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DECONSTRUCTING THE ‘RUSSIAN WORLD’ IDEOLOGY: UKRAINIAN PUBLIC FIGURES’ DISCOURSE IN TIMES OF WAR

Abstract

Background. *The “Russian world” (russkij mir) concept has become a central ideological instrument in Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine. Promoted as a civilisational model grounded in shared language, culture, and values, it has been widely studied from geopolitical and historical perspectives. However, its discursive deconstruction by Ukrainian public figures remains underexplored.*

Contribution to the research field. *The present study raises the possibility that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) can uncover how wartime political communication functions as ideological resistance. These findings help us to understand how public actors reframe a hostile ideological construct through language, and how such discourse contributes to shaping national and international narratives of war, identity, and sovereignty.*

Purpose. *The article aims to identify and analyse strategies and lexical tools used by Ukrainian political and religious leaders to counter the “Russian world” ideology in public communication during the full-scale invasion.*

Methods. *The study applies van Dijk’s socio-cognitive model of Critical Discourse Analysis to a corpus of statements, social media posts, interviews, and speeches produced by key Ukrainian figures between March 2022 and April 2023. Semantic strategies such as categorisation, polarisation, and lexicalisation are used as the primary analytical tools.*

Results. *The analysis reveals how the “Russian world” doctrine is consistently portrayed as an ideology of violence, occupation, destruction, and geno-*

cide. Linguistic choices, such as epithets, sensory framing, irony, and orthographic resistance (e.g., writing русскій мир, рускiй мир instead of російський світ), are used to delegitimise the enemy. The dual meaning of мир (peace/world) is leveraged to highlight the ideological contradictions inherent in Russian narratives.

Discussion. *The findings demonstrate how language becomes a tool of symbolic resistance in wartime. Ukrainian discourse not only exposes the violent core of russkij mir but also contributes to shaping a shared moral and civilisational identity. This analysis opens new perspectives for interdisciplinary research into information warfare, political discourse, and national identity formation.*

Keywords: Russian world, critical discourse analysis, Ukraine, wartime communication, ideology, political narrative.

1. Introduction and Background

The concept of the “Russian world” (russkij mir)¹ has become a focal point in discussions surrounding Russian identity, geopolitics, and relations with neighbouring states. Rooted in historical ties and cultural unity, the doctrine has evolved over time, particularly during Vladimir Putin’s presidency, to assert Russia’s influence over Russian-speaking populations and promote a vision of a broader cultural and geopolitical sphere.

This study is informed by real-world events surrounding Putin’s regime, which has been formulating a doctrine to legitimise the annexation of territories neighbouring Russia, known as the “near abroad”. This doctrine emphasises protecting and promoting cultural values such as the Russian language, culture, and historical memories. However, this apparent concern for Russian civilisation may mask a deeper intention to foster a sense of common nationhood. The concept of “spiritual ties” (Renan, 1990) within the Russian world suggests a desire for cohabitation, echoing Renan’s notion of an “imagined community” (Anderson, 2006).

Russian ideologists have employed various strategies to define and support their doctrine. While Putin’s elaboration at the Congress of Compatriots in 2018 (TASS, 2018) emphasised a non-compulsory role for religion within the notion of the Russian world, other ideologists have incorporated Orthodox Christianity (Russian Orthodox Church) as an essential element (Ksenofon-

¹ In this paper, I use terms “Russian world” and “russkii mir” as full equivalents.

tov, 2018). Huizinga (2024) understands the “Russian world” as a “heretical national theology that expresses a mythical, teleological understanding of Russia not as a mere nation among other nations, but as the standard-bearer of a great Orthodox Christian civilisation.”

The full-scale intervention in Ukraine has led to significant sociocultural changes, altering attitudes towards the Russian language, culture, and the “Russian world” ideology (Slovo i dilo, 10.03.2023). Before the invasion, only 4% of Ukrainians viewed Russia as friendly, but after the invasion, 95% considered it an enemy state. Support for severing ties with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate rose from 63% to 74%, and 51% believe its activities should be banned in Ukraine (Sotsiologichna hrupa “Rejtynh”, 08.04.2022). Ukrainian language usage increased, with more people using it at home, work, and study, rejecting Russian as the language of the enemy (Kulyk, 2023). The perception of Ukrainian identity also shifted, with 75% of respondents viewing Ukraine as the rightful heir to Kyivan Rus (Sotsiologichna hrupa “Rejtynh”, 27.07.2021). In 2021, 55% of Ukrainians did not consider themselves part of the same historical and spiritual space as Russians (Ibidem). According to a survey conducted by the Razumkov Center conducted from April 28 to May 3, 2023, at the request of ZN.UA, 68.5% of respondents categorically refuse such reconciliation (Tsaruk, 2023).

Resistance to Russia and its ideology is also evident at official and legal levels. A draft law “On the decolonisation of the humanitarian sphere of Ukraine” has been submitted to the Verkhovna Rada. On April 21, 2023, Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed the law “On Condemnation and Prohibition of Propaganda of Russian Imperial Policy in Ukraine and Decolonisation of Toponymy,” aimed at liberating the country from the markers of the “Russian world” (Viatrovych, 2023). This law criminalises and condemns the Russian imperial policy, prohibiting the promotion of its symbols. Consequently, Ukraine is undergoing a re-evaluation of the “Russian world” concept and recognising its destructive nature at official and business levels.

Although the ideology of the “Russian world” has been examined from various perspectives, and its deconstruction in contemporary Ukrainian popular culture has received scholarly attention (Kiss et al., 2024), its dismantling in the social media posts, interviews, and speeches of Ukrainian public figures during the full-scale Russo-Ukrainian war has yet to be systematically explored. In this study, I have used the term “deconstruction” in a broad sense, specifically as the destruction of an idea, while the verb “to deconstruct” is

taken as equivalent to “to dismantle”. In this article, I intend to explore how the “Russian world” ideology is addressed, evaluated, and deconstructed in the statements of high-ranking Ukrainian officials, including President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council Oleksij Danilov, Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, Advisor Mykhajlo Podoljak, and Metropolitan Epiphanius, among others. The study utilises Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine the relationships between language, society, power, and traditional ideology within implied discourse.

The instrumentalisation of ancient history, collective memory, and language issues has been used to justify Russia’s military invasion of Ukraine. By employing the concept of the “Russian world,” the Kremlin positions itself as the protector and authority over all aspects it claims are part of Russian culture. This paper aims to analyse the strategic narratives employed by Ukrainian public figures as they counter the doctrine of the “Russian world” in the context of a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine.

2. The Concept of the “Russian World”

Definitions of the “Russian world” have centred around territories, people, values, and cultural and humanitarian ties, with official narratives serving to justify Russia’s interventionism under the guise of preserving civilisation and common values. These strategic narratives serve as a form of public diplomacy or propaganda, rationalising Russia’s missionary role in the world. They project an image of commendable cultural heritage preservation, over which the Russian government asserts its oversight.

In this study, I will not concentrate on the historical aspect of the “Russian world” notion, even though it has many definitions and deep historical roots. Instead, I will outline the current sense where this concept is recognized as an “international, interstate, and intercontinental civilization” (Kravchenko, 2018, p. 8), following the aim of “uniting disunited Russian-speaking compatriots” (Aleynikova, 2017, p. 6) since the “Russian world” constitution and unification are due to “the Russian language and the Russian-speaking Russian/Soviet culture, together with historical memory” (Tishkov, 2017). Since 2010, the concept of the “Russian world” has been expanded beyond its previous scope, as the policy represented a form of “soft power” that ultimately evolved into a political conflict and military aggression (Laruelle, 2015). Laruelle (2015, p. 1) also acknowledges the inherent ambiguity of the concept, stating, “This blurriness is structural to the concept, and allows it to be

reinterpreted within multiple contexts.” Starodubtseva (2022, p. 144), having analysed some definitions of the “Russian world”, categorises the essential meanings of the concept, namely the “Russian world as a civilisation, as a linguistic community, and, in a rare case, as an Orthodox community”. Etymologically, the “Russian world” leads us to the mythological personification of “Holy Russia”. Holy Russia is organically perceived as a proper name, not as a combination of an epithet with an ethnonym or a geographical name. This is not a characteristic of Russia, but a complete mythological complex “Sviatoruska zemlia”, which is interpreted as a world axis around which the world system revolves (Denysenko, 2023, p. 37). Analysing the terminological definition of the “Russian world” concept, Horkusha (2023, p. 16) points out that “ruskii mir” cannot be translated either as *руський мир* (lit. “Rus’ peace”) or as *російський світ* (lit. “Russian world”). The researcher underlines that “ruskii mir” “denotes a state of world-order in which every element of the system occupies the place, condition, and form predetermined for it by the demiurge of this system – the ideologist and propagandist. This system is moulded at various levels by the instruments wielded by the sovereign/tsar/leader: the Russian army, the Church (Russian Orthodox Church – L.P.), and propagandists” (Ibidem). After Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, the “Russian world” concept attracted the attention of scholars and has become the object of various interdisciplinary research (Denysenko, 2023; Horkusha, 2023; Noubel, 2022; Poiarkova, 2023; Polegkyi & Bushuyev, 2022). Since 2014, the “Russian world” has become a tool for the legitimisation of invading Crimea and Donbas and full-scale war against Ukraine, as well as a determining component of Putin’s official ideology. In his articles (Putin, 2021) and speeches (Vneplanovoe soveshchanie, 2023), Putin presented his version of Ukrainian history to demonstrate Ukraine’s inferiority, minimise its culture, and distort its language. Declaring that Ukraine had been created by Vladimir Lenin and had not existed before, Putin proclaimed that large parts of its territory had always been purely Russian territory. According to Cotter (2016), Putin has been advocating the “Russian world” for a long time, and it has become central and crucial to his strategic mindset. In the meantime, Young (2022) believes that the idea of the “Russian world” creation was a decisive impetus for the annexation of Crimea and is currently a motivating concept underpinning and legitimising Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Moreover, the notion of the “Russian world” as well as the role of its main components has been recently fixed and developed in the of-

official documents of the Russian Federation, namely the *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* (July 3, 2021), *Decree of the President of the Russian Federation “On Approval of the Concept of the Humanitarian Policy of the Russian Federation Abroad”* (September 5, 2022), *The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* (March 31, 2023). In the *Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation*, such notions as the “Russian world”, “preservation of the Russian people”, “strengthening the role of the Russian language”, “preservation of historical memory” and the formation of a just world order have been officially introduced. The recent political and official discourses of the Kremlin aimed to transmit the “Russian world” globally and to level the historical and cultural role of Ukraine, enabling researchers to classify this ideology as a tool for legitimising the full-scale war. For example, Poiarkova (2023, p. 70) assumes that the “Russian world” turned into “an informational weapon of the Russian-Ukrainian war, as it acted as a foundation: 1) for the solidarity of Russian society based on the picture of the world, which is common to the post-Soviet space; 2) universal meaningful life guidelines that replaced ideological schemes with a generalization of the common experience of survival in the USSR; 3) subjectivity of Russians, which allowed them to join world history and build their own identity”.

The “Russian world” is the “construction of the new era, which to a large extent repeats the ideas of the elites of the Russian Empire before the 1917 revolution” (Yermolenko, 2019, p. 53). During that period, Ukrainians were defined as “Little Russians” and proclaimed as a part of the Russian nation, which consisted of “Great Russians” and “Belarussians”² (Ibidem). In 2014, when Russia intervened in Ukraine, the Russian propagandistic media and Russian politicians announced that Donbas and ‘Novorossiya’ are part of the “Russian World”, and “Ukraine cannot be an independent state because it has always been part of the “Russian World” (Yermolenko, 2019, p. 10). Later, in 2022, these statements of Russian historical propaganda became a justification for the full-scale invasion since “the neo-imperial ambitions of the Russian elites will have never allowed them to accept the fact that Ukraine is an independent sovereign state, as well as that Ukrainians even are

² Although the correct spelling is *Belarusians*, I have deliberately used the Russianised form *Belarussians* in this context to highlight how Russia perceives Belarus as an inseparable part of itself, reflected in the name *Belarussia* (literally “White Russia”).

a separate nation” (Prymachenko, 2022). Denysenko (2023, p. 38) argues that the integrity of Ukraine was not and cannot be intrinsically valuable for Russians and the “Russian world”. Moreover, “the liquidation of Ukraine in its current composition under the existing conditions would be good for the Russians because it becomes their prison” (Ibidem). In other words, “Russian world is a synonym of Russian fascism, the essence of which is noteworthy implemented into the practice of dehumanisation of everything that is Ukrainian” (Denysenko, 2023, p. 76).

3. Theoretical and Methodological Background

This study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its principal theoretical and methodological framework, drawing particularly on the socio-cognitive model developed by Teun A. van Dijk (1980, 1993, 2006). CDA offers a powerful means of analysing the relationships between discourse, power, and ideology, especially in political and military conflict contexts. It enables the study of how language not only reflects but also shapes social and political realities, including the legitimisation of violence, resistance to domination, and the (re)construction of group identities.

Van Dijk’s (1993, 2005) approach to CDA operates on both the micro- and macro-levels of analysis. At the macro level, social analysis focuses on portraying power imbalances between societal groups (Van Dijk, 1995, 2005).

The micro-level focuses on textual and linguistic features, specifically syntactic structures, local semantics, lexical choices, thematic content, and narrative organisation. Van Dijk (2005) identifies 25 specific discursive strategies for micro-level analysis (Van Dijk, 2005, pp. 735–736), and the following ones have been employed in this paper: *comparison*, *euphemism*, *evidentiality*, *example/illustration*, *generalisation*, *irony*, *lexicalisation*, *metaphor*, *national self-glorification*, *polarisation*, and *us-them categorisation*.

In this article, I focus primarily on the micro-level, examining how public figures linguistically frame the concept of the “Russian world” in statements, interviews, speeches, and social media posts. However, the analysis is informed by macro-level considerations, particularly those relating to Ukrainian resistance to Russian neo-imperial ideology and military aggression.

The selection of contexts was based on the presence of terms like *русский мир*, *російський світ*, *руський світ* (in Ukr.), *русский мир* (in Rus.) (lit. Eng. Russian world, Russian peace), *Russian world*, *russskij mir* in the aforementioned sources. In Ukrainian political and media discourse, the concept of the

“Russian world” is frequently rendered not as the standard Ukrainian equivalent *російський світ*, but rather in its Russian-language form: *русский мир* or *русский мир*. This orthographic and linguistic choice is deliberate; it signals distancing and alienation from the ideology, emphasising its foreignness, ideological strangeness, and aggressive otherness. With a qualitative approach, the data were segmented into individual sentences and contexts, which were then grouped into categories and subcategories that represented the discursive strategies associated with the concept of the “Russian world.”

A central analytical focus is on semantic strategies identified in van Dijk’s (1995, p. 22) socio-cognitive model: *positive self-representation* and *negative other-representation*. These strategies are discursive mechanisms used to construct group identities and oppositional narratives, most notably, in-group vs out-group dichotomies. Through discursive tools such as categorisation, lexicalisation, polarisation, and evaluative labelling, Ukrainian officials reinforce the image of Ukraine as a peaceful, sovereign, and civilised nation, while portraying the “Russian world” as a destructive, genocidal, and imperialist ideology. The analysis also considers how actors such as Russia and its military are attributed agency in expressions of violence and dehumanisation.

CDA thus allows for the systematic analysis of how discourse encodes ideological meaning through repeated patterns of language use. In the context of this research, these include references to the “Russian world” as a metaphorical and literal vehicle for violence, cultural erasure, and historical revisionism. The focus on discursive categorisation, rather than metaphor or epithet per se, provides a nuanced account of how meaning is stabilised, challenged, or contested through repeated lexical and thematic framings.

While the concept of strategic narratives (Miskimmon et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2018), which has been used to examine the importance of persuasion in conflicts (de Franco, 2012; Simpson, 2012), is also relevant to this topic, especially given that political actors aim to shape perceptions of legitimacy, memory, and identity (Liao, 2012), this study integrates such concerns within the CDA framework.

Rather than analysing narrative structure separately, I consider strategic narratives to be macro-discursive formations that are realised through concrete discursive strategies. In other words, CDA provides the tools to deconstruct the linguistic forms and ideological underpinnings through which strategic narratives acquire meaning and power. In doing so, the study addresses both the *content* and the *form* of wartime political discourse.

Thus, CDA offers a comprehensive lens through which to explore the linguistic representations of the “Russian world”, as articulated by Ukrainian public figures. It enables the identification of discursive strategies that delegitimise the enemy, reinforce national identity, and promote resistance – strategies that are central to both information warfare and the broader struggle over ideological hegemony in the post-2022 geopolitical landscape.

While writing this paper, I utilised ChatGPT-4 to enhance the fluency and accuracy, and Grammarly Premium was employed for spelling and grammar checks. DeepL and ChatGPT-4 were also used for the initial translation from Ukrainian and Russian to English of the social media posts and interview quotes, which I then edited and refined to ensure both accuracy and stylistic consistency. These resources were used exclusively for language quality improvement and translation support purposes, with no bearing on the substantive material, analysis, or interpretation of the study. As a non-native English author, I relied on these resources to refine my writing style and improve readability.

4. Research Data

The research data for this study includes:

- ✓ Speeches of the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, along with selected posts from his Twitter and Telegram accounts.
- ✓ Twitter and Telegram posts, video appeals, and written interviews by Mykhailo Podoliak, Adviser to the Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine.
- ✓ Twitter posts, addresses, and online media interviews of Metropolitan Epiphanius, Head of Ukraine’s Orthodox Church.
- ✓ Twitter posts and selected interviews by Dmytro Kuleba, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine (2020–2024).
- ✓ Written interviews and selected Facebook posts by Oleksii Danilov, Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine (2019–2024).

Although this paper does not delve deeply into voice and nonverbal communication, videos of Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s daily speeches have also been included. Discourse analysis facilitates an understanding of how messages about the “Russian world” are conveyed through word stress, metaphors, lexical choices, and other linguistic devices. This analysis transcends language, addressing social issues and political, geopolitical, and historical contexts.

The study covers the period from March 1, 2022, to April 15, 2023, encompassing more than a year of the full-scale Russian military intervention in

Ukraine. I provided English translations for the data, except for some English-written Twitter posts by Mykhailo Podoliak.

5. Thematic Categories of the “Russian World” Deconstruction

While Kremlin propaganda asserts that Russia embodies a unique civilisation and high culture, aims to protect traditional Russian values and the Russian-speaking population, and seeks to cleanse Ukraine of Nazis, Ukrainian officials emphasise a starkly different perspective. Through speeches, statements, interviews, and social media posts, high-ranking Ukrainian officials highlight that the “Russian world” doctrine promoted by Russia leads to tears, devastation, and mass torture. These counter-narratives are not merely oppositional; they seek to delegitimise the ideological core of the “Russian world” and expose its underlying genocidal logic. The findings are grouped into thematic categories based on semantic strategies (categorisation, polarisation, lexicalisation, and evaluative framing) through which Ukrainian political and religious figures construct ideological resistance to the “Russian world.”

5.1. The “Russian world” as violence and death

One of the most pervasive discursive framings presents the “Russian world” as inherently violent. Lexical markers such as mass executions, torture, abduction, and concentration camps recontextualise the term as a euphemism for atrocity. For instance, in Podoliak’s tweet – (1):

- (1) *Mass killing by cruise missiles is the essence of the ‘Russian world’* (@Podolyak_M, 29.04.2022).

The lexical equivalence *essence of* has been used to define the entire ideological construct by its violent manifestations. In the following fragment, the use of present time *nyshchyt’* (*destroying*) and *vbyvaje* (*killing*) demonstrates the ongoing processual representation of harm – (2):

- (2) *Zaraz u bilshosti ukraintsiv vidkrylysia ochi, shcho take «russkii mir», shcho vin prynis v Ukrainu velyke zlo – nyshchyt myrne naselennia, vbivaie nevynnykh ditok* (see Tarasov, 2022).

Currently, the majority of Ukrainians have opened their eyes to what the ‘Russian world’ is, that it has brought great evil to Ukraine – it is destroying the civilian population, killing innocent children” (see Tarasov, 2022).

This allows for the possibility of situating the violence in the immediate present. Another example refers to the past and invokes Holocaust imagery – (3):

- (3) ...under the brand of 'Russian world'. Only half a step away from gas chambers (@Podolyak_M, 09.08.2022).

This metaphor intensifies the ideological critique by associating “Russian world” with the ultimate historical symbol of genocidal policy. Moreover, it is emphasised that the “Russian world” aims to obliterate Ukrainian identity and the Ukrainian nation – (4):

- (4) *Want to know what is “Russian world” on the occupied territories? 1000 and 1 ways of torture. Kidnapping. Mass executions, rapes. Only because our people identify themselves as Ukrainians* (@Podolyak_M, 22.11.2022).

In certain contexts, a parallel is drawn between the emergence of the “Russian world” and the policy of genocide against the Ukrainian people, as for Russians – (5)

- (5) *...tse ne pytannia zakhystu yakykhos “narodiv Donbasu” chy rosiiskomovnoho naseleennia. [...] tse konkretna viina na znyshchennia chuzhoi kultury, chuzhoi identychnosti, chuzhykh liudei, chuzhoi terytorii* (see Rik nezlamnosti Ukrajin, 2023).
... it is not a matter of protecting some ‘peoples of Donbas’ or the Russian-speaking population. [...] this is a concrete war to destroy someone else’s culture, someone else’s identity, someone else’s people, someone else’s territory (see Rik nezlamnosti Ukrajin, 2023).

The deliberate repetition of the phrase *someone else’s* serves a rhetorical function: it emphasises that Ukraine does not belong to Russia. This repetition directly counters the Russian imperial narrative that persistently denies Ukrainian sovereignty by claiming Ukrainian territories as historically and/or spiritually “theirs”.

Moreover, the sensory register combines auditory imagery with rhetorical questioning, reinforcing the omnipresence of violence and appealing to international audiences’ moral perception – (6):

- (6) *The pre-Christmas sound of sirens in Kyiv... With cruise missiles, Russia offers to ‘start peace talks’, ‘restore fraternal relations’, ‘finish off international law’... Is there anyone who still does not hear these real sounds of ‘Russian world’?* (@Podolyak_M, 23.12.2022).

5.2. “Russian world” as a destructive and devastating force

In contrast to the previous category, which primarily addressed killings and violence against individuals, this category concerns the destruction of infrastructure, buildings, and related facilities. What links the two categories is the

deployment of the “Russian world” doctrine in distinctly negative connotations, consistently framed as a destructive force, as illustrated in the following context – (7):

- (7) *“Russkyi mir” – tse povna ruinatsiia. Perekonanyi, shcho nadali, napevno, vzhe ne znaidetsia zhodnoho ukrainsia, yakyi by skhvalno stavysia do tsykh idei, bo ideia «russkoho myra» vbyvaie vse zhyve (see Tarasov, 2022).*
‘Russian world’ is complete destruction. I am convinced that in the future there will certainly not be a single Ukrainian who would approve of these ideas, because the idea of the ‘Russian world’ kills all life (see Tarasov, 2022).

Such metaphorical extension as *kills all life* is used to demonstrate ideological toxicity. The lexical field includes burnt, ruined, mutilated, and devastated, which cluster around destruction and moral desecration – (8), (9):

- (8) *Burnt fields in Ukraine. This is the face of the ‘Russian world’: destruction, death, and devastation” (@Podolyak_M, 12.08.2022).*
- (9) *Ponivechenyi khram, zruinovani budynky, zhorovani liudy, obirvani abo skalicheni zhyttia – os shcho po sobi zalyshyv «russkii mir» za kilka tyzhniv okupatsii (@Epifaniy, 13.04.2022).*
A mutilated temple, destroyed houses, grieving people, severed or mutilated lives – that is what the ‘Russian world’ left after a few weeks of occupation (@Epifaniy, 13.04.2022).

Such formulations evoke sacred/profane dichotomies, portraying the “Russian world” as not just violent but spiritually corrupt. In the following fragment, the adjective *evil*, meaning ‘profoundly immoral and wicked’, brings a negative connotation to the “Russian world” concept – (10):

- (10) *120+ missiles over Ukraine launched by the ‘evil Russian world’ to destroy critical infrastructure & kill civilians en masse” (@Podolyak_M, 29.12.2022).*

The “showcase of the Russian world” is metaphorically termed “a showcase of evil” since the entire world witnessed the cruelty of the Russians – (11):

- (11) *A sproby rosiiskyykh okupantiv zrobyty iz zakhoplenykh terytorii «vytrynu russkoho myra» ostatochno ta beznadijno provaluiutsia... “Vitrina russkoho mira” vyiavylasia pokhmuroiu “siroiu zonoiu” zi zruinovanymy zhyttiamy, budynkamy, FSBivtsiamy, shcho masovo z’iavylysia, bandamy maroderiv ta inshym treshem (@M_Podolyak, 01.08.2022).*
And the attempts of the Russian occupiers to turn the captured territories into a ‘showcase of the Russian world’ ultimately failed. The ‘showcase of the Russian world’ turned out to be a gloomy ‘grey zone’ with destroyed lives, houses, schools, hospitals, FSB officers who appeared en masse, gangs of looters and other trash” (@M_Podolyak, 01.08.2022).

Moreover, metaphors such as the failed “showcase of russkii mir” becoming a “grey zone” further ridicule the failed state project. Here, the lexicalisation of failure is used to strip the “Russian world” of prestige.

5.3. “Russian world” as a criminal ideology and a racist and genocidal doctrine

5.3.1. The “Russian world” as a criminal ideology and the new Nazism

Statements by Metropolitan Epiphanius position “Russian world” as a criminal ideology, frequently comparing it to Nazism, as the approval of brutal actions is common to both ideologies – 12:

- (12) *Ideolohiia „ruskoho mira” ye tym samym, chym ye ideolohiia natsyzmu. Vona vypravdovuiie nasyilstvo, vbyvstvo, viinu ta henotsyd, tomu maie buty vidkynuta i zasudzhena tak samo, yak zasudzhenyi natsyzm, yoho ideolohy ta yoho zlochyny (see Zhytnjuk, 2022).*

The ideology of the “Russian world” is the same as the ideology of Nazism. It justifies violence, murder, war, and genocide, so it must be rejected and condemned just as Nazism, its ideologues and its crimes” (see Zhytnjuk, 2022).

This dehumanisation is a discursive inversion of Russia’s own propaganda, which often claims to fight fascism. Furthermore, Epiphanius asserts that the creators and leaders of this criminal ideology are the head of the Moscow Patriarchate, Kirill Gundiajev, and his followers, and Patriarch Kirill is recognised by him as one who chose the antichrist – 13:

- (13) *Idetsia pro dobro i zlo yak take i pro vlasnyi vybir dlia kozhnoho: ty z Bohom chy z dyiavolom? Kyrylo Hundiajev svii vybir na koryst sprav antykhrysta vzhe зробыв (see Zhytnjuk, 2022).*

It is about good and evil as such and about personal choice for everyone: are you with God or with the devil? Kyrylo Gundiajev has already made his choice in favour of the cause of the antichrist” (see Zhytnjuk, 2022).

In this context, the antichrist is not merely an ephemeral character of Christian eschatology; rather, he is attributed with a concrete face and name – 14:

- (14) *Putin upodibniuetsia antykhrystu, vin volodiie vsima yoho yakostiamy. A my znaiemo, shcho dyiavol namahaietsia znyshchyty vse zhyve. Osoblyvo vin protydiie liudiam, namahaietsia nyshchyty tvorinnia Bozhe. Zaraz tsia viina i ye proiavom u sviti tsoho zla — zla, yake povynno buty znyshchene (see Tarasov, 2022).*

Putin is likened to the antichrist; he has all of his properties. And we know that the devil is trying to devastate everything alive. He especially opposes people and tries to destroy the creation of God. This war is a manifestation of this evil in the world, and this evil must be destroyed (see Tarasov, 2022).

The quote likening Putin to the antichrist literalises this evil through a religious symbolic register, adding eschatological weight.

5.3.2. *The “Russian world” as an ethnic-phyletic and racist doctrine*

Metropolitan Epiphanius points out that the Russian Orthodox Church disseminates the heretical ethno-phyletic doctrine of the “Russian world” and fosters schisms among the Orthodox (@Epifaniy, 26.05.2022). Moreover, in his Letter to Bartholomew I, Archbishop of Constantinople and Ecumenical Patriarch, regarding the bringing of Russian Patriarch Kirill to canonical responsibility and depriving him of the Patriarchal throne, Epiphanius emphasises that Kirill, whose attention had long been focused on geopolitical issues, “decided to join the creation of the ‘Russian world’ doctrine”. This doctrine is a nationalist ethno-phyletic theory about the nation’s and the state’s special role in the world and the church (Lyst shchodo prytyahnennja, 2022). This theory is also recognised as racist since it portrays Russia and the ‘Russian world’ as “something fundamentally better and higher than other peoples”. According to this ideology, “Russia’s historical neighbours – Ukrainians and Belarusians – have the right to exist exclusively as part of Russian reality” (Ibidem). Given that the Russian Orthodox Church is perceived as one of the pillars of the “Russian World”, the so-called Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate is seen as “a definite outpost of Russia and Putin in Ukraine” (see Tarasov, 2022).

5.4. *The Russian world as a threat to Ukraine and the civilised world*

The concept of the “Russian world” is perceived as menacing since it has evolved into a quasi-ideological foundation for an aggressive imperialist policy. It is utilised to legitimise Russian aggression by asserting that certain territories of Ukraine culturally belong to the “Russian world” – 15:

- (15) *Ideolohiia “russkoho mira” ta yii instrumenty ye realnoi zahrozoiu dlia Ukrainy, tomu oboviazok derzhavy – zakhystyty ukrainsku relihiinu spilnotu i vsikh hromadian vid neii* (Mytropolyt Epifanij, 2023).

The ideology of the ‘Russian world’ and its tools are a real threat to Ukraine; therefore, the state’s duty is to protect the Ukrainian religious community and all citizens from it” (Mytropolyt Epifanij, 2023).

Furthermore, the ideology of the Russian Orthodox Church is viewed as threatening not only Ukraine but also the entire Orthodox world – 16:

- (16) *Pochynaiuchy yak minimum z zhovtnia 2018 roku, vsi dii patriarkha Kyryla pidporiadkovani konkretnii politychnii meti. Vin prahne radykalno zbilshyty prysutnist RPC za mezhamy Rosii, maksymalno poslabyty Vselenskyi Patriarkhat ta hrekomovni Pomisni Tserkvy (see Lyst shchodo prytjahnennja, 2022). Since at least October 2018, all of Patriarch Kirill's actions have been subordinated to a specific political goal. He seeks to significantly expand the presence of the Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia, aiming to weaken the Ecumenical Patriarchate and Greek-speaking Autocephalous Churches as much as possible (see Lyst shchodo prytjahnennja, 2022).*

This narrative reframes the “Russian world” not only as a threat to Ukraine but to global peace. It is described as a contagion – 17:

- (17) *YeS maie rozumity: zahravaty z prorosiiskymy politykamy – tse klykaty “russkyi varvarskii mir” do Yevropy (@Podolyak_M, 10.04.2022). The EU must understand that flirting with pro-Russian politicians is tantamount to inviting the ‘Russian barbaric world’ into Europe (@Podolyak_M, 10.04.2022).*

Here, *barbaric* is an epithet of otherness, invoking a civilisational binary (civilised vs savage) and turning Russia’s framing against itself. Mykhailo Podoliak underscores the political dimension of the “Russian world,” which involves intervening in the internal affairs of European countries – 18:

- (18) *Rf ne zupynytsia, yakshcho ne prohraie. Vona prodovzhyt investuvaty u teroryzm v Yevropi. I bude robyty tse shche zukhvalishe. Vtruchatymetsia u natsionalni vybory, vbivatyme politychnykh oponentiv, a spalakhy separatyzmu stanut normoiu. Chy v takomu sviti vy khochete zhyty? Bo tse i ye “russkii mir” (@Podolyak_M, 04.02.2023). Rf [Russian Federation – L.P.] will not stop until it loses. It will continue to invest in terrorism in Europe. And it will do it even more defiantly. National elections will be interfered with, political opponents will be killed, and outbreaks of separatism will become the norm. Is this the world you want to live in? Because this is the “Russian world” (@Podolyak_M, 04.02.2023).*

This tweet relies on hypophora and apocalyptic framing, warning of a descent into chaos as the logical consequence of tolerating the “Russian world”. Moreover, a rhetorical question is employed to resonate with local sentiments and convey certain appeals. Goffman (1976) underscores the significance of posing questions in social interactions. In political discourse, questioning can capture the audience’s attention and prompt them to contemplate the statement. Furthermore, in the high-ranking officials’ statements, every single Russian is regarded as a potential threat in any civilised country – 19:

- (19) *Rosiiskyi pasport sprymaetsia u sviti yak maksymalno toksychnyi. Tse mitka, za yakoiu u bud-iakii tsyvilizovanii kraini vyznachaiut potentsiinoho nosiia tsinnostei*

„russkoho mira», a otzhe, reputatsiinu ta bezpekovu zahrozu (@M_Podolyak, 13.08.2022).

The Russian passport is perceived as the most toxic in the world. It is a label by which any civilised country identifies a potential bearer of the “Russian world” values, and therefore a reputational and security threat (@M_Podolyak, 13.08.2022).

5.5. Lexical Ambiguity and Ideological Wordplay: “Mir” as World vs Peace

The Russian term “mir” means both ‘world’ and ‘peace’, and this homonymic ambiguity is a key site of ideological struggle. Ukrainian public figures weaponise this ambiguity to expose the hypocrisy of Russian discourse. For instance, in the following fragment, the ironic contrast has been used to reveal semantic dissonance – 20:

- (20) *Etot “russkii mir” – eto otkrytaia rosiiskaia voina i mirom tam, izvinite, i ne pakhnet* (BBC, 14.04.2022).

This ‘Russian peace’ is an open Russian war, and there is no smell of peace” (BBC, 14.04.2022).

Other excerpts illustrate the usage of the “russkii mir” concept in the meaning of the “world” – (21), (22):

- (21) *tak nazyvaemyj «russkii mir», kotoryi okupanty nesut na ukrainskie zemli, yavliaetsa mirom smerti. Da i sama Rosiia nakhoditsa uzhe vne chelovecheskoi tsivilizatsii* (see Lielich, 2022).

...the so-called ‘Russian world’, which the occupiers are bringing to Ukrainian lands, is a world of death” (see Lielich, 2022).

- (22) *Russkyi mir – eto mir smerti, krovi, voni i nenavisti. V Ukraine eto nepriemlemo. V Ukraine sushchestvenno drugoi tip zhizni* (see Lielich, 2022).

The ‘Russian world’ is a world of death, blood, stench and hatred. In Ukraine, this is unacceptable. In Ukraine, there is a completely different type of life (see Lielich, 2022).

In these fragments, the *mir* is sarcastically redefined as a dystopia. The semantic saturation of *mir* (peace/world/death) is resolved by Ukrainian voices in favour of the latter, reinforcing the contrast with Ukrainian ideals.

In both interpretations, *mir* as ‘peace’ and ‘world’, it is emphasised that the “russkii mir” brings death and destruction, and being a representative of the “Russian world” as a sociocultural space poses a threat to Ukraine and the world.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, this article reveals that the strategies employed by Ukrainian public figures to counter Russian narratives are multifaceted and assertive. By

framing Russians as barbarians, savages, and brutes through direct labelling, mini-narratives of atrocities, and metaphorical characterisation, Ukrainians effectively dismantle the Russian self-image of representing civilisation and high culture. They further undermine the Russian concept of “mir” (peace) by exposing the inherent violence, war, crime, and destruction that define the so-called “Russian world.” When Russians claim to be protectors and custodians of civilisation, Ukrainians reverse this narrative by highlighting the ruins, deaths, and criminal actions perpetrated by Russians in Ukraine. In response to Russian assertions of a special mission to improve the planet and unite people against perceived threats, Ukrainians counter with evidence of Russian racism and bigotry.

These strategies collectively serve to reveal the stark contrast between Russian claims and their actions, thereby fortifying the Ukrainian stance and discrediting Russian propaganda. The strategic narratives used by Ukrainian public figures have been employed to influence public perception, social beliefs, and values, as well as to appeal to the recipients’ emotions in political communicative events. Moreover, the use of these strategic narratives has enabled the deconstruction of the image of Russia and the “Russian world” doctrine by employing the “Other-negative” approach.

This study contributes to the understanding of how political leaders use various strategic communication approaches during military conflicts to influence public perceptions. Future research may further explore the connection between leadership’s strategic narratives and information warfare.

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