DEAD SOULS

Hrvoje Cvijanović https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0742-0844

Faculty of Political Science
University of Zagreb

E-mail: hrvoje.cvijanovic@fpzg.hr

https://doi.org/10.20901/an.21.11
Original Scientific Article
Received: November 10th 2024
Accepted: November 25th 2024

Abstract From early modernity, but particularly during the nationalist rise in the 19th century and again after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russians have been obsessed with the quest for their identity. At the intersection of the West and East, between a nation and empire, Russia has never fully constituted itself as a nation-state, instead understanding itself as an empire searching for its place in the world. This identity search has manifested through the messianic mission of being a "Third Rome" and defender of Orthodox Christianity, or the protector of a "Russian World" as a political project echoing Russian imperial self-understanding. This article examines Russia's quest for identity by focusing on Gogol's troika as a political metaphor of Russia's messianic and imperial destiny, on Carl Schmitt's use the concept of katechon, historically rooted in Christian eschatology, on Alexander Dugin's view of Russian katechonic identity that brings together Russian messianism, imperialism, and nationalism to the eschatological dimension positioning Russia as the bulwark against the Antichrist embodied in Western liberal modernity, and finally, on Vladimir Putin's adoption of the "Russian World" concept, which has become an official part of Russian foreign policy that embraced the "state-civilization" identity as a historical destiny, justifying Russian imperialism, particularly in the context of Russia's imperial war campaign in Ukraine.

Keywords Gogol, Schmitt, Dugin, Putin, katechon, katechonic identity, Russian messianic mission, Russian World

Introduction

"We in Central Europe live '*sous l'oeil des Russes*' [*under the eye of the Russians*, trans. H.C.]", wrote Carl Schmitt, warning us about our predicament (Schmitt, 2007a: 80). For Schmitt, this omnipresent gaze towards Europe from "the more radical brother" becomes more unsettling with Russia appropriating "the anti-religion of technicity" (Schmitt, 2007a: 81). However, it is not the irreligious aura of "technicity" but the *katehonization* of politics that gives shape to political, philosophical, and eschatological quests for Russian identity, and thus determining the way in which this Russian gaze is set towards Europe, or towards the West in general.

The article has four parts. In the first part I take the metaphor of a speeding *troika* from Gogol's *Dead Souls* as it perfectly resembles the quest for Russian identity and the Russian mission in the world, and accordingly an impossibility for Russia to constitute as a nation-state. This metaphor became an ongoing reference for Russian elite, feeding on Russian messianism, nationalism, and imperialism. And

Gogol satisfied their hunger. For that reason, it will be important to understand the roots of Russian messianism depicted in the myth of "Moscow as the Third Rome". The second part provides a theoretical denominator for that quest through Schmitt's political-theological concept of *katechon* as a force that gives history meaning by restraining the appearance of evil, of the Antichrist in the world, hence arguing that Russia's katechonic identity best explains its messianic and imperial drive. In the third part, I focus on the Russian katechonization of politics, specifically on how Russian katechonic identity has been articulated both through Dugin's eschatological understanding of Russia as the spiritual bastion of Orthodoxy, as well as through his Eurasian project on the one hand, and the attack on Western liberal eschatology and liberal modernity on the other. Finally, in the fourth part I highlight how this search for Russian identity takes Putin to define Russia as the "state-civilization" that transcends nation-state borders, particularly through his embrace of the Russian World (Русский мир) concept.

Gogol: Russian mission and the quest for Russian identity

"No city can stand before us!" ("Никакой город перед нами не устоит!"), Russian soldier yelled euphorically at the moment his army entered and occupied the town Selydove in Eastern Ukraine after months of heavy fighting. This triumphalist view echoes Nikolai Gogol's novel *Dead souls* (1842) where the author uses a metaphor of *troika* – a carriage with team of three horses at a gallop – for a powerful symbol of unstoppable Russia on its historical imperial mission. Gogol writes:

> And you, Russia of mine – are not you also speeding like a troika which nought can overtake? Is not the road smoking beneath your wheels, and the bridges thundering as you cross them, and everything being left in the rear, and the spectators, struck with the portent, halting to wonder whether you be not a thunderbolt launched from heaven? What does that awe-inspiring progress of yours foretell? What is the unknown force which lies within your mysterious steeds? Surely the winds themselves must abide in their manes, and every vein in their bodies be an ear stretched to catch the celestial message which bids them, with iron-girded breasts, and hooves which barely touch the earth as they gallop, fly forward on a mission of God? Whither, then, are you speeding, O Russia of mine? Whither? Answer me! But no answer comes – only the weird sound of your collar-bells. Rent into a thousand shreds, the air roars past you, for you are overtaking the whole world, and shall one day force all nations, all empires to stand aside, to give you way! (Gogol, 1916: 206).[1]

Gogol's words, both quasi-prophetic and ambiguous, have become a powerful reference point for the Russian intelligentsia in their attempts to decipher and reclaim Russia's role in the world. For Gogol, the *troika*, as a metaphor for Russia, mirrors the uniqueness of the "chosen" people, resilient and able to endure all the harshness in the world, but also serves as a self-fulfilling prophecy of their messianic destiny. The *troika* resonates with the people and the vice versa: "Ah, *troika*, *troika*, swift as a bird, who was it first invented you? Only among a hardy race of folk can you have come to birth – only in a land which, though poor and rough, lies spread over half

[1] In the original, the second sentence is rather a statement, not merged together with the third sentence. It is: "Дымом дымится под тобою дорога, гремят мосты, все отстает и остается позади" (216), translated as "The road smoking beneath your wheels, and the bridges thundering, and everything falls behind and is left behind". As a statement this is a bolder metaphor of Russia's power. For the original: https://anylang.net/en/books/ru/dead-souls-0/read.

the world, and spans *versts*[2] the counting whereof would leave one with aching eyes" (Gogol, 1916: 205).[3] Gogol's evocative passages celebrating the *troika* symbolism have been continually inspiring Russian nationalism and imperialism. It was not a coincidence, then, that the omen of Gogol's *troika* appeared during the opening spectacle of the Sochi Winter Olympic Games in 2014, just before Russia was set to invade and occupy Crimea and, in months to come, to start the separatist war in Donbas: "For Russians, the image would have resonated with Gogol's *troika* passage and its prophecy of Russia's primacy among all nations. What the Russians therefore likely saw in the Olympic troika was a defiant symbol of newly assertive Russian nationalism" along with the projection of Russia "as an ascendant power reclaiming its rightful place on the world stage" (Bojanowska, 2014).

Yet, it is not only in *Dead Souls* where Gogol conveys the view of Russian ascendence to the world stage, implying a sense of inevitability to that historical and teleological event. The ending of Gogol's *Taras Bulba* (1842)[4] similarly manifests Russia's destiny and its power, along with the portrayal of the Russian Tsar that resembles Hobbes's invoking of the powerful Leviathan monster, as expressed through the prophetic words of the dying hero:

> 'Wait; the time will come when ye shall learn what the Orthodox Russian Faith is like! Already the peoples, far and near, are beginning to understand it. A Tzar shall arise from the Russian soil, and there shall not be a Power in the world which shall not submit itself to him!' But the fire had already risen above the faggot: it was lapping his feet, and the flames spread to the tree… But can any fire, flames or power be found on earth capable of overpowering Russian strength? (Gogol, 1917: 284).[5]

The final scene is structured in such a way that Gogol makes Taras Bulba speak just before he is about to die at the hands of the Poles, but here Gogol intensifies Bul-

[2] Verst is a Russian measure for distance, and it is around 1,1 kilometers.

[3] Here Gogol echoes earlier Herder's view that the strongest people and those deserving to change the world can only be found in harsh circumstances that made them more resilient: "Wherever the peoples keep themselves alert and vigorous, or where nature feeds them only with the hard bread of labor, there no soft sultans can exist; the rough country, the hard way of life are fortresses for their freedom" (Herder, 2004: 126).

[4] Gogol was born in Ukraine as Mykola Hohol (Микола Гоголь). When he was 20, he moved to Russia transformed into a Russian nationalist. His legacy is a matter of the Ukranian-Russian debate. Bojanowska, attempts to save Gogol from his fervent Russian nationalism, claiming that even when "he constructs a nationalist ideology", he is either positioning it against imperialism, or this very nationalistic discourse actually "subverts the nationalism … by injecting it with irony" (Bojanowska, 2007: 26, 233). Bojanowska often highlights the Ukrainian traits in Gogol's work, but it is Gogol who ended up with his "director's cut" of both *Dead Souls* and *Taras Bulba* adding the parts related to Russianness. These made him a hero of Russian nationalists. Thus, as Bojanowska correctly noticed, "Gogol's relevance for Russian nationalism has remained strong irrespective of the political regime" (Bojanowska, 2007: 3).

[5] In the "Ukrainian" version of the text that takes into an account the original from 1835, the whole passage is different, without any reference to Russia or the tsar, instead pointed toward the power of cossacks: "And what have you done, you damned Poles? Do you think there is anything in the world that a Cossack would be afraid of! And the fire had already risen up and licked his feet, gradually embracing the whole tree... But will there be such fires and torments in the world, such a force that would defeat the Cossack force?" ("А що, взяли, чортові ляхи? Думаєте, є що-небудь на світі, чого б злякався козак! А вже вогонь піднявся вгору і лизав його ноги, обіймаючи потроху все дерево... Та хіба знайдуться у світі такі вогні й муки, така сила, що перемогла б козацьку силу?"). See: https://www.ukrlib.com.ua/world/printit.php?tid=15

ba's curse against the foreign enemies, with what appears to be his own commentary on the enigmatic Russian power, again presented in the form of a suggestive and poetic rhetorical question, similarly to the one from the *Dead Souls* regarding direction of where the *troika* is heading.

With the *troika* in *Dead Souls*, Gogol poses the central question concerning Russia's identity: where Russia is going, which direction is taking? Gogol provides no answer. Gogol waits for the *troika*, for Russia, to respond, yet the answer is not coming. However, by doing so, Gogol is answering that riddle, not by showing the direction, but the destiny that Russia is pursuing, the very mission that Russia is on. Gogol got a similar question about his own identity posed by his good friend Aleksandra Osipovna Smirnova in 1844. At that time, it was evident that after revising and adapting his novels to meet the expectations of the Russian intelligentsia, Gogol had also adopted their Russian nationalism. Thus, when Smirnova asked Gogol to clarify his identity by asking him, "In your soul, are you a Russian or a Ukrainian?", he answered:

> I'll tell you that I myself don't know what soul I have: Ukrainian or Russian. I only know that I would grant primacy neither to a Little Russian[6] over a Russian nor to a Russian over a Little Russian. Both natures are generously endowed by God, and as if on purpose, each of them in its own way includes in itself that which the other lacks – a clear sign that they are meant to complement each other (Bojanowska, 2007: 1-2).

Gogol's ambivalence about his own identity is a way not to tell directly that he adopted Russian identity becoming, after all, the Russian writer, i.e. writing and rewriting his novels from the Russian perspective.[7] This is clear from the passages written about Russia and its imagined role in the world. Unlike Bojanowska, who attempts to diminish Gogol's Russian nationalism in these paragraphs by claiming that the "inscrutability of its direction makes Russia's manifestation as pure energy and movement less unequivocally positive, for energy can conceivably be spent toward unworthy goals, and movement can conceivably lead to a blind alley", or that "Russia remains an unstable enigma, a heedless, unpredictable elemental force – for better and for worse" (Bojanowska, 2007: 232), it is clear that Gogol's philosophy of history suggests a definitive endpoint for the Russian mission. Whatever direction Russia takes, it reveals the Russian mission of "overtaking the whole world", leading to upheaval for all others while compelling them to stand aside, regardless of the temporal dimension of that mission. In this sense, the "inscrutability" that Bojanowska mentions should be attributed to Gogol's philosophy of history, which

[6] Little Russia is a historical term linked to Ukraine dating from the 17th century. The Russian Empire used the term for the non-Russian territories, in this case Ukraine, that it claimed to be culturally or ethnically related to Russia.

[7] For Bojanowska, prior to becoming a Russian writer, Gogol was a Ukrainian nationalist, however, not as fervent as he was as a Russian nationalist. But for her "his Ukrainian nationalistic message appears more subdued and indirect" (Bojanowska, 2007: 8). Even if that was the case, it would show him as a flamboyant character switching from one nationalism to another. She writes about Gogol's transformation: "The year 1836 stands as an important caesura in the evolution of Gogol's nationalist ideas. At some point during this year, Gogol renounced his ambition to launch a career in the civil service and in academia and decided to become a professional writer. While this led to his very public espousal of the Russian national cause, up to that point … Gogol was primarily involved with Ukrainian nationalist concerns" (Bojanowska, 2007: 5).

provides a direction while simultaneously containing unclear omens and potential apocalyptic consequences.

For Gogol, imperial, nationalist, and messianic traits of Russian identity are intertwined. In *Selected Passages from Correspondence With Friends* (1847) Gogol is convinced that Russian uniqueness has been shaped and led by "the hand of God" as he put it in the letter to Vasily Zhukovski: "Why are neither France nor England or Germany infected by this fad, why do they not prophesy about themselves, why is Russia the only one to prophesy? Because more strongly than the others does it feel the hand of God in all which has been visited upon her and it scents the approach of a new kingdom. That is why the accent of our poets is biblical. And this is what there cannot be in the poets of other nations, as strongly as they may love their motherlands and as ardently as they may know how to express that love" (Gogol, 1969: 51). In the letter to Russian general Pyotr A. Tolstoy, Gogol writes: "For the Russian, at the present time, there is a way; that way is Russia herself … It is to this love that God Himself now directs us" (Gogol, 1969: 111). Direct "us" where?

As we have previously seen in *Dead Souls*, this direction is described as "a mission of God", revealing that Gogol adopted the view that Russian messianic mission is both nationalist and imperial. We find not only the idea of the chosen people and the worldly mission of Russia as a defender of true Christianity, but also cryptic apocalyptic prophesying that envisions Russia as the first to celebrate "the advent of the Kingdom of Christ" (Gogol, 1969: 259). Only by understanding Russia's messianic call, it is possible to reveal where Russia stands at the stage of universal history. "The Russian idea, the proper role and duty for Russia in history demands of us that we recognize ourselves to be in solidarity with the universal family of Christ and to employ all our national capabilities, all the power of our empire, to the complete realization of the social Trinity", as Vladimir S. Solovyov, the Russian 19th century philosopher, defined. For him, this Leviathan-like union of the state, the church, and society should be a mirror of "the divine Trinity, this is the Russian idea" (Solovyov, 2015: 49).

The importance of Russian messianism and missionism is outlined by Nikolai Berdyaev:

> *Messianism* derives from Messiah, *missionism* from mission. *Messianism* is much more exacting than *missionism*. It is easy to assume that each nation has its particular mission, its calling in the world, corresponding to the uniqueness of its individuality. But the messianic consciousness claims an exclusive calling, a calling which is religious and universal in its significance, and sees in the given people the bearer of the messianic spirit. The given people are God's chosen people, and in this lies the Messiah (Berdyaev, in Duncan, 2000: 7).

At the heart of Russian messianism lies the significance of Orthodox Christianity in shaping Russia's sense of purpose. Berdyaev declared: "Messianic consciousness is more characteristic of the Russians than of any other people except the Jews" (Berdyaev 1948: 8). The very background of such messianism is the idea of "Moscow as the Third Rome". Following the collapse of the Byzantine Empire, Moscow regarded itself as "the Third Rome", as a spiritual successor of previous Christian empires. Based on the appropriation of earlier Byzantine messianism that viewed Constantinople as the Second, or New Rome, the idea of Moscow as the Third Rome has been shaped at the beginning of 16th century by Russian monk Filofei (Philotheus). In 1511, Filofei's letter to Tsar Vasily III stated that "two Romes have fallen, and

the Third stands, and a fourth shall never be, for Thy Christian Empire shall never devolve upon others" (Duncan, 2000: 11). For Filofei, the Russian Tsar "is the only Christian Tsar in the whole earth", and as such, above all other worldly emperors, to whom, ultimately, "belonged not only care for the interests of the State but also care for the salvation of souls" (Berdyaev 1948: 8-9).[8]

Finally, it should be added that Russian messianism can hardly be detached from eschatology. In the light of the events where the Church predicted the apocalypse for the year 1492, and when this did not happen, the Church proclaimed Russian tsar Ivan III as the "new Emperor Constantine of the new Constantinople – Moscow" (Duncan, 2000: 12). All these beliefs have sparked Russia's sense of exceptionalism and messianism. Not only that Russia is assigned to protect Orthodoxy as the authentic version of Christianity, but eventually, the Third Rome has to liberate the Second, i.e. Constantinople (*ibid.*)[9], on its mission of upholding Christianity against chaos and the forces of evil.

Schmitt: the concept of *katechon* in political theory

Katechonic identity is a driving force of Russian imperialism. Before demonstrating how Dugin redeployed Schmitt's politico-theological view on *katechon* – related to eschatological thinking – in the context of Russian messianism, thereby assigning Russia a katechonic identity, I will first discuss the concept of katechon itself and then illustrate how it has become integrated into contemporary Russian political discourse.

All the contemporary references to the concept of *katechon* with its eschatological dimension come from the *Second Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians*. I quote the relevant passage from the English translation of Agamben's *Il mistero del male*, *The Mystery of Evil*, which provides the original Greek terms in brackets:

> As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we beg you, brothers and sisters, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by inspiration or by word or by a letter that claims to be sent by me, as though the day of the Lord were imminent. Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the apostasy comes and the man of lawlessness [*ho anthropos tēs anomias*] is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God. Do you not remember that I told you these things when I was still with you? And you know what is now restraining [*to katechon*] him, so that he may be revealed when the time comes. For the mystery of lawlessness [*mystērion tēs anomias* …] is already at work, but only until the one who now restrains [*ho katechōn*] it is removed. And then

[8] While the idea of "Moscow as the Third Rome" has not always been equally accepted among Russian tsars, it has become a permanent trait of the Russian socio-political context. Some tsars relied on this idea pragmatically, using it as a vehicle for political gains and territorial expansion, as in the cases of imperial conquests of Ivan III, and Catharine II, who under the influence of the Enlightenment ideas did not link imperial expansions with messianism. Peter I, "the Great", even refused the title of "Christian Emperor of the East". He introduced reforms aimed at Westernizing society, even moving the capital from Moscow to St. Petersburg, thereby symbolically undermining the idea of Moscow as the Third Rome. However, his disregard for Russian messianism bolstered opposing views. Ultimately, he was perceived as an Antichrist, and his reforms were seen as a departure from the Russian people (Duncan, 2000: 13-16).

[9] "The real end of our national politics is Constantinople" (Solovyov, 2015: 13). This is how Russian messianism is integrated into the Russian historical mission.

> the lawless one [*anomos*, literally "the without-law"] will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will eliminate with the breath of his mouth, rendering him inoperative with the manifestation of his coming. The coming of the lawless one is apparent in the working of Satan, who uses all power, signs, lying wonders, and every kind of wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved (2 Thessalonians 2:1-11) (Agamben, 2017: 8-9).

It seems like the role of the *katechon* in historical time is ambivalent, as it restrains both arrivals or presences (*parousia*) – the Second coming of Christ, as well as the *anomos*, i.e. the Antichrist (Agamben, 2005: 109-111). Roberto Esposito highlights the delaying capacity of the katechon in order to understands its aporetic character – by restraining evil, the katechon hinders the full realization of the ultimate good: "In order to protect people from the Antichrist, the katechon defers the final battle that will lead to the victory of the good. This means that rather than eradicate evil, the katechon restrains it to prevent it from being unleashed … The need to incorporate evil, controlling it, issues from this imperative: to safeguard the possibility of the good by delaying its realization" (Esposito, 2015: 77).

Schmitt used the concept of katechon for the first time explicitly in his short article *Beschleuniger wider Willen, oder Problematik der westlichen Hemisphäre* (*Accelerators against their will, or the problem of the Western Hemisphere*) published in the newspapers on April 19, 1942. Here Schmitt follows the ancient and medieval view of katechon as the ability to stop, delay, restrain (*Aufhalter* and *Verzögerer*). He writes:

> In Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, people believed in a mysterious restraining power, referred to by the Greek term 'kat-echon' (to hold down, germ. *Niederhalten*, H.C.), which prevented the long-overdue apocalyptic end of times from occurring just yet. Tertullian and others saw the then-existing, ancient Roman Empire as the restrainer that, by its mere existence, 'held' the aeon and caused a postponement of the end. The European Middle Ages adopted this belief, and significant events in medieval history can only be understood from this perspective (Schmitt, 1995: 436).

Schmitt identifies several "restrainers", such are emperor Franz Joseph, Czech president Masaryk, or Polish marshal Pilsudski. However, for him Roosevelt seems to be an interesting figure, although not in a positive way. By engaging in the Second World War, Roosevelt "had become one of the great restrainers and delayers of world history", yet, Schmitt concludes: "the fate of those who glide into the maelstrom of history without certainty of inner meaning unfolds here. They are neither great movers nor great delayers but can only end as accelerators against their will" (*ibid.*). Nazi Germany, under Hitler, is likely to be understood as the true "accelerator" of world history, and if that is the case, then the United States portrayed as a katechonic force holds the world history from speeding up. It is evident that Schmitt uses the concept of katechon in a negative sense, viewing it as a force that prevents the unfolding of world history.

However, during the same year, Schmitt assigned a positive meaning to the concept of katechon in his work *Land und Meer* (*Land and Sea*) linking it to the role of the Byzantine Empire in holding/preventing the ultimate destruction of the Christian civilization: "it acted as a rampart, a *katechon*, as it is called in Greek … preventing the Arabs from conquering the whole of Italy. In its absence, Italy would have become part of the Moslem world, like Northern Africa, and all of the Ancient and Christian civilization would have been destroyed" (Schmitt, 2007: 8). In *The*

Nomos of the Earth, Schmitt further strengthened this interpretation of katechon that serves as historical and political force against destructive forces of division and decay. After the fall of Rome, history is, as Schmitt stated, "the history of a struggle *for*, not against Rome" – a struggle against political entropy, where the Christian empire was capable of acting as "the restrainer: *katechon* … the historical power to restrain the appearance of Antichrist and the end of the present eon; it was a power that withholds (*qui tenet*), as the Apostle Paul said in his Second Letter to the Thessalonians" (Schmitt, 2006: 59-60).

Katechon gives meaning to history by establishing and defending the political order (*nomos*) against destructive chaos (*anomos*). As such it embodies both the order and the one who represents it. The apocalypse, or the end of the world cannot be prevented, but it can be either hastened or delayed through activities in world history. This is why the concept of katechon serves to prevent what Schmitt calls, "an eschatological paralysis of all human events" (Schmitt, 2006: 60), namely a sole focus on the transcendent rather than the immanent, worldly life. Between the First and the Second Coming, we thus have a permanent struggle between the forces of chaos and the forces of order. Schmitt anchors his entire theory of the political in this understanding of the katechon, which becomes the condition of possibility of the spatial political order. The friend-enemy relation serves that purpose – to delay the state's own self-destruction.[10] Hence, as Agamben noted, based on this understanding of the katechon "every theory of the State, including Hobbes's which thinks of it as a power destined to block or delay catastrophe can be taken as a secularization of this interpretation of 2 Thessalonians" (Agamben, 2005: 110). Indeed, it is in Hobbes's theory where the state is teleologically set to withhold catastrophe of the civil war and enable the time to exist through human achievements, since the abyss of chaos in the state of nature has been described, among all, as a condition with "no account of time" (Hobbes, 1998: 84).

On the one hand, the katechon appears as the bridge of the space-time continuum between the spatial political order of historical time, represented by the *imperium* (the emperor), and the spiritual spaceless order of eschatological time, represented by the *sacerdotium* (the pope). On the other hand, the Antichrist is not just an abstract figure. For Schmitt it embodies inhuman forces of what he calls, "the economic-technical thinking", namely the forces of technological, materialistic, and economic rationalism, that accelerate chaos and destruction and undermine the political order. Schmitt writes: "A devout Catholic, precisely following his own rationality, might well be horrified by this system of irresistible materiality. Today, one can say it is perhaps more among Catholics that the image of the Antichrist is still alive" (Schmitt, 1996: 15).

Dugin: the katechonization of Russian politics

> Every Russian bears the stamp of the Third Rome upon his soul. This is the central paradigm of our historical consciousness. And here it is important to emphasize the intimate connection between the national, governmental component and the eschatological, metaphysical truth of the Orthodox faith … Holy Rus' was not simply one among many

[10] In Schmitt's theory of the partisan this "telluric-terrestrial character of the partisan" (Schmitt, 2007b: 70) can be understood as the katechon, the one that holds the land and defends "a local space and autochthonous form of life against the devastating forces of encroaching rootlessness" (Minca and Rowan, 2016: 207).

governments; Russians are not simply one among the multitude of Orthodox peoples, with their heroes, convictions, institutes, and customs. This is the sole New Israel on earth, having become such precisely during the fifteenth century and having been chosen to fulfill its mission from that point forward (Dugin, 2023a: 47).

For Dugin, the emergence of Russia's katechonic identity coincides with two concurrent epic "falls" – the fall of the Golden Horde along with the fall of Byzantium. He explains the appearance of "a new ideology" of "the Russian katechon (Moscow – the Third Rome)" within a specific historical context, or, precisely, within the space-time continuum as a proof of Russian katechonic mission: "The fall of Byzantium and the almost simultaneous disappearance of the Golden Horde were understood as a transfer of the mission of the stronghold of universal Orthodoxy to the Russian state and the Russian people. Here, the uniqueness of Russian Orthodoxy (in its fundamental form, previously in Kyiv and preserved in Eastern Russia) is recognized as evidence of eschatological chosenness" (Dugin, 2019: 77). On the one hand, while the Golden Horde provided "an important lesson for Russia in centralised organization of the imperial type", its collapse also allowed for Russia to fill this spatial vacuum in Eurasia (Dugin, 2021: 41). On the other hand, the fall of Byzantium paved the way for Russia's "eschatological chosenness", revealing its underlying messianism and defining Russia's mission on Earth as a katechon:

The fall of Byzantium was the end of the 'thousand-year kingdom,' and only Orthodox Russia, having adopted this mission from the New Rome, was able to stand for a time as the bastion of Orthodoxy in a world of universal apostasy. Holy Rus' (the Third Rome) was a sort of miraculous continuation of the 'thousand-year kingdom,' but was a far cry from its initial period or its moment of blossoming. Rather, in a certain sense, Holy Rus' took on this mission after it had ended, paradoxically preserving it in a special, providential territory chosen by God: a geopolitical ark (Dugin, 2023a: 47).

Russian katechonic identity and the obsession with Christian eschatology form the axis of Dugin's "practical philosophy" aiming to justify Russian imperialism via the lenses of the so-called Russian messianic mission: "Empire became our fate … our revival is inconceivable without returning to the imperial mission laid down in our historical destiny. This mission is diametrically opposed to the globalist project … the globalists will do everything in their power to prevent an imperial renaissance in Russia … this is our mission – to be the *katechon*, 'the one who withholds', preventing the arrival of the last evil in the world" (Dugin, 2021: 41-42). Dugin has essentially reinterpreted the myth of Moscow as the Third Rome, suggesting that Russia's imperial mission embodies its katechonic identity, the view that Russia is a historical katechon countering emerging forces of evil (i.e. globalization and its manifestations).

In Russian, the word *derzhava* (держава) comes from the old word *drzh*a (дьржа), which means dominion, and refers to the great power that embodies the capacity "to hold" or to "restrain", so the verb *derzhat'* (держать) – "to hold" retains its full meaning in relation to the state, thus expressing the idea of katechon more faithfully than in Anglo-Saxon languages. *Derzhava* as a great power is also a synonym for an empire (*imperya*/империя) and an archaic name for the state.[11]

[11] Also, a derivation of the word *derzhava* is exemplified in the "miraculous" icon of the "Mother of God" who holds in her hands the scepter and orb. The icon (found in 1917 near Moscow) is named "She Who Reigns" (Derzhavnaia/Державная). In regular Russian language *derzhava*, as more grandeur description for the state, is replaced with *gosudarstvo* (государство).

Moreover, *derzhava* is the name of the *globus cruciger* (or, the orb), a symbol of the tsar's power, that was usually held in the hand, so it is linked to the above mentioned verb *derzhat'* (держать), "to hold", that corresponds to the Greek term *katechein*. In this context, *ho katechōn* is translated as *uderzhivaiushchii* (удерживающий), meaning the one who holds/restrains, i.e. the emperor, and the term *uderzhivaiushche* (удерживающее), or *to katechōn*, represents the worldly form that withholds, such as the empire. The first, for Dugin, was the Byzantine Emperor, the second the Byzantium. However, in the light of the fall of the Byzantine Empire in the 15th century, the idea of katechon has revived as an omen of the impending apocalypse.[12] Dugin explains:

> During that period in Russia, the idea of the Third Rome was born, according to which the fall of Byzantium did not signify the arrival of the 'son of destruction'. The very Byzantium inherited the mission of Rome, that is, the functions of the imperial *katechon*, becoming the Second Rome. Since then, this mission has been transferred to Russia that was declared The Third Rome … The Greek era was exhausted, but the Russian era continued. Thus, the Russian state became the time itself [самим временем] – and to a greater extent than it had been before. Constantinople, the Second Rome, could no longer withstand the onslaught of the 'mystery of lawlessness', but Moscow still endured and kept [еще держалась и держала] the world at bay. This was the peak of Russian state history when the entire historical process … came together to Russian power [держава]; Then Ivan IV (1530–1584) was crowned as tsar (that is, he officially accepted the title of Emperor, the katechon – ὁ κατέχων), and the Russian state itself became the *kingdom* [*царством*] (το κατέχον), not conditionally, but fully and exclusively (Dugin, 2019: 302-303).[13]

The "Moscow-the-Third-Rome" myth forms, for Dugin, the causal chain of events prompting "the self-awareness of the Russian church, which in turn defined the very identity of the Russian national soul. To 'be Russian' after the fall of the Byzantine Empire was to 'be chosen for apocalyptic resistance against the liberated Satan immediately before the End of the World'" (Dugin, 2023a: 46). Such katechonization of politics reflects the view that Orthodox politics cannot be detached from the existence of the Orthodox "katechon" emperor who holds not only temporary power, but "is seen as a spiritual mystical eschatological support for the entire Christian tradition … and, accordingly, performs a function that is much deeper and more serious than ordinary princes, kings, tsars" (Dugin, 2004: 175-180). Similarly, this katechonization of politics means that the state exists not only within the space-time continuum, encompassing both spatial and temporal dimensions, but it is the very condition of possibility of the space-time to exist. Specifically, the state transcends its mere political mission of taming forces of disorder and preven-

However, in the Russian national anthem the term that is used is *derzhava*, not *gosudarstvo*: "Russia – our sacred state" ("Россия – священная наша держава").

[12] Dugin claims that "Catholicism was seen as a 'heresy' which distorted the soteriological proportions found in the structure of the Final Kingdom, inflicted upon the '*katekhon*'"; that was the reason why Byzantium as the Orthodox power "remained the *katekhon*", and after all, Russia, its successor. Dugin emphasized: "Rus' truly became the chosen kingdom; Russians truly shouldered the eschatological mission" (Dugin, 2023a: 30-31).

[13] All translations from references in Russian to English are mine. Throughout the text, I put Russian words in brackets (within quotations) or in parentheses (in the main text and footnotes) to reflect the original meaning where I thought it was important. In this quotation, the parentheses with two versions of *katechon* in Greek alphabet are Dugin's.

ting the outbreak of political entropy due to its eschatological dimension. Dugin provides an additional clarification to this originally Schmittian understanding of the state:

> The state exists in time according to its Orthodox interpretation, as it is called to delay the end of the world and the moment of the apocalypse. Consequently, time is prolonged because the state exists … As soon as the state weakens, time will collapse into the abyss of the end … The state, in its future dimension, borders on the Antichrist. As long as the state exists, the mystery of lawlessness has not yet come. When it weakens or ceases to be Christian, the 'son of perdition' will freely invade the world and collapse time. Thus, the official history of Russian statehood has originally been tragically and apocalyptically sharpened. The state was a mission, and its very existence was primarily represented by sequences of eschatological battles (Dugin, 2019: 302).

Hobbes's metaphor of the state as a mortal god presupposes that the state is fragile because it is always exposed to centrifugal forces of chaos and destruction. Similarly, in Dugin's eschatological conceptualization there is an always present danger of the state's breakdown. For Schmitt, Europe, wrapped up in a liberal mantle, was destined to fail because it was not anchored in the idea of katechon. Liberals like Tocqueville "lacked the footing in salvific history that would preserve his historical idea of Europe against despair. Europe was lost without the idea of a *katechon*. Tocqueville knew no *katechon* (Schmitt, 2017: 29).

However, the katechonization of politics in Russian political discourse does not radiate the powerful perception of the Russian state, but rather a deluded belief in the katechon that should be understood as tacit fear of Russia's ultimate demise and "a perpetual and restless desire of power after power" (Hobbes, 1998: 66). This Russian obsession with the katechonic identity, viewing Russia as "the northern Katechon" (Maler, 2005), influences a strong modern political myth of Holy Rus' embodied in the institutions of state and church anchoring these esoteric eschatological concepts into a cohesive political narrative that attempts to shape the direction of Russian mission. For Russian conservatives and nationalists, the events that followed the fall of communism, which brought weakness and unrest, reflected the attempt to destroy Russia "under the ideological flag of Western European liberalism and human rights", as Natalya Narochnitskaya put it, from "the kingdom of the beast, of the Anti-Christ" (Horvath, 2016: 875).

Yet, it would be simplistic to claim that Russia's direction is necessarily anti-Western, as the very logic of the East-West divide has been not only a matter of Russia's quest for its identity from modernity until contemporaneity, but also something that has been reconceptualized recently. For instance, Arkadii Maler is warning about the mistake of equating the concept of "Europe" with the concept of "the West" since the foundation of Europe is not only in Ancient Greece, but also in Byzantium. What the West has been doing is an "abduction of Europe" (Maler, 2007). Moreover, the East holds a special place in the Christian tradition. As Maler says, it is not only where the light of the sun comes from but, more importantly, where the light of Christ comes from. As a caretaker of the "eastern light" Russia is thus understood as a bulwark against the godlessness and decadence of Western liberalism and moral relativism, as well as against globalism and global capitalism (*ibid.*). Dugin similarly stated: "We don't invite people to fight against the West. Not at all. The West is not an enemy … We have identified our main enemy as Western political modernity, or Western modernity in general … it coincides with capitalism

… So, we need to liberate the West … We need to liberate Europe and the United States from liberalism" (Dugin, 2021: 69-70; 76-77), to "save Europe from gay Satan" (Snyder, 2018: 150). This will mark the climax of the "eschatological war of the Third Rome against the Third Carthage" (Maler 2005: 177), the final battle between two biblical monsters – the Leviathan (the sea animal, the civilization of Atlanticism, of the West) vs. the Behemoth (the terrestrial animal, the Eurasian civilization, Russia), as described by Dugin (Dugin, 2015; 2023a), referencing Schmitt's portrayal of this cabbalist narrative where at the end of the battle "the two opponents kill each other" (Schmitt, 1997: 6).[14]

Francis Fukuyama's liberal eschatology has been equated with the arrival of the liberal Antichrist. This was the wake-up call for Russia to embrace its katechonic identity, since the "last battle" has come.[15] This is the battle in which, as former Russian president and current Deputy Chairman of the Security Council, Dmitry Medvedev said, Russia must "stop the supreme ruler of Hell, whatever name he uses – Satan, Lucifer or Iblis", and send "all our enemies to fiery Gehenna" (Reuters, 2022). Therefore, the proclamation of "the abyss of the end of history", always accompanied with "the mystery of lawlessness" (Dugin, 2019: 302), has become an imperative for Russia to act as the katechon.[16] Politically, Fukuyama's "the end of history" would be the end of the multipolar world. This view reflects Schmitt's fear of depoliticization and the post-political rise of a global "universe" that will lead to the annihilation of the political and the end of the world as a "pluriverse" (Schmitt, 1996b: 53), the end of the world divided along "continental blocks", "spheres of interests", or, what he theorized under the concept of *Großraum*/*Großräume* (Schmitt, 2006: 234). Based on the "might makes right" principle in which powerful political entities dominate and suppress weaker states, Schmitt's concept of *Großraum* serves as a foundation for the idea of a multipolar world, or as Dugin said, "Eurasianism is the philosophy of multipolar globalization" (Dugin, 2014: 52).

Moreover, Russia's Eurasian political identity relies on messianic philosophy of history. It is "claimed to be the logical conclusion of Russian thinking about identity", justifying Russia's imperial project "as a political expression of Eurasian space", while at the same time understanding Europe as a major challenge for realization of Russia's "geohistoric being" (Laruelle, 2008: 46-48). For Dugin multipolarity is the anti-globalist and anti-liberal project of the hepta-polar world in which six poles of the BRICS countries stand against Western hegemony. While Eurasianism is fundamentally an anti-EU project, from the Russian angle it can be wrapped up into a revisionist project of "Europe's coming home", or coming to Russia. Namely, for Dugin, Russian Eurasian mission is "a project for the strategic, geopolitical, and economic integration … of the Eurasian continent" (Dugin, 2014: 35) based on "a fundamental revision of the political, ideological, ethnic, and religious history of

[14] In Christian mythology, the Behemoth monster is mentioned in the Book of Job before the sea-monster Leviathan is introduced as "king over all the children of pride". However, for Hobbes (Hobbes, 1990), the Behemoth symbolizes seditious forces of the "kingdom of darkness". Dugin uses this symbol for Russia when assigning Russia the katechonic identity, not the Leviathan, as described by Hobbes, that truly reflects the katechon able to hold against chaos.

[15] This ongoing "last battle" has been recently perceived as the fight against the "Great Reset", as Dugin claims (Dugin, 2021: 16), or against globalism (linked with transgender ideology, LGBTQ+, BLM, Soros, post-humanism, etc.).

[16] While Fukuyama's "prophesy" about the end of history is one sign of the endtimes, the coronavirus is "a kind of eschatological sign" for Dugin (Dugin, 2021: 78).

mankind" (Dugin, 2014: 31).[17] The Russian Eurasian mission relies on messianic and eschatological foundations based on "Third Romeism", however, its aim is to redefine global geopolitical structure by creating multipolar *Großräume* with Russia having a prominent role and securing its own *Großraum*. The key idea for defining Russia's identity and the direction Russia is taking is the concept of the Russian World.

Putin: the necropolitical imperialism of the Russian World

> Moscow, Peter's city, and Constantine's city
> Are the holy capitals of the Russian realm.
> But where its outer limit, where its border,
> To north, to east, to south, and where the sun sets?
> Destiny will unmask them in future times.
> Seven inland seas, and seven great rivers,
> From Nile to Neva, from Elbe to China, from Volga
> To Euphrates, from the Ganges to the Danube –
> That is the Russian realm. And never will
> It pass, as the Spirit foresaw and Daniel predicted.
> *(1848 or 1849)*
>
> Tyutchev, *Russian Geography* (1973: 131)

On November 24th, 2016, at the awards ceremony of the Russian Geographical Society, Vladimir Putin asked nine-year-old Miroslav, a schoolboy who was participating in a geography Olympiad, where Russia's borders end. "Russia's borders end through the Bering Strait with the United States…", the boy answered, but Putin interrupted the boy: "Russia's borders do not end anywhere." ("Границы России нигде не заканчиваются"). A year after Russia started the full-scale invasion on Ukraine on February 24th, 2022, billboards with this statement about Russian borders began appearing across Russia. Later, in October 2023, Putin discussed the meaning of this phrase aligning it with the idea of the Russian World (Русский мир) – an "imagined community" mirroring a spiritual community of Holy Rus' – where, as Putin said, "many of our compatriots" reside and speak the "Russian language" (Tass, 2023).

This revealed two important contemporary imaginations of Russia: first, since "the Russian world has a global character", Russia is not merely a state; rather it is a state of mind of those united by the Russian language and culture; and second, unlike a "nation-state" with fixed borders, it is a "state-civilization" with fluid boundaries and open frontiers. Putin publicly introduced the "state-civilization" idea in 2012. Russia is seen as an imperial rather than a nation-state project. Putin argued against "the ideas of building a Russian 'national', 'mono-ethnic' state", instead viewing Russia as a "unique socio-cultural civilizational entity formed on the multi-people Russian nation" (Tsyugankov, 2016: 6). Accordingly, Russian identity is understood

[17] For instance, in 2015 Dugin promoted his Eurasian project in Vienna while meeting various "right-wing politicians, such as Marion Maréchal-Le Pen … members of the Austrian Freedom Party, and other figures from Spain, Switzerland, Croatia and Bulgaria … on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the Congress of Vienna, which ushered in the Concert of Europe – a Europe of sovereign national states, where balance and stability were guaranteed by the Holy Alliance of 1815: an alliance of Russia with German-speaking Europe in the form of Prussia and Austria-Hungary" (Clover, 2016: 328).

not only beyond a narrow national perspective, but also in its civilizational distinctiveness from the Western world.

Gogol's question about what Russia is or what it should be is a similar type of attempt at national self-understanding and self-realization. Is it a nation-state, and if so, on what kind of mission? Or is it an empire with its messianic destiny? Where Russia belongs – to the West, or to the East? What is Russian identity? All these questions were a matter of fierce intellectual debate of the 19th century in Russia between the so-called Slavophiles and the Westernizers. Berdyaev summarizes their views:

> The Westernizers accepted Peter's reform entirely, and in their view the future of Russia lay in its taking the Western path. The Slavophils believed in a special type of culture springing out of the spiritual soil of Orthodoxy; Peter's reform and the Europeanizing of the Petrine period were a betrayal of Russia. The Slavophils absorbed the Hegelian idea of the vocation of peoples and what Hegel applied to the German people they applied to the Russian … The Slavophils put forward an integral and organic conception of Russia as a contrast to the dividedness and complexity of Western Europe; they fought against Western rationalism which they regarded as the source of all evils" (Berdyaev, 1948: 40, 42).

An important figure in that debate was Peter Chaadaev, who, on the one hand supported the reforms of Peter I (the Great) and positions himself against vulgar Russian nationalism, hence being labeled as a Westernizer, but on the other hand, his views about Russian distinctiveness, both cultural and spiritual, made him to some degree close to the Slavophiles. In his *Philosophical letters*, Chaadaev expressed pessimistic views on Russia and Russians, viewing them as directionless and detached from the path humanity is taking, from any current of history. In the *Letter I*, he writes:

> One of the most deplorable things in our unique civilization is that we are still beginning to discover truths which are trite elsewhere … we have never advanced along with other people; we are not related to any of the great human families; we belong neither to the West nor to the East, and we possess the traditions of neither. Placed, as it were, outside of the times, we have not been affected by the universal education of mankind … Don't you think we are all very restless? We all resemble travelers. There is no definite sphere of existence for anyone, no good habits, no rule for anything at all; not even a home; nothing which attracts or awakens our sympathy or affection, nothing lasting, nothing enduring; everything departs, everything flows away, leaving no traces either without or within ourselves (Chaadaev, 1991a: 20).

Russia has nothing to offer to the world. Besides, Chaadaev does not share the view of many of his contemporaries that Russia is on the mission of any sort. There is no messianic destiny for Russia: "Providence does not seem to have been interested in our destiny at all … Providence has left us completely on our own, has refused all involvement in any of our affairs, and has not cared to teach us anything" (Chaadaev, 1991a: 24-25). Chaadaev claims that Peter's reforms had failed along with his enlightened civilizational mission: "a great man wanted to civilize us, and in order to give us a foretaste of enlightenment, he threw us the cloak of civilization: we took up the cloak but did not so much as touch civilization" (Chaadaev, 1991a: 25). In the *Letter VII*, Chaadaev views Europe as Russian destiny, not in the imperial sense, but as a cradle of civilizations from which Russia should learn, despite being distinct from the rest of the continent. "Basically we Russians have nothing in com-

mon with Homer, the Greeks, the Romans, the Germans", wrote Chaadaev, however, "we tend towards the Western world … the more we try to identify ourselves with European society, the better off we shall be" (Chaadaev, 1991a: 95-96). About eight years after the *Philosophical letters*, and following being declared insane due to a comment made by Tsar Nicholas I that only a madman could write such letters, Chaadaev wrote *The Apologia of a Madman* (1837), again emphasizing the Westernizing mission of Peter the Great in shaping Russia's identity:

> The greatest of our kings, our glory, our demigod, he who began a new era for us, he to whom we owe our greatness and all the goods which we possess, renounced old Russia a hundred years ago in front of the entire world. With his powerful breath he swept away all our old institutions: he dug out an abyss between our past and our present, and he threw all our traditions into it; he went to make himself the smallest in the West, and he returned the greatest among us; he prostrated himself before the West, and he rose as our master and our legislator … Since that time, our eyes constantly turned towards the West … we drew everything from the West (Chaadaev, 1991b: 103).

Peter's ability to cut off the umbilical cord with the traditional past, allowed Russia a possibility for the future's greatness. Actually, backwardness became the advantage, now reconceptualized as a condition for filling of the emptiness of Russian souls with new enlightened visions: "In his land Peter the Great found only a blank sheet of paper, and he wrote on it: Europe and West; since then we belonged to Europe and to the West" (Chaadaev, 1991b: 104). However, unlike Chaadaev's dream, this blank sheet, this emptiness, became a different precondition for national homecoming, a boost toward new nationalist and imperial agendas. As Gogol put it: "Our very disorder prophesies it to us. We are still a molten metal, not cast in the mold of our national form" (Gogol, 1969: 258).

These were the foundations for contemporary imperial conceptualization of the Russian World, a boundless spiritual-linguistic space where Russian destiny is realized. The very concept of the Russian World can be traced in the 11th century, but its articulation can be found in the 19th century "writings of Panteleimon Kulish … one of the fathers of the Ukrainophile movement … to define the population that came out of Kyivan Rus'", yet later the Russian Slavophiles took it to define "the ethnic and cultural community within the borders of the Russian Empire" (Plokhy, 2017: 328). In the post-Soviet era, the Russian World has been revived and redefined by Petr Shchedrovitsky and Gleb Pavlovsky. Triggered by the collapse of the Soviet Union that left many Russian-speaking people on the other side of Russia's national borders, in their 1999 article, they wrote: "Over the course of the twentieth century, following tectonic historical shifts, world wars and revolutions, a Russian World was created on Earth – a network of small and large communities, thinking and speaking in Russian. It is not a secret that the territory of the Russian Federation contains only half of this Russian World", conceived to be "a new global meta-project" (Laruelle, 2015: 5). This neo-imperial concept is based on the presumption of a given civilization organizing space in a particular way while projecting its system of values and aiming towards the reunification of the Russian-speaking people. Putin used the Russian World concept for the first time in 2001 at the World Congress of Russian Compatriots Abroad. He stated: "The notion of the Russian World extends far from Russia's geographical borders and even far from the borders of the Russian ethnicity"

(Putin, 2001).[18] This concept is not just a reflection of Russia's soft power, but rather an expansionist territorial political agenda towards Russia's neighbors. After the collapse of the Soviet empire, yearning for old Russian imperial glory became a fundamental aspect of Russian identity, embraced both by right-wing nationalists and former communists. On one end were ultranationalists like Alexander Prokhanov and Dugin, while on the other end the leader of the Communist Party, Gennady Zyuganov, who advocated for some blend of communist, nationalist, and traditional values in his vision of a new powerful Russia. Zyuganov's self-identification with "imperial nationalism" (Hoffman, 1996), as he labelled it, served as a defining characteristic of the whole post-Soviet Russia's political trajectory. The concept of Russian World became a cloaked synonym for Russian imperialism. But in 2014 Putin openly put the concept of Russian World in an imperialist use following Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea. In a speech held on March 18th, 2014, prior to Russia's "small-scale" intervention to the Ukrainian Donbas region, Putin tried to explain that a formerly divided country like Germany should understand the best and even bolster up such an annexation of Crimea as the "aspiration of the Russian World, of Russian history, to reestablish unity" (Laruelle, 2015: 14).

Such understanding of Russia as an organic whole beyond national borders has its roots in the thought of early 20th-century ultranationalist Ivan Ilyin, a philosopher of Russian fascism, among all (Snyder, 2018b). In his essays, Ilyin argued that "Russia is an organism of nature and spirit … this organism is a spiritual, linguistic and cultural unity that has historically connected the Russian people with their national younger brothers" (Ilyin, 1991: 290, 317). On September 30th, 2022, when Putin announced an illegal annexation of four Ukrainian regions to Russia, he closed his speech by quoting on, as he said, "a true patriot" Ivan Ilyin: "If I consider Russia my Motherland, that means that I love as a Russian, contemplate and think, sing and speak as a Russian; that I believe in the spiritual strength of the Russian people. Its spirit is my spirit; its destiny is my destiny; its suffering is my grief; and its prosperity is my joy" (Putin, 2022). Prior to the Russia's full-scale invasion on Ukraine, Putin outlined this organicist view of the "Russianness" in his essay *On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians* from 2021 that became a historical-political framework of the Russian World policy directed toward negating the Ukrainian nation and statehood.[19] Putin assigns Ukraine to "the same historical and spiritual space" with Russia – Moscow as its political centre, and Kyiv as its spiritual centre – "bound together by one language" (Putin, 2021). But this was not just about the language and culture. He emphasized the historical process of "homecoming" for "Malorosians" (Ukrainians): "The Russian state incorporated the city of Kiev and the lands on the left bank of the Dnieper River … Their inhabitants were reunited with the main part of the Russian Orthodox people. These territories were referred to as 'Malorossia' (Little Russia)" (Putin, 2021). Moreover, Putin argues that "the idea of Ukrainian people as a nation separate from the Russians" is, on the one hand, histo-

[18] The role of Russian Orthodox Church in providing support to the Russian World narrative is fundamental. Kirill, after his appointment as Patriarch in 2009 actually "infused Orthodox messianism into the Russian World and supported Putin's 'gathering of Russian lands'" (Kuzio, 2022: 205).

[19] During the NATO summit in Bucharest (2008) Putin said to the American president Bush: "You don't understand, George, that Ukraine is not even a state", but mostly a gift from Russia (Marson, 2009). More recently, Medvedev, said: "Ukraine is definitely Russia … an integral part of Russia's strategic and historical borders" (Kuzio, 2024).

rical attempt of the Polish elite, of some nationalists in Ukraine, and on the other hand, "modern Ukraine is entirely the product of the Soviet era" mostly shaped "on the lands of historical Russia" (Putin, 2021). For him, the problem was the Soviet policy that adopted the distinctive identities of three separate people "instead of the large Russian nation, a triune people comprising Velikorussians, Malorussians and Belorussians" (*ibid*.). Thus, while Dugin articulates Russian mission within the framework of an eschatological conspiracy according to which "the forces of the Antichrist are simply using the Ukrainians to achieve their goals" (Dugin, 2023b), Putin's essay echoes a political conspiracy according to which "Russia was robbed" (Putin, 2021), similarly to Zyuganov who in the 1990s accused the West for a "geopolitical sabotage" (Hoffman, 1996).

The Russian World has been conceived as an open-ended project, with its gaze permanently directed toward the frontier horizon where its meaning and identity are continually sought and reaffirmed. In practice this project cannot be detached from the philosophy of death. During the "Direct line with Vladimir Putin" annual TV-show in April 2014, just after the annexation of Crimea, Putin has shown the death-embraced sinister direction and destiny of those belonging to the Russian World, while at the same time opposing it to the Western worldview:

> …a person of the Russian world, primarily thinks about his or her highest moral designation, some highest moral truths. This is why the Russian person, or a person of the Russian world, does not concentrate on his or her own precious personality . . . Western values are different and are focused on one's inner self … This is not enough for us in this country . . . I think only our people could have come up with the famous saying: 'Meeting your death is no fear when you have got people round you.' How come? Death is horrible, isn't it? But no, it appears it may be beautiful if it serves the people (Clover, 2016: 324).

A "beautiful death" is on the frontier, and for Russians, it is Putin who provides this death with a greater meaning – as it is better to die in Ukraine than from vodka.[20] For Ukrainians this frontier is where all should die or "understand that life in one large common state … is better than death – their death and the deaths of their loved ones", as Medvedev phrased it (Medvedev, 2024). In Russia's political discourse this frontier space has been known as Novorossiya (New Russia)[21] – "Kharkov, Lugansk, Donetsk, Kherson, Nikolayev and Odessa" (Putin, 2014). Darya Dugina later framed this frontier understanding in a more philosophical way: "Philosophy is born where life and death co-exist, where there is an 'I' and 'Another', where there is division and an overcoming of division. For me, Novorossiya is a space of philosophical meaning. It is now an empire-forming space for Russia, and thanks to this frontier horizon we exist as Russia, as an unconquered Russia" (Street, 2022). For Putin it is this messianic destiny that a nation has to follow, similarly to the view that Solovyov framed in the 19th century: "For, the idea of a nation is not what it thinks of itself in time, but instead what God thinks of it in eternity" (Solovyov, 2015: XII).

[20] Putin assigned a purpose and an hierarchy in life and death. He said to the mother of a dead soldier: "Some people, are they even living or not living? It's unclear. And how they die, from vodka or something else, it's also unclear. … But your son lived, you understand? He reached his goal" (The New York Times, 2022).

[21] Dugin used that term in the public before Putin, first in 2009 when labelled eastern Ukrainian regions as "Novorossya", and after Russia's annexation of Crimea (Clover, 2016: 12-13).

The Russian World mirrors an empire in permanent struggle, of Russia "as a beleaguered outpost of civilization for which security could be found only through exerting its absolute will over its neighbors" (Kissinger, 2014: 52). The frontier is the space where such activity occurs in the form of necropolitical imperialism,[22] where the katechonic identity should be searched and tested. It is a field of Armageddon, as Dugin labelled the territory of Ukraine: "the beginning of an eschatological battle between sacred Tradition and the modern world, which precisely in the form of liberal ideology and globalist politics has reached its most sinister, toxic, radical expression. This is why more and more often we speak of Armageddon, the last decisive battle between the armies of God and Satan" (Dugin, 2023b). The Russian World is a politically schizophrenic idea – It promotes the strength in unity through cultural or biological identity negation of the Other/the colonized, as we can see in the conclusion of Putin's essay: "Together we have always been and will be many times stronger and more successful. For we are one people" (Putin, 2021).

Conclusion

From Gogol's *troika* to Putin's Russian World, Russians are in permanent quest for their identity as a response to Russia's historical distinctiveness from Western Europe and its self-understanding of being on a messianic mission, thus adopting a katechonic identity. Due to these identity quests, Russia has been unable to constitute itself as a nation-state, but rather has become stuck in a permanent search for direction. This was epitomized in Gogol's *troika* metaphor, and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it reappeared as central Russian question of how to reclaim the lost empire. It became particularly evident in the case of Russia's encroachment toward Ukraine since without Ukraine, as Brzezinski pointed out "Russia ceases to be an empire", adding that "Russia can be either an empire or a democracy, but it cannot be both" (Plokhy, 2017: 349). Dugin's eschatological philosophizing about Russia's katechonic identity sought to provide new meaning for the Russian mission in the post-Soviet era. For Dugin, Russia's identity should be forged in the apocalyptic battle between good and evil where Ukraine is just a field of Armageddon: "And the main battle from now on unfolds between … the Russian Idea, the Katechon, the Orthodox Civilization, and the world of the Western Antichrist, coming at us. It is not us Russians who need Ukraine. It is Christ who needs it. And that is why we are there" (Dugin, 2022). Russian borders "do not end", as Putin stated, precisely because the empire is positioned in the eschatological perspective, and not determined by spatial but by temporal boundaries. In Russian foreign policy, it is embodied in the political project of Russian World that Putin adopted for defining Russia as the "state-civilization", basically by reintroducing the response Minister Nashchokin gave during the mid-17th century to Tsar Alexei when asked to define Russia's foreign policy – "expanding the state in every direction" (Kissinger, 2014: 52). So, while Gogol has been puzzled with the question of where Russia's *troika* is heading, we now know for sure – to Ukraine, where Gogol comes from.

[22] Necropolitical imperialism can be understood as an amalgam of imperialism and necropolitics, following Achille Mbembe's understanding of necropolitics (Mbembe, 2003) as the power able to determine who is to live or die via the process of normalization of violence, death, and destruction on the periphery in order to maintain control and exploitation over colonized peoples and territories.

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Mrtve duše

Sažetak Od rane modernosti, a posebno tijekom nacionalističkog uspona u 19. stoljeću i ponovno nakon raspada Sovjetskog Saveza, Rusi su bili opsjednuti potragom za vlastitim identitetom. Na raskrižju Zapada i Istoka, između nacije i carstva, Rusija se nikada nije u potpunosti konstituirala kao nacionalna država, već se razumijevala kao carstvo koje traži svoje mjesto u svijetu. Ta se potraga za identitetom očitovala kroz mesijansku misiju da se bude "Treći Rim" i branitelj pravoslavnog kršćanstva ili zaštitnik "Ruskog svijeta" kao političkog projekta koji odražava rusko imperijalno samorazumijevanje. Ovaj članak ispituje rusku potragu za identitetom usredotočujući se na Gogoljevu trojku kao političku metaforu ruske mesijanske i imperijalne sudbine, na Schmittovu upotrebu koncepta katehona, povijesno ukorijenjenog u kršćanskoj eshatologiji, na pogled Aleksandra Dugina na ruski katehonski identitet koji povezuje ruski mesijanizam, imperijalizam i nacionalizam, dajući im eshatološku dimenziju pozicioniranja Rusije kao bedema protiv Antikrista utjelovljenog u zapadnoj liberalnoj modernosti; i konačno, na prihvaćanje koncepta "Ruskog svijeta" od strane Vladimira Putina, koji je postao službeni dio ruske vanjske politike koja je prihvatila "državno-civilizacijski" identitet kao povijesnu sudbinu, čime se opravdava ruski imperijalizam, osobito u kontekstu ruske imperijalne ratne kampanje u Ukrajini.

Ključne riječi Gogolj, Schmitt, Dugin, Putin, katehon, katehonski identitet, ruska mesijanska misija, Ruski svijet

Kako citirati članak / How to cite this article:
Cvijanović, H. (2024). Dead Souls. *Anali Hrvatskog politološkog društva*, 21(1). 179-200. https://doi.org/10.20901/an.21.11