²⁷ Kashin, Oleg. "Sovest Nazii." *Russkii Jurnal*. <http://www.russ.ru/Mirovaya-povestka/Sovest-nacii>.

¹²⁸ Dmitrash, Maria, and Stanislav Govorukhin. "Narod sposoben na velikie svershenia, tolko esli on verit vlasti." *Izvestia*. <http://izvestia.ru/news/331078>.

Russia did not protect Yugoslavia from NATO.¹²⁹ He noted that he was a man of European culture yet felt disgusted that Russians seek wisdom from foreigners.¹³⁰ The man, who in 1989 exclaimed “My god how different we are from the elegant, cheerful crowd that, come the evening, strolls down the Champs Elysees,”¹³¹ in 2012 castigated liberals who want to be the West.¹³² Govorukhin’s trajectory exposes the mistakes of Western liberals who treated Russia’s society’s rejection of socialism as an embrace of Western values. Socialist myths have been ruptured yet Russian society was not ready to abandon all that shaped its existence for decades, if not centuries.

¹²⁹ "Govorukhin ob Internetе. Online Video Clip." YouTube (NTV). http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=AbQC0H_rY6Y; "Pozner. Stanislav Govorukhin." YouTube (Perviy Kanal). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJ_3OO2HxBQ.

¹³⁰ Egereva, Yelena, and Stanislav Govorukhin. "Pravila Jizni Stanislava Govorukhina." *Esquire*. <http://esquire.ru/wil/govorukhin>.

¹³¹ Govorukhin, Stanislav, Maya Ganina, Kirill Lavrov, and Vladimir Dudintsev. "Homo Sovieticus." *World Affairs* 152, no. 2 (1989): 104-108.

¹³² "Govorukhin: Inteleghentsia eto 'govno nazii'." Newsland. <http://newsland.com/news/detail/id/888664/>.

Chapter 3: After the Collapse – From Yeltsin to Putin

“Yeltsin, Yeltsin”

In 1991, conservative communists attempted to overthrow Gorbachev by force. The radio broadcasted the organizers of the revolt promising the people to restore the “dignity and honor of the Soviet citizen.”¹³³ Yet the people no longer saw the perpetrators as capable of doing that and went out to protest and meet the tanks on the streets of Moscow. Anna Lawton recalls that period, describing a sad mood but full of humor, with people calling the coup leaders “both a gang of criminals and a bunch of clowns.”¹³⁴ The crowd chanted “Russia, Russia” and “Yeltsin, Yeltsin.”¹³⁵ Yeltsin, who dramatically spoke from atop of a tank in Moscow, represented a full on shift in identity, framing the communist regime as ‘other’. Yuri Vlasov spoke to the crowd fiercely: “we were held down on our knees for seventy years. Down with the CPSU! This is not a coup, this is an acknowledgement of their bankruptcy.”¹³⁶ Lawton notes that protesters avoided calling each other comrades, opting for words like “friends” or “citizens.”¹³⁷

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the Communist party was framed as ‘other’ by certain elites, in particular Yeltsin and Kozyrev, and large parts of the public. Russian citizens envisioned their place in the West and attempted to reconfigure their identity to that of similarity with the West. Yeltsin was optimistically naïve about the West and pushed for full integration with Western institutions, including the IMF, the WTO, G-7, and NATO. Yeltsin expected massive aid and investments from Western governments and the international business community.¹³⁸ When initiating his “shock therapy” package of economic liberalization, he promised a painful but short period of transition. Yeltsin continued positing the crisis as caused by foreign causes: the communist regime. “It was not Russia that suffered a defeat, but the Communist idea, the experiment which was ... inflicted

¹³³ Weir, Fred. “The Soviet August Coup still resonates 20 years later.” The Christian Science Monitor - CSMonitor.com. <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2011/0819/The-Soviet-August-Coup-still-resonates-20-years-later>.

¹³⁴ Quoted in Lawton, Anna. *Imaging Russia 2000: film and facts*. Washington, DC: New Academia, 2004. 41.

¹³⁵ Quoted in Lawton, *Imaging Russia*, 45.

¹³⁶ Quoted in Lawton, *Imaging Russia*, 45.

¹³⁷ Quoted in Lawton, *Imaging Russia*, 45.

¹³⁸ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 70.

on her people," he told the nation.¹³⁹ As Zarakol noted, one method of dealing with a stigma is presenting it as an external imposition that can be shed, allowing an agent to reclaim its true, uncomplicated identity.¹⁴⁰

Continuity in the New World: *It Rains Again on Brighton Beach*

The possibility of Russia's integration into the West while establishing a sense of continuity can be seen in the last film of Leonid Gaidai, *Weather Is Good on Deribasovskaya, It Rains Again on Brighton Beach* (1992). Expressing the new hopes of Russians, the film takes place during the very end of *perestroika*. The Russian mafia is threatening to derail an important meeting between Bush and Gorbachev. The crisis is averted through the cooperation of a male KGB agent and a female CIA agent. The new international atmosphere is portrayed through a healthy heaping of kitsch: t-shirts with writing KGB-CIA love, a theme song with lyrics "hello America, you seem like paradise," etc. It is continuously emphasized that Brighton Beach is basically Russia, with shots of Russian restaurants, newspapers, goods, juxtaposed with cliché American iconography: McDonald's, the Statue of Liberty, and American flags. Unlike in *Intergirl*, being Russian in the West is not complicated; after all, Brighton is even more Russian than Russia. Everyone speaks Russian, everyone understands each other. Gaidai's position as perhaps the most iconic Soviet comedy director suggests continuity from Soviet times; the jokes and mannerisms are the same and only the setting has changed. This was one of few films that expressed such an optimistic view of Russia-West relations, and it was less successful than Gaidai's Soviet comedies. Comedies are a form of escapism, and the Russian public could not suspend disbelief and ignore the much harsher, more disorienting realities around. There were several films playing on a similar motif of Russians in the West, with an optimistic portrayal of the possibility of understanding. Yana Hashamova points that these films' fantasy of becoming the West exposes how unrealistic that fantasy is. They typically have *deus-ex machine* endings with the fantasy coming to fruition, which only emphasizes its implausibility.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Schmemmann, Serge. "Yeltsin Tells Russia of Hardship to Come." The New York Times. <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/30/world/yeltsin-tells-russia-of-hardship-to-come.html>.

¹⁴⁰ Zarakol, *After Defeat*, 97.

¹⁴¹ Hashamova, Yana. *Pride and panic Russian imagination of the West in post-Soviet film*. Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2007. 32.

Fantasies of Integration and Their Failure

Russians have experienced enormous changes and now sought integration in a world they held as fantasy for decades. Michael Kennedy notes the desire to be normal, to have an “unproblematic identity.”¹⁴² Giddens notes that “normal appearances mean that it is safe and sound to continue on with the activity at hand, with only peripheral attention given to checking up on the stability of the environment.”¹⁴³ Yet when normal appearances are inconsistent with the biographical narrative or with the feedback from the environment, they lead to false performances, a dissociation with the self that “expresses existential anxieties impinging directly upon self identity,”¹⁴⁴ threatening ontological security.

Tsygankov notes that Yeltsin and Kozyrev envisioned more than the Gorbachev’s New Thinking strategy of cooperation with the West; their goal was to become the West, and they were idealistically naïve about the possibility to do so.¹⁴⁵ Gorbachev derisively referred to the Russian Foreign Ministry under Kozyrev as a branch of the U.S. State Department.¹⁴⁶ Kozyrev’s vision provided no alternative identity, no real continuity of national biography, deriding both Imperial Russia’s legacy, with its focus on protection of the periphery and expansion East while sacrificing the well being of the Russian people,¹⁴⁷ and the Soviet system, an experiment on hundreds of millions of human subjects that “suffered a crushing defeat in an open contest with the *civilized world*”¹⁴⁸ (emphasis added). Kozyrev here accepts Russia’s inferiority in development, and then further reinforces the stereotype Neumann refers to of Russia as a learner,¹⁴⁹ stating explicitly that “we have a lot to learn. But rest assured, we are learning fast.”¹⁵⁰ Tsygankov notes that liberal theories explain the desirability of the Western model for the Russian elites during this period.¹⁵¹ Yet while Russia did join the IMF, the World Bank, and the G-7, most of Yeltsin’s hopes did not materialize. The U.S. and Europe supported the reforms but hesitated to accept Russia into the club of Western states. Domestically, Russia was going through one of its worst economic crises in history. At the same time,

¹⁴² Quoted in Hashamova, *Pride and Panic*, 30.

¹⁴³ Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity*, 58-59.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 59.

¹⁴⁵ Tsygankov, *Russia’s Foreign Policy*, 61.

¹⁴⁶ Aven, Petr, and Andrei Kozyrev. “Andrei Kozyrev: Nastoyashiy Kamikaze.” *Forbes*. <http://m.forbes.ru/article.php?id=74501>.

¹⁴⁷ Kozyrev, Andrei. “Russia: A Chance for Survival.” *foreign affairs* 71, no. 2 (1992): 1-16.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 4.

¹⁴⁹ Neumann, Iver B. *Uses of the other: “The East” in European identity formation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. 107

¹⁵⁰ Kozyrev, “Russia: A Chance for Survival,” 9.

¹⁵¹ Tsygankov, *Russia’s Foreign Policy*, 61.

loss of status and disintegration of order led to anxiety. Not surprisingly, a poll in 1993 found that 51% of Russians prefer a strong leader to 31% who favored democracy. In 1991, these figures were reversed, when 51% expressed preference for democracy and 39% pined for a strong leader.¹⁵²

Tsygankov points out that Western leaders saw Russia as an aid recipient rather than a donor and that it was not treated as an equal partner.¹⁵³ Zarakol notes that identities are "continuously created and recreated which are then perceived as reflecting inherent innate and fixed characteristics. The slave becomes a natural slave."¹⁵⁴ In the 1990s, the perception of Russia as a failed state became more and ingrained in both Western and domestic societies.¹⁵⁵ At the same time, support for Yeltsin continued, and the New York Moscow bureau chief referred to anti-Yeltsin forces having a "Soviet mentality suspicious of reform, ignorant of democracy, disdainful of intellectuals or democrats."¹⁵⁶ In Russia, its weakness was emphasized in domestic narratives. Russian cinematic output of the early 1990s was primarily of *chernukha*, dark and violent movies portraying the unstable and dangerous nature of Russian society.¹⁵⁷

The Westernizers' unilateral concessions to the West certainly made sense within the new narrative that Russia is the West. Yet that narrative has not been internalized. It was difficult for ordinary Russians to travel to the West or obtain Western goods. The Iron Curtain was no more, yet the West remained a fantasy for most Russians while their reality was bleak. Naomi Klein notes that in the mid 1990s, 74 million Russians found themselves below the poverty line, compared with only 2 million in 1989. There was an epidemic of unemployment due to the collapse of previously state-owned enterprises.¹⁵⁸ Consumer prices increased by almost 1400% from 1991 to 1992, and by the end of 1994 they were 2000% higher than in 1990.¹⁵⁹ People were troubled by rising costs, unemployment

¹⁵² McManus, Dyole. "Impatient Russians Yearn for Strong Leader, Poll Finds." The Los Angeles Times. http://articles.latimes.com/1993-01-27/news/mn-1946_1_strong-leader.

¹⁵³ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 71.

¹⁵⁴ Zarakol, *After Defeat*, 69.

¹⁵⁵ Reddaway, Peter. "Russia on the Brink?" The New York Review of Books. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1993/jan/28/russia-on-the-brink>.

¹⁵⁶ Klein, Naomi. *The shock doctrine: the rise of disaster capitalism*. New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2007. 226.

¹⁵⁷ Graham, Seth. "Chernukha and Russian Film." *Studies in Slavic Cultures* 1 (2000): 9–27.

¹⁵⁸ Klein, *Shock Doctrine*, 237–239.

¹⁵⁹ Klugman, Jeni. *Poverty in Russia public policy and private responses*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1997. 2.

and crime.¹⁶⁰ Jackson notes that the decline in standards of living compared to Europe has reinforced Russia's feeling of otherness and its sense of humiliation and resentment.¹⁶¹

Thus, it was easy for nationalists and neo-communists to frame Yeltsin's actions as stemming from weakness. Zhirinovksy's promise to end Russia's humiliation abroad and provide cheap vodka for all resonated, and he tied ideas of prosperity to nationalism and expansionism.¹⁶²¹⁶³ At the same time, ethnic tensions were mounting in the North Caucasus, as well as in the CIS states between ethnic Russian and titular ethnic groups, and civil wars in Tajikistan, Georgia, and Moldova appeared threatening for Russians, for whom until recently these were parts of their country. Kozyrev and Yeltsin's focus on the West came at the expense of influence within former CIS states. By 1992, only one Russian embassy (in Kiev) was created in the post-Soviet region. In 1992, Yeltsin removed Russian troops from Nagorno-Karabakh and asked NATO to intervene there.¹⁶⁴ For many Russians, however, historical continuity - of the Russian Empire and the USSR - suggested that these places were part of Russia, and this made these conflicts seem threatening and chaotic.

“The Honeymoon has Come to an End”

Lo notes that Russia's foreign policy during that time became greatly politicized and placed a great value on creation of myths, whether of Russia as the West, Russia as a great power, or Russia as a unique civilization.¹⁶⁵ IMF recommended shock therapy and the distress it caused to ordinary Russians compounded their mistrust of the West. A poll in 1993 indicated that most Russians believed the West's economic advice was a deliberate attempt to weaken the country, a narrative promoted by nationalists and neo-communists.¹⁶⁶ Giddens wrote that ontological insecurity as a result of a fragmentation of a biographical narrative causes feelings of being overwhelmed, engulfed by external events and paralyzed in terms of capacity to act. Without trust in the environment to mitigate that anxiety, ontological security is violated and subconscious competing narratives threaten to overwhelm

¹⁶⁰ Klugman, Jeni. *Poverty in Russia public policy and private responses*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1997. 261.

¹⁶¹ Jackson, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 32.

¹⁶² Kipp, Jacob W. 1994. "The Zhirinovsky Threat." *Foreign Affairs*. 733: 72-86.

¹⁶³ Jackson, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 43.

¹⁶⁴ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 79.

¹⁶⁵ Lo, Bobo. *Russian foreign policy in the post-Soviet era: reality, illusion, and mythmaking*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, 6-8.

¹⁶⁶ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 75.

the individual.¹⁶⁷ The way to mitigate this insecurity is through further construction of the ‘other’ and as Yeltsin failed to convince the public that Russia is now the West, alternative narratives have emerged, framing the West as the ‘other’. These narratives spelled out a more coherent notion of Russian identity based on historical continuity with Soviet times. As domestic approval ratings for Yeltsin plummeted, he took increasingly authoritarian steps to strengthen his position, with tacit Western approval, further fueling anti-Western sentiment.¹⁶⁸ Words like democracy became as hollow as socialist speak during perestroika times.

By 1993, it became clear that the Westernizer’s strategy was not sustainable, and Yeltsin and Kozyrev began shifting toward a more realist foreign policy. NATO expansion in Eastern Europe was also perceived as a slight and a threat by most Russian elites and publics.¹⁶⁹ Yeltsin declared that Russia has to have balanced relations with the West because it is a Eurasian State.¹⁷⁰ In 1995, Kozyrev told a journalist that “the honeymoon has come to an end.”¹⁷¹ In 1996, Kozyrev was replaced by conservative statist Primakov, as Yeltsin’s attempt to balance against the rising influence in the domestic sphere of communists and nationalists. Primakov held conservative views, advocating for restoration of Russia as a great power, gaining greater influence in the post-Soviet states, and balancing against the West.¹⁷² Primakov also echoed elements of the Eurasian narrative, suggesting an alliance of Russia, China, and India to balance against the West,¹⁷³ and pursued further integration of the CIS.¹⁷⁴ These views restore some continuity with a common narrative of the past, of Russia as a bridge between East and West. The National Security Concept of 1997 spelled it out by claiming that Russia was an “influential European and Asian power.”¹⁷⁵ Yet Russia was still very dependent on foreign aid. It engaged further with the post-Soviet successor states, yet could not stabilize the

¹⁶⁷ Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity*, 52-55.

¹⁶⁸ Shevtsova, Liliia. *Lonely power: why Russia has failed to become the West and the West is weary of Russia*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010. 22-34.

¹⁶⁹ Tsygankov, *Russia’s Foreign Policy*, 103.

¹⁷⁰ Tsygankov, *Russia’s Foreign Policy*, 67.

¹⁷¹ Kempster, Norman. "Honeymoon With U.S. Over." *The Los Angeles Times*. http://articles.latimes.com/1995-03-24/news/mn-46663_1_russian-participation.

¹⁷² Tsygankov, *Russia’s Foreign Policy*, 96.

¹⁷³ Dmitri Trenin. "After the Empire: Russia’s Emerging International Identity." In Gorodetsky, Gabriel, ed., *Russia between East and West: Russian foreign policy on the threshold of the twenty-first century*, 32-36. London: Frank Cass, 2003.

¹⁷⁴ Tsygankov, *Russia’s Foreign Policy*, 98.

¹⁷⁵ Quoted in Tsygankov, *Russia’s Foreign Policy*, 98.

situation in Chechnya or attain greater cooperation with Georgia.¹⁷⁶ Domestically Russian economy continued to flounder and Northern Caucasus continued to feed the insecurity of Russians. Restoring Russia's ontological security required not only balancing against the West but also restoring domestic security and trust in the state. The great power narrative could not be effective without it.

Westernizers dealt with the stigma of Cold War defeat by what Zarakol refers to as passing of the stigma, treating it as something foreign to the real identity of Russia. Yet as Giddens notes when routines violate a biographical narrative, a "false self" immerses.¹⁷⁷ Betty Jean Lifton calls that self an "artificial self" that "is almost selfless in its desire to please... but knows itself to be an imposter." Neumann notes that 1993 was a watershed year when the Westernizer narrative could no longer be maintained by Russian elites. It was challenged by nationalist narratives which, unlike the Westernizer narrative, "came complete with references back to an unbroken and proud national history."¹⁷⁸

Not accepted as European gave greater prominence to the existing discourse in Russia of being a Eurasian rather than a European power, with its own unique history and sense of morality. The stigma, thus, was reconfigured as an indicator of uniqueness and spirituality: not accepted by the West, Russia confronts its ontological insecurity by reconfiguring its self identity as a distinct civilization based on hybrid Orthodox and Asian values.¹⁷⁹ In a 2001 poll, 71% of respondents said that Russia belonged to a Eurasian civilization, even though another poll in the same year indicated that 83% of respondents supported stronger Russia-West relations. Alexander Dugin posits the dichotomy between fitting in the Western international community and having a sense of agency: "if Russia were to see itself as European, it will automatically be a caricatured country... Russia is not a country, it is a civilization."¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 104-117.

¹⁷⁷ Steele, *Ontological Security*, 63.

¹⁷⁸ Neumann, *Uses of the Other*, 169.

¹⁷⁹ O'Loughlin, John, Gearoid O Tuathail, and Vladimir Kolossov. "A 'Risky Westward Turn'? Putin's 9–11 Script And Ordinary Russians." *Europe-Asia Studies* 56, no. 1 (2004): 5-6.

¹⁸⁰ Quoted in Chepurina, Maria. "Is Russian Identity European Identity?" *InFocus: Revue Bilingue des Affaires Internationales*. <http://infocusrevue.com/2011/04/21/is-russian-identity-european-identity/>.

The Cinema Crisis in Russia

With the dissolution of the socialist state, Russian society went into turmoil and the film industry was no different. The fantasy of artistic freedom, once attained, became a reality of violent, dystopian films. Film critic Andrei Plakhov wrote in 1990 that "the screen has been taken over, in form and content by a nightmare of communal squalor, curses of history, cruel and joyless sex, food line brutality, and the metallic scrape of barracks and prisons."¹⁸¹ An artistic continuum has been broken. Production and quality of Russian films steadily declined, and in 1996 Russian cinema hit a new low, with only 21 films released.¹⁸² During Soviet times Russians were avid moviegoers; after the collapse many theaters went bankrupt, prices went up, and few people could afford to go to a movie theater.¹⁸³ Audiences preferred American or Soviet films. Critics and filmmakers pined for the cinema culture of the past while Russian cinema rebelled against the old and portrayed a present disconnected from the past, a present seething with anxiety. In many ways this was similar to the situation in the country overall. From a great power with a specific, oppressive but familiar, ideological content, Russia went to become a failed state with an official ideology that breaks with the past yet fails to provide a direction, an identity for the country. As a young state and a nascent cinema industry weaned from a protective cocoon of the past, various milieus had to reimagine themselves and overcome what Lacan calls castration anxiety, a stage that comes after the separation of the child from the mother.¹⁸⁴ A fantasy can defend the self against lack of agency.¹⁸⁵ Yet Russian cinema failed to produce such a fantasy. Russian society experienced reality as hopeless and cynical, as "an 'irreal' nightmarish universe with no firm ontological foundation."¹⁸⁶

In 1998, Russia was swept by an economic crisis, accompanied by flight of investors and foreign companies which led to further deterioration of economic security.¹⁸⁷ This was the final nail in

¹⁸¹ Quoted in Graham, "Chernukha and Russian Film," 9.

¹⁸² Lawton, *Imaging Russia*, 12.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 14.

¹⁸⁴ Hallward, Peter, ed. "La castration." Concept and Form: The Cahiers pour l'Analyse and Contemporary French Thought. <http://cahiers.kingston.ac.uk/concepts/castration.html>.

¹⁸⁵ Hallward, Peter, ed. "Le fantasme." The Cahiers pour l'Analyse and Contemporary French Thought. <http://cahiers.kingston.ac.uk/concepts/fantasy.html>.

¹⁸⁶ Quoted in Hashamova, *Pride and Panic*, 31.

¹⁸⁷ Caldwell, Melissa L. "Domesticating The French Fry: McDonald's And Consumerism In Moscow." *Journal of Consumer Culture* 4, no. 1 (2004): 7.

the coffin of the “we are Europe” narrative, and led to greater emphasis on Russianness.¹⁸⁸ During the early 1990s, foreign products were typically preferred as symbols of being Western, but, due to the crisis, Russian products became en vogue again, introducing continuity to Soviet times.¹⁸⁹ At the same time, many Russians blamed the crisis on the West, and, coupled with the bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 to which the Russian public vehemently opposed, the end of the 1990s was a time of growing anti-Americanism. One poll suggested that if in 1993 40% of respondents viewed America's increasing power as a threat for Russia, by 1999, 73% felt that way. In September 1999, Moscow and several other cities were hit by a series of bombing, which further increased the insecurity Russians felt and increased its isolationist mood.

Russia's Nationalist Moment: The Dystopian Fantasies of Balabanov

To respond to the onslaught of *chernukha* and the sense of disorientation, Dondurei, an influential sociologist and film critic called for the creation of a new national mythology, suggesting that Russians were sick of tragedy, sick of Russian humiliation by their environment, their government, and the world.¹⁹⁰ Balabanov's *Brother* (1997), *Brother 2* (2000), and *War* (2002) provided a blueprint for ontological security within a dystopian world. Both *Brother* films achieved cult following in Russia.¹⁹¹ *Brother*'s hero is Danila, a veteran of the Chechen war who goes to St. Petersburg where his brother, Viktor, lives. Viktor was the pride of the family, but in St. Petersburg he became a hitman, and soon he draws Danila into that world, asking him to do a hit. Danila's character constructs a prototype of a dystopian hero. He is loyal to his friends and family, generous, loves Russian music, and is always willing to protect his own, and his brothers. The government is seen as impotent, and St. Petersburg is a cesspool of crime and violence, which in part is blamed on ethnic minorities. When a tram ticket checker asks two men for tickets, they laugh at her, saying with a heavy Caucasian accent “no ticket,” and refuse to pay the fine. Danila aims his gun at them, and when one begs “don't kill me brother,” he provides the iconic line “I'm not your brother you black-assed

¹⁸⁸ Graham, Thomas, and Arnold Horelick. "U.S.-Russian Relations at the Turn of the Century." *Report of Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Working Group on U.S.-Russian Relations* 1 (2000). <http://www.gfna.net/usrussiahorelick.pdf>.

¹⁸⁹ Caldwell, “Domesticating The French Fry,” 7.

¹⁹⁰ Hashamova, *Pride and Panic*, 41.

¹⁹¹ Norris, Stephen M. *Blockbuster history in the new Russia: movies, memory, and patriotism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012. 8-9.

louse.” To justify a hit on a competitor at the black market, Viktor explains that “Chechen terrorists are taking over: they know we’re weak now,” and “it’s either us or them.”

Russians are also portrayed as violent, deceitful, and this is illustrated by Viktor’s betrayal. Viktor expects Danila to kill him but he helps him instead, despite the betrayal. “You were like a father to me when we were growing up,” he tells his shivering, beaten, treacherous, brother. Viktor can be seen as a metaphor for Russia that failed its sons yet still deserves love and redemption. Danila is suspicious of the West, although he is more concerned about the internal enemy. Yet Americanization is portrayed negatively. He meets a girl who speaks English and goes to parties with foreigners, yet all she cares about is money and drugs. Danila goes to a party and tells (in Russian) a Frenchman that his American music is shit and that “soon your America is screwed.” Thus, the Russian hero’s moral code also includes mistrust of foreigners, although here it is presented ironically. Despite being a killer, Danila is presented as a positive hero, a naïve but street-smart character, and a realization of a nationalist fantasy. The collapse of values and morals are real problems, yet through maintaining loyalty to the family and values while staying strong and masculine, Russia can find agency, stop being a victim of environment, and shed its sense of shame.

1999 was one of the lowest points in Russia-West relations. If *Brother*’s nationalist mood was tempered by irony, there was little irony in the sequel. In *Brother 2* the world is black and white. One of Danila’s army friends from the Chechnya War is murdered by an American businessman, and Danila goes to Chicago to seek revenge and save the victim’s brother. In America, the enemies are American values, African Americans, Jews, Ukrainians. A Jewish car salesman sells Danila a broken car, while promising him that “we Russians don’t lie to each other.” When Danila tells a Russian expat cabdriver that he loves his homeland, the driver mocks him: “A patriot! The Russian Idea. Dostoyevsky. *Derzhava*. And where is your homeland? Given by Gorbachev to the Americans, so that he looks pretty. And now your homeland screwed up two wars and Crimea, betrayed Russians in the Baltics, betrayed Serbs in the Balkans. Today, homeland is where your ass is warm.” On the way, Danila meets a Russian prostitute, suffering from the harsh realities of American life and exploited by an African-American pimp. He convinces her to come back to Russia where she reclaims her

‘Russianness’. In the airport, she is told by officials that she violated her visa and will never be able to go back to the U.S. She gives them the finger and runs into the plane, where she tells the flight attendant “bring us vodka. We’re flying home.” The film ends with the song *Goodbye America*, (where I have never been/will never be) an ironic difference from *It Rains Again on Brighton Beach*’s song *Hello America*, illustrating the change in attitude that transpired in Russia in just a few years.

Brother 2 reaffirms Russian honesty and values while American values are mocked and castigated. Hashamova notes that the film exposes the insecurities that threaten Russian collective imagination, such as money and consumer culture, which was inaccessible for most Russians at the time.¹⁹² At the end, Danila summarizes his world view. "American, what is power? Is it money? ... Well, you have a lot of money. So what? I think power is truth. Whoever has more truth is stronger." The message is clear: Russia may not seem powerful, but it is more powerful than the U.S. because it represents truth. There is a constant assault on American political correctness: most African Americans are portrayed as violent and cowardly, mocking the whites who are too afraid to say or do anything. Hashamova notes the subtext: Russia is a unique place, and it should not accept hypocritical liberal values. She links the anxieties felt by the character with Klein’s examination of the defense mechanisms the ego employs to protect itself from “the overwhelming fear of obliteration.”¹⁹³ While one method of dealing with such anxiety is attempting to blend in with the environment,¹⁹⁴ Balabanov suggests an alternative – a technique Klein describes as establishing a “hateful object” by introjecting anything good and projecting all negative experiences and characteristics onto an object.¹⁹⁵ Balabanov isolates the “hateful outsiders” and shows them as caricatures and as moral opposites of the self.¹⁹⁶ It reconfigures the stigma of being misunderstood by America to something positive: we are misunderstood because we have a unique truth, inaccessible to Americans. This mediates the anxiety of Russia’s inability to be accepted by its environment, while rejecting the “false self,” and suggests an alternative narrative of the self in its dealing with the ‘other’. *Brother 2* was by far the most

¹⁹² Hashamova, *Pride and Panic*, 53.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 52.

¹⁹⁴ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity*, 53-54.

¹⁹⁵ Hashamova, *Pride and Panic*, 52.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

popular Russian film in 2000 and attained a cult following, showing that at that juncture in time, the mythology Balabanov was peddling was appealing to a large segment of the population.¹⁹⁷

When Putin came to power, he adopted a pragmatic approach of cooperation with the West while nurturing a new identity that merges aspects of Soviet history with aspects of Imperial Russian history, constructing a hybrid narrative of historical continuity. His handling of the war in Chechnya and the improvement of the economy led to greater stability, and Russia's anti-Americanism was becoming less pronounced. While Russia was still seen as unique and misunderstood by the West, the West was being reconfigured as naïve and hypocritical but not outright threatening and hostile. Balabanov's *War* reflected the shift toward greater focus on the internal enemy while being willing to cooperate with the West, despite its inability to understand Russia.

War starts with a scene of Chechen rebels executing Russian soldiers. There are four hostages: a British man, John, his girlfriend, an injured Russian captain, held for ransom, and a soldier, Ivan. Surprisingly, Ivan is released, while John is told to go to Britain and raise 2 million dollars to ransom his girlfriend, or she will be raped and killed. John fails to get the ransom money, as British authorities refuse to help him. He then contacts Ivan, who is now a civilian, and asks him for help in releasing his girlfriend. The two enter Chechnya and fight their way into the village where the hostages are held, releasing them and killing the rebels. John, then, makes a movie in which he mentions how Ivan killed civilians. He becomes rich, while Ivan is arrested and narrates the film while awaiting trial for murder of civilians. John is presented as hypocritical and cowardly; he kills the kidnapper of his girlfriend for revenge, yet Ivan is prosecuted, due to the John's testimony. Western values are mocked: when the Chechen threatens to rape and kill the British woman, John yells that this is a violation of their human rights. John's girlfriend falls for a Russian captain while in captivity and leaves John after the rescue, reaffirming Russian masculinity.

War also feeds Russian anxieties over the 'other' within its borders. The leader of the Chechens promises that the war will be over when "all Russians will live in the north." They hate

¹⁹⁷ "Luchie Kassovie Sbori V Rosii: 2000." Kinopoisk.ru. http://www.kinopoisk.ru/box/best_rus/view_year/2000/.

cowardice and mock the weakness of Russia's authorities. "Your leaders are idiots and people are weak. Gave away Ukraine and Kazakhstan, half the country for nothing; soon the Far East will go to China. I have in Moscow hotels, restaurants, I milk the Russians like goats and they give me money." Later, he tells Ivan that Russians fight badly because they don't fight for their homeland; they have no biography. "I know my family 7 generations back." Thus, Russia's lack of agency is presented as stemming from its lack of a biography. While the West is portrayed negatively in the film, it is the Russian government that is truly at fault for being swayed by Western pressures.

European and Asian, Friendly and Misunderstood: Nikita Mikhalkov's Russia

By 1997, as Russia was on track to recovery, the cinema began recovering as well, yet Russian cinema, along with its society was still searching for an identity. Dondurei addressed the Congress of the Filmmakers Union in 1997, noting the improvements in infrastructure yet urging for change in content. He called Hollywood "the most important myth-maker, producing ideologically regulated films with an extremely stable value system,"¹⁹⁸ and bemoaned that Russian spectators are now proud of "American heroes."¹⁹⁹ The films of Russia, on the other hand, produce images that "contradict the aims of the modernization of Russia. A national inferiority complex cannot be cultivated in cinema."²⁰⁰ At the end of that Congress Nikita Mikhalkov was elected President and has retained that role since.²⁰¹ Mikhalkov is part of a distinguished family. His brother is also a famous film director, while his father penned the Soviet anthem, and in 2000 wrote the words for the new Russian anthem. Mikhalkov's *Burnt by the Sun* won the Oscar for Best Foreign Film, and he had his own studio, TriTe, one of the few profitable studios in Russia. A few months after the elections, Mikhalkov called for an emergency Congress meeting, where he elaborated his plans and asked for a vote of confidence. In his dramatic speech, he noted that film has to create myths that can create a model for Russian society.²⁰² If the situation does not change, he warned, "the unique cultural bridge between East and West that Russia has traditionally formed will collapse." Mikhalkov's plan was twofold: to create a financial infrastructure, using both state support and free market mechanisms to

¹⁹⁸ Dondurei, in Beumers, Birgit. *Russia on reels: the Russian idea in post-Soviet cinema*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1999. 47-48.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 48.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 47.

²⁰¹ Lawton, *Imaging Russia*, 28.

²⁰² Mikhalkov in Beumers, *Russia on Reels*, 50-53.

make sure cinema remains financially viable, and to cultivate a cinema that strengthens Russia's national identity.²⁰³ He also asked for additional powers, such as appointing a secretariat of administrators instead of filmmakers.²⁰⁴ Lawton notes that while critics denounced him as attempting to take on dictatorial powers, his supporters were pleased to finally have a strong leader with a vision to bring back pride and purpose to a battered industry that fell far from its heyday of influence during Soviet time.²⁰⁵ The plan passed with a large majority. A few months later, Mikhalkov illustrated his vision in his blockbuster *The Barber of Siberia*.

The Barber of Siberia (1998) had a budget of \$49 million, the most expensive Russian film ever made and one of the most expensive non-Hollywood films of all time. The story takes place in 1885, during the time of Alexander the 3rd. It follows Jane, an American who is hired by an investor to come to Russia to help him secure financing for a massive logging operation in Siberia. On the way she meets a Russian soldier, Andrei, and they fall in love. To secure the deal, the woman flirts with an older Russian general. Andrei attacks the general and is sentenced to exile in Siberia. The film romanticizes Imperial Russia. It is shown to be prosperous, its population educated, and the only threat comes from revolutionary terrorists. It is truly European: the soldiers speak perfect English, like most other Russian characters in the film. They perform Mozart's operas, singing in German. At the same time, the Asian Russia is also emphasized. In Siberia, the camera glides over the expansive forests, rivers, and lakes, emphasizing how different they are from European Moscow. The camera shows the Siberian people, with their Asian features and way of life as integrated with the Russian.

The soldiers are courteous, honorable, and somewhat naïve. When Jane asks Andrei "who do you love?" he responds "I love my mom, my homeland, my Czar." Andrei is portrayed as honest and stubborn, willing to sacrifice himself for what he believes in and what he loves. The tagline of the film, "He's Russian. That explains a lot," emphasizes a cultural difference: The American, on the other hand, has a hard time understanding such romantic world view. Jane tries to explain to Andrei

²⁰³ Lawton, *Imaging Russia*, 28-29

²⁰⁴ Ibid, 29.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

that she courts the general for economic gain. She is attracted to Andrei's mystique. "I don't understand anything about this country," she exclaims.

The film presents the interaction between Russia and America as one based on mutual misunderstanding of the other. The American investor is not portrayed as an outright villain but as a naïve and arrogant industrialist, seeking to take advantage of Russian resources for self-enrichment without understanding Russia's uniqueness and the harm he is bringing, which, Norris notes, is a metaphor for the 1990s, when American capitalists exploited Russia's natural resources for gain while robbing the country.²⁰⁶ At the end, Andrei marries a Russian woman and lives a quiet life in Siberia, suggesting that after the initial infatuation with the West, he has returned to his Asian roots and regained what is important.

This is Mikhalkov's vision of Russia's restoration of pride and agency – internalizing its Eurasian and Imperial history and accepting that this will cause misunderstandings with the West, although these need not result in hostility. The movie restores Russia's historical narrative and produces positive heroes, honest people who love their homeland. That this was in part due to Russia's unfavorable interactions with the West was spelled out by Mikhalkov himself. "We've had enough of Hollywood depicting Russians as mobsters, hit men, and prostitutes," he stated in an interview.²⁰⁷ Another aspect of Mikhalkov's vision is the positive portrayal of Czar Alexander the 3rd, played by Mikhalkov himself. Alexander the 3rd is known in Russia as a conservative leader who rolled back many of the liberal reforms of his father. He strengthened and industrialized the military while avoiding any wars.²⁰⁸ He censored the press and oppressed dissent,²⁰⁹ while reaffirming his God-given autocratic power.²¹⁰ This was, thus, the leader Mikhalkov envisioned the country needed to restore its pride and power. Hashamova notes numerous historical inaccuracies in the film, and suggests that Mikhalkov "constructs the historical mystification as reality and transforms illusion into

²⁰⁶ Norris, *Blockbuster History*, 34.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 33-34.

²⁰⁸ Malsom, Scott. "Alexander III." Alexander Palace Time Machine. <http://www.alexanderpalace.org/palace/alexbio.html>.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ <http://novaonline.nvcc.edu/eli/evans/his241/Documents/Manifesto.pdf>.

truth.”²¹¹ The film constructs an object of desire as reality that constitutes a path for the reconstruction of Russian identity.²¹²

The film’s premiere was screened at the Kremlin’s Palace of Congresses and was attended by Russian politicians of all ideological persuasions: Gorbachev, Primakov, Zyuganov, Patriarch Alexi II all attended and praised the film. The film attracted a huge number of spectators in Russia, setting a record for cinema attendance and video sales.²¹³ A poll of viewers found that 95 of respondents liked the film.²¹⁴ Critics were less generous. Many suspected that the film reflected Mikhalkov’s political ambitions to run for president.²¹⁵ Critic Iurii Gladil’shechikov wrote that if Mikhalkov becomes president, Russian film critics will become political emigrants and prisoners.²¹⁶ Critic Natalya Sirivlya, on the other hand, said the movie “is an ointment on the wounds of national pride, and has a very therapeutic function. For that, many thanks.”²¹⁷ Mikhalkov created a blueprint, as a director and as President of the Filmmaking Congress of integrating into the West on Russia’s terms, of merging Russian nationalism with a Western economy to erase the shame of Russia’s loss of status and its failure to be accepted as a Western state. That blueprint was taken up less than a year later by Vladimir Putin.

Putin’s Search for Ontological Security and a New Mythology

In the 2000s, negative attitudes toward the West were deeply entrenched in Russian society.²¹⁸ Interestingly, attitudes toward the West were more negative among young people than middle-aged,²¹⁹ suggesting that this was not a knee-jerk response to globalization by people socialized in a different era; these were indicators of anxiety about Russia’s lack of identity and respect in the international community. Putin provided a panacea for these anxieties by removing many oligarchs from positions of power, forcing some of them into exile. He framed himself as a strong leader not bound by an

²¹¹ Hashamova, *Pride and Panic*, 68.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 69.

²¹³ Norris, *Blockbuster History*, 41.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

²¹⁵ Lawton, *Imaging Russia*, 92.

²¹⁶ Norris, *Blockbuster History*, 42-43.

²¹⁷ Lawton, *Imaging Russia*, 91.

²¹⁸ Guriev, Sergei, Maxim Trudolyubov, and Aleh Tsyvinski. "Russian Attitudes Toward the West." *Centre for Economic and Financial Research at New Economic School Working Paper* 135 (2008).

<http://www.econ.yale.edu/faculty1/tsyvinski/WP135.pdf>.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

inefficient bureaucracy, which resonated with a public that yearned for stability and distrusted democratic institutions. The return to the music of the Soviet anthem and new lyrics penned by the author of the Soviet anthem, signaled a greater shift toward familiar, anxiety reducing, perceptions of the state. Analysts have compared Putin to Andropov,²²⁰ the KGB officer turned General Secretary of the CPSU, and Stolypin, the reformer prime minister of late Imperial Russia who industrialized the nation while fighting dissent and prosecuting those perceived as radicals.²²¹ Putin expressed respect for Andropov and scholars Peter Baker and Susan Glasser wrote that Putin “almost selfconsciously seemed to take ... as his role model and posthumous mentor.”²²² Similarly, Putin has not hidden his admiration for Stolypin, acknowledging his problematic tactics toward revolutionaries but calling to understand the environment in which Russia operated, recovering from its humiliating defeat to Japan in 1905.²²³ Acknowledgment of the positive and the negative aspects of history allowed him to create a narrative that reconciles the past and the present. Not unlike Mikhalkov, Putin merges real and fictitious historical elements while incorporating and mythologizing some of Russia’s ruling traditions that both create historical continuity and calm the anxieties stemming from globalization.

Like Alexander the 3rd, Putin rolled back freedom of the press²²⁴ and almost tripled the military budget within the first two years of his rule.²²⁵ He used strongman tactics in Chechnya. At the same time, his approach toward the West was conciliatory. Trenin notes that Putin's policies underscored his view that foreign policy should be “a resource, and not a drain on resources.”²²⁶ Thus, despite significant criticism from nationalists at home, Putin cooperated with the U.S. following September 11, using it as an opportunity to bolster his international credentials while linking the war

²²⁰ Burlatsky, Fedor. "Potaeniy Andropov." *Izvestia*. <http://izvestia.ru/news/291061>.

²²¹ Whitmore, Brian. "Stolypin and Andropov: The Angel and Devil on Vladimir Putin's Shoulders?" *The Atlantic*. <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/11/stolypin-and-andropov-the-angel-and-devil-on-vladimir-putins-shoulders/265363/>.

²²² Quoted in Kryshatanovskaya, Ol'ga, and Stephen White. "The Sovietization Of Russian Politics." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 25, no. 4 (2009): 283.

²²³ "Putin Otvetil Na Kritiku Stolypina i ego Reform." *Ria Novosti*. <http://ria.ru/society/20111115/489623390.html>.

²²⁴ Gessen, Masha. "Fear and Self-Censorship in Vladimir Putin's Russia." *Nieman Foundation*.

<http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/101154/Fear-and-Self-Censorship-in-Vladimir-Putins-Russia.aspx>.

²²⁵ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 133.

²²⁶ Dmitri Trenin. "After the Empire," 35.

in Chechnya with the War on Terror,²²⁷ promoting traditional Russian narratives of its role as defender of European civilization from barbarism.

Putin understood that alongside economic growth, Russia needs to reclaim control of the nationalist narrative. He constructed a positive definition of patriotism, linking it to "love of one's home, one's people, one's cultural values.... the source of our uniqueness."²²⁸ Putin made it clear that despite his cooperation with the West, he rejects Western values as inappropriate for Russia, noting that it will never be "the second edition of... the U.S. or Britain."²²⁹ He emphasized Russia's links to Asia and ignored Western criticisms of the war in Chechnya.²³⁰ Putin's regime fosters ontological security by integrating Russia into the West while moderating anxiety-causing narratives of Russia's inadequacy by emphasizing Russia's uniqueness, promoting a view of history that does not treat either communism or Imperial Russia as 'other' but instead morphs them into a biography that emphasizes the good in both, allowing for greater stability of narrative. He presents himself as a strong leader of a state that is capable to protect both the safety and the pride of the people. The 'others' for Putin are those who undermine the narratives he attempts to create, the radical nationalists, communists, and liberals.²³¹ At the same time, Putin keeps courting moderate communists, nationalists, and liberals. They gain access to influence and prestige due to rubbing shoulders with a popular leader, while Putin increases his appeal as a strong statist. People like Kurginyan,²³² Dugin,²³³ Prokhorov,²³⁴ all critique Putin yet note that he is the lesser of the evils. It is not surprising that anti-Putin demonstrations are attended by ideological enemies: neo-Nazis, communists, and liberals.²³⁵

²²⁷ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 130-145.

²²⁸ Tuminez, Astrid. "Russian Nationalism and Vladimir Putin's Russia." *PONARS Policy Memo* 151 (2000). http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/pm_0151.pdf.

²²⁹ Quoted in Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 131.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ "Countering extremists key task for law enforcers-Putin." *Russia Today*. <http://rt.com/politics/putin-extremist-rights-security-752/>.

²³² "Kurginyan: Putin - Menshee Zlo, no ya protiv nego." *Newsland*. <http://newsland.com/news/detail/id/850956/>.

²³³ Dugin, Aleksander. "Putin 2: Posledniy Shans." *Odnako*. http://www.odnako.org/magazine/material/show_21190/.

²³⁴ "Mikhail Prokhorov: Putin Sliskom Mnogo Naohidsa u Vlasti." *Kommersant*. <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1858424/>.

²³⁵ For example, see documentary *Winter Go Away* (2012).

Putin's brand of patriotism also made it to the cinema, with the creation of the new Foundation for the Support of Patriotic Cinema.²³⁶ This organization was supported by the President, the Federal Agency of Culture and Cinematography, the State Duma, and the Federal Security Services of the Russian Federation. The main funder was Viktor Vekselberg, one of Russia's richest oligarchs who in the 2000s became involved in branding himself as the 'patriotic oligarch'. The foundation's goal was to promote patriotic cinema and popularize "state symbols, attributes of Russian power, and other heraldic symbols of the state."²³⁷ Productions included a film about an FSB female agent saving the world from terrorists, a documentary about Andropov, and films about the Afghan and Crimean wars that portrayed the military in a positive light. These attempted to emphasize Russia's uniqueness, its history as a *derzhava* (great power) and its role as protector of the West. Vasilii Gerosin noted that "our patriotic movies are the subconscious of the Russian authorities," and characterized them as "a rehash of old Soviet material."²³⁸ Bogomolov noted that they were "the engine for building myths that the government sorely needs."²³⁹ This was true: Putin recognized what people needed and in tandem with Mikhalkov worked to imbed a new kind of identity within the Russian publics. Norris' *Blockbuster History in the New Russia* provides an excellent account of that trend.²⁴⁰

Putin understands that his pro-Western course needs to be tempered by Russia's identity needs and that Russians need to feel that lack of liberalism is part of what makes Russia unique. Foreign policy should serve the nation's economic development, but it cannot contradict Russia's new national narrative. In this context, Steele's view of self-help to achieve ontological security and promote a consistent, proud self identity is appropriate. While understanding acts such as the Dima Yakovlev Law as attempts for rational gains on the international arena is difficult, within the context of protecting Russia's identity from anxieties of being an abnormal country, it becomes more logical. The pain of defeat and the destroyed fantasy of integration are still open wounds in Russia's national

²³⁶ Norris, *Blockbuster History*, 262-263.

²³⁷ Ibid, 263.

²³⁸ Ibid, 308.

²³⁹ Ibid, 308.

²⁴⁰ Ibid, 251-318.

psyche. Opposing certain Western values can provide material benefit of ontological security,²⁴¹ even at the expense of soft power in the West. The Magnitsky Act frames Russia as lacking agency compared to the U.S. and excludes parts of its elites from the global economy. Dugin noted that the Magnitsky Act continues America's stereotyping of Russians as a barbaric people.²⁴² The Dima Yakovlev act perhaps only encourages this notion, but as Zarakol notes, this is an instance of accepting the stigma and treating it as a positive. Putin called the Law an "emotional but appropriate response" reflecting a narrative of Russia's unique irrationality as a positive, like the romantic actions of Andrei Tolstoy, willing to act honorably for truth. This narrative rejects acceptance of Western values as universal and produces symbolic continuity with the past. Russians are willing to join the West, to work with the West, but Russia will not be the West.

²⁴¹ Steele, *Ontological Security*, 3.

²⁴² Aleksander, Dugin. "Svoy Vzgl'yad." MED. med.org.ru/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=4615.

Conclusion

The research in this thesis has two goals. Firstly, to examine what additional explanations for Russia's seemingly irrational behavior can be obtained from an analysis through ontological security theory. Secondly, to suggest that insights about a state's foreign policy can be derived from the examination of domestic society and popular culture. While I do not suggest that traditional IR analysis should be replaced by interdisciplinary approaches, I wanted to show that such approach can augment existing scholarship. Interdisciplinary approaches are not without their problems; I was only able to examine IR theory and Russian film superficially. Yet through this approach, I show the interconnectedness of domestic and foreign policy narratives and argue that much can be gotten from an intersubjective approach to interests and identity formation. Future research that examines other ways domestic identity and popular culture impact foreign policy, in Russia and other states, could be beneficial in providing new insights. It was also outside the scope of this paper to examine how Western attitudes framed Russia as 'other' to maintain their own sense of biography for ontological security needs. By presenting Russia's ontological insecurity, I do not mean to suggest it is a 'sick' or unique country; this kind of an analysis could be similarly performed on other states, including the U.S.

The crises of the *perestroika* and the 1990s caused Russians to feel insecure in their identity and interaction with the environment. The destruction of old symbols without production of new ones by the elites brought about fractures in Russia's biographical continuity and encouraged production of competing narratives within society. Putin restored some of the mythology and reconfigured himself as protector of Russian identity. Economic improvements and anti-Western rhetoric from Putin allowed Russians to feel again that it is a great power, restoring some ontological security. Putin's ability to maneuver between West and anti-West approaches while projecting an image of a strong leader creates continuity with both Soviet and Imperial Russian history. Putin accuses opposition of cooperating with the West to soothe the ontological insecurity of the communists and nationalists. This also allows him to crack down on liberals by framing the uniqueness of illiberal Russian traditions which reassures the domestic public that the country has regained agency and soothes their

anxiety of modernization. This can explain why Russia behaves in ways that seem irrational sometimes; it is trying to protect its identity and sense of agency by rejecting certain values of the 'other'. The war in Georgia and the rhetoric that accompanied it, for example, can be explained by geopolitical security considerations, but the explanation can be augmented by an examination of Georgia's place in Russia's historical narrative. Only part of this strategy is conscious. A part if it is internalized in Putin through the experience of *perestroika* and the 1990s, like it is internalized in many Russians. The goal of this research is to present one of the ways it was internalized. Even the mishap when Azerbaijan failed to give Russia 12 points at the Eurovision has been described by Foreign Minister Lavrov as an "outrageous action"²⁴³ This was not necessarily a planned PR move but rather a result of socialization in a Russian society that feels insecure due to this cultural misunderstanding. For them, Azerbaijan and other CIS states are part of their history, their geopolitical backyard. Russian public yearns for their acceptance of Russia as a cultural hegemon, and perhaps as family, a part of itself, like it has been for many years in Russia's convoluted historical narrative.

²⁴³ "Russia: Azerbaijan's Eurovision snub 'outrageous'." BBC. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-22609523>.

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