

‘Safeguarding moral decency’

A Queer discourse analysis of Russian president Vladimir Putin’s sexualized discourses and boundary-making in the Russian-Ukraine war

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Abstract

The thesis investigates discourses on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression in national addresses performed by Russian president Vladimir Putin since the large-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. It applies an embedded approach of Critical Discourse Analysis and Queer Linguistics to disseminate how such discourses are produced by Putin in the war. The theoretical approach of Nira Yuval Davis (2011) ‘politics of belonging’ is employed to analyze in which ways such discourses are instrumentalized in a political effort to construct a Russian national community of belonging and its performative function in the war. The analysis identifies how the discourses naturalizes heteronormativity and gender binarism as well as antagonizes non-heteronormative gender identities and sexualities by the invocation of cultural, moral, religious, and anti-Western values. The analysis further demonstrates the construction of a national community of belonging which produces a threatening sexualized ‘Other’ that poses an acute threat to the Russian nation. Finally, it concludes that Putin’s demonization of non-heteronormative subjects carries an important function in the war by providing a legitimizing and mobilizational foundation.

Keywords: Putin; discourse; gender identity; sexuality; national belonging

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1 Introduction

“They sought to destroy our traditional values and force on us their false values that would erode us, our people from within, the attitudes they have been aggressively imposing on their countries, attitudes that are directly leading to degradation and degeneration, because they are contrary to human nature. This is not going to happen” (Kremlin.ru 2022).

The statement above is an excerpt from Russian President Vladimir Putin’s national address on the 24th of February 2022, which announced what would come to be a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In his speech, Putin continued his well-known rhetoric of safekeeping ‘traditional values’, this time narrating it as threatened by ‘Western absolutism’ (Kremlin.ru 2022). The focus on ‘traditional values’ is part of a wider ideology of state-sponsored homophobia which is seen to guide Putin’s domestic policy (Edenborg 2017: 2). Since his entrance of office, LGBTQ+ (an abbreviation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and other non-heteronormative gender identities and sexualities) issues have become increasingly politicized in Russia, made particularly visible by the so-called ‘Anti-gay’ legislation prohibiting ‘propaganda of non-traditional relations’, imposed in 2013, and further strengthened during midst of war in 2022 (Reuters 2022). This domestic conservative turn has been examined by many scholars (*see* Romanets 2018, Stella & Nartova 2016, Sleptcov 2017). What is far less studied, and what the introductory statement by Putin suggests, is an increased focus on moral and ‘traditional’ values also in foreign policy.

As recognized by feminist and queer scholars of International Relations (IR), sexual politics in general, and LGBTQ+ rights in particular, are increasingly framed by states as matters of global concern, entangled in struggles of power, influence, and security. It is often placed at the heart of identity contestations centered around ‘morality’, ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’, narrated to represent a ‘clash of civilizations’ (Richter-Montpetit & Weber 2017: 8-9). As such, LGBTQ+ issues are turned into a powerful source of global polarization, increasingly instrumentalized in state-strategies to create specific national and geopolitical borders which distinguishes a national community in opposition to a foreign threat which requires action (Bosia & Weiss 2013: 2, Yuval-Davis 1997: 57). Yet, queer perspectives are rarely

sufficiently recognized within mainstream IR, particularly as war unfolds and material and realist notions of security tend to be privileged as rational explanations. Contrary to such sentiments, I suggest that as the statement by Putin indicates, the geopolitical strategies of Russia, *in particular the Russian invasion of Ukraine*, cannot be understood fully if separated from the politics of sexuality and gender. Instead, critical queer perspectives can help enable productive ways to rethink and understand the complexities embedded in the Russian-Ukrainian war.

With this point of departure, I seek to analyze discourses on *sexual orientation, gender identity and expression* (hereon: SOGIE) in national addresses given by Putin during the Russo-Ukrainian war. The framework of SOGIE is employed as it is an inclusive term which recognizes a diversity of sexual and gender identities without prescribing specific identities (Altman & Symons 2016: 6). I employ an overarching queer theoretical and methodological framework within a Critical Discourse Analytical approach in order to deconstruct and disseminate Putin's discourses on SOGIE in national addresses during the war. To analyze the findings, I make use of the theoretical approach of 'politics of belonging' as formulated by Nira-Yuval Davis (2011) to investigate how such sexualized and gendered discourses are instrumentalized in a political effort to construct the boundaries of the national collective, used to distinguish a threatening 'Other'.

As such, the thesis attempts to contribute with important insights on how discourses on SOGIE are instrumentalized in a specific political effort to construct particular national boundaries of belonging and its performative function in the Russian-Ukraine war.

1.1 Research purpose and questions

The objective of the study is to examine discourses on SOGIE expressed by Putin in national addresses during the war, further analyzing how such discourses are employed in the political construct of the Russian national boundary.

The research questions are as following:

RQ1: How are discourses on sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression produced by Russian President Vladimir Putin in the Russian-Ukraine war?

RQ2: In which ways are discourses on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression employed in the construction of the Russian national belonging?

1.2 Important ethical considerations

This thesis is normative, seeking to deconstruct discourses on SOGIE. As recognized in the background (2.1) and previous research (3.3), the political regulation of LGBTQ+ rights differ throughout Russian history, reflecting specific political, and historical moments. It is important to underline that this thesis only investigates and reflects political discourse on SOGIE on the state-level in Russia. As in all places, Russia is diverse and home to various narratives on LGBTQ+ rights. However, the theoretical assumption of this thesis assumes that political discourse constructing identity regimes reflects strategies of power and dominance, thereby that it is essential to recognize the political aspects of it. As such, it opposes any essentialist understanding suggesting that homophobia is something inherent, in Russia or anywhere else, actively emphasizing that it is a political construct. The theoretical assumption guiding this thesis is further that discursive practices shape the social world as well as interact with other social practices and political regulations, which in this case targets a highly marginalized community in Russia. I hold this in mind throughout the thesis, whereas the queer theoretical and methodological framework has been chosen with careful ethical considerations, purposely recognizing the normative aspects of uncovering such harmful political efforts.

2. Background

2.1. The Russian invasion of Ukraine

This section presents a short outline of the Russian invasion of Ukraine to provide the context in which the discourses operate.

The Russian-Ukraine war is an international conflict between Russia and Ukraine which dates to 2014. On the 27th of February 2014, Russian separatist troops without military insignia invaded Crimea, seized the Crimean parliament, and installed a new pro-Russian prime minister (Ray 2023). Shortly after, on March 18, Putin signed a treaty incorporating Crimea into the Russian federation (Britannica 2023). According to international law, Crimea belongs to Ukraine and the annexation was deemed unlawful by the United Nations' General Assembly (UNGA 2014: 2, EEAS 2018). The conflict expanded as Russian troops seized the territory of Ukrainian region Donbas in April 2014, and Russian separatists proclaimed the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) as independent states.

On 21 February 2022, Putin recognized the two regions as independent states, further announcing a 'special military operation' in Ukraine on the 24 of February 2022. This date marks the Russian large-scale invasion of Ukraine, still on-going. The thesis is delimited to national addresses given by Putin since the beginning of the *large-scale invasion of Ukraine*.

2.2 Sociopolitical context on LGBTQ+ regulation in Contemporary Russia

LGBTQ+ people and communities face various legal and social barriers in Russia. The situation for regulation of LGBTQ+ people has varied throughout Russian history but has hardened during the presidency of Putin. In the following section I briefly outline the state of LGBTQ+ regulation in contemporary Russia to provide the context in which the discourses are produced.

Homosexuality was decriminalized in Russia in 1993 and further removed from the list of mental illnesses in 1999 (Refworld 2000). Same-sex civil partnership or marriage is not legal, and the Russian constitution explicitly outlaws same-sex marriage since 2020 (Reuters 2020). Joint adoption by non-heterosexual couples is illegal since 2013 (Reuters 2013). Since 1997 transgender people are allowed to correct their legal gender on the basis of a medical commission, neither sex-affirmative surgery nor hormone replacement therapy is required (TGEU 2018). The Russian constitution guarantees the legal right to peaceful association (e.g., hold meetings) but Russian authorities do not recognize LGBTQ+ organizations and enforce discriminatory policies against such (HRW 2018: 447). Russia does not provide any anti-discrimination laws specifically protecting LGBTQ+ people and does not recognize any hate crimes based solely on sexual orientation or gender identity (Equal Rights Trust 2018: 9-10).

In 2013, President Putin signed the federal law “For the purpose of Protecting Children from Information Advocating a Denial of Traditional Family Values” which prohibits distribution of information or material considered to promote “non-traditional sexualities” amongst minors (Grove 2013). In December 2022 the law was amended by Putin, further criminalizing the distribution of “propaganda of non-traditional relationships” amongst all ages. In practice, the law makes any form of public information or depiction of non-heterosexual relationships or non-heteronormative gender identities illegal (HRW 2022).

3. Previous research

The following section gives insight into the current academic research related to the topic of the thesis. The purpose of the previous research is to provide the reader with the context in which the thesis is conducted as well as to situate the study within the current academic debate, thus also ensuring the relevance of the thesis. As the thesis explores discourses on SOGIE by Putin in the Russian-Ukraine war in relation to national boundaries of belonging, this section will outline research on sexual politics in national and geopolitical boundary-making, current debates on global polarization over LGBTQ+ rights and lastly give insight into research on the politicization and geo-politicization of LGBTQ+ rights in contemporary Russia.

3.1 Sexualized National and Geopolitical Boundary-making

Queer and feminist researchers have long noted the ways in which sexuality and gender lie at the heart of boundary-making on both nation-state and global levels (Richter-Montpetit & Weber 2017: 10-11). Various scholars have examined how national belonging is shaped by specific norms and assumptions about sexuality and gender. Mosse (1985: 228-229) early demonstrated the ways in which nation-states prescribe heterosexuality, as the desires of men towards women are set out to guarantee the survival of the state. Peterson (2013: 67) further investigates the ways in which state-making naturalizes heterosexuality by examining the major institutional arrangements which prescribe heteronormativity, such as regulatory forms of power, the monitoring of biological and social reproduction and the constructs of collective identities. Stambolis-Ruhstorfer (2017: 3) maintains that sexuality is a building block for defining nationhood and an integral part of discursive practices which construct imagined national communities.

Queer scholars of IR have further demonstrated how sexual and gender differentiation become geopoliticized and important for international boundary-making. Bleys (1996) introduced the term 'Geographies of Perversion' which represents the symbolic displacement of non-normative sexualities to other states or regions, moreover, described as instrumental for the definition of sexual normalcy at home. Post-colonial feminists have particularly highlighted the ways in which representations of sexual 'savages' and 'widespread

homosexuality' in European colonies in Africa constituted a part of the European colonial imaginary which was employed to legitimize imperialism (Hawley 2001: 9, Chari 2001: 278). Contradictory, LGBTQ+ rights are also seen to mark the boundary of the 'West' by the representation of Western 'modernity' in opposition to a 'backward' Other (Richter-Montpetit & Weber 2017: 20).

Research on sexualized and gendered boundary-making, both internal and external, thus provides insights on the gendered and sexualized foundations of state-making, the creation of sexualized imagined national communities and the dislocation of non-normativities. For the purpose of this thesis, such insights provide an important basis as it recognizes the sexualized foundation of state-making and delimitations of the nation. Building on this, the next section further outlines polarization between states over sexual rights.

3.2 Global Polarization over LGBTQ+ rights

In the 21st century, states have increasingly come to depict LGBTQ+ issues as a global concern, entangled in contestations of power and security (Altman & Symons 2016: 11). Queer scholars have highlighted how sociocultural and legal gains for LGBTQ+ rights in some places are mirrored by increasing repression in others, resulting in international polarization (Dhawan 2016: 51, Altman & Symons 2016: 111). Sexual politics and LGBTQ+ rights are often seen to become interwoven in 'clash of civilization' narratives, portrayed to represent a deeper anxiety related to Western hegemony that threaten authorities in other parts of the world (Altman & Symons 2016: 23). Geopolitical mapping of queer rights often results in LGBTQ+ rights as symbolically linked to the 'West' and Western advancement, while the 'East' is condemned as a site of queer oppression (Dhawan 2016: 53).

Altman and Symons (2016: 30) suggest that globalization, particularly the extent of the internet, has made contestations over queer rights visible, thus enforcing polarization. The polarization over LGBTQ+ rights is seen as increasingly incorporated in state strategies. Puar (2017: 39) coined the term 'homonationalism' which describes the instrumentalization of queer rights for nationalist purposes, often employed by right-wing populists in liberal democracies in the Global North to stigmatize the 'Muslim Other'. This is further elaborated by Bosia and Weiss (2013: 12-13) which traces the instrumentalized narrative of a gay-

friendly 'West' as opposed to a homophobic 'East' as an orientalist colonial logic and a tool of 'Othering'. As opposed to 'homonationalism,' Bosia and Weiss (2013: 6-7) highlight a contemporary trend of 'political homophobia'. Political homophobia is described as a state-strategy that drives processes of state-building and which is employed by state actors as a tool for building national collective identities. It is often merged with anti-Western, anti-imperialist rhetoric which frames homosexuality as a 'Western import'. Such rhetoric is used by some political leaders in Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe where the imposition of LGBTQ+ rights is perceived as an extension of Western imperialism (Boss & Weiss 2013: 2-3).

The research of scholars on global polarization over queer rights provides insights as to how issues of LGBTQ+ rights have become entangled in wider contestations over power and security. It is recognized as various state strategies within states which are linked to global polarization. Moving from this, the next section outlines research on such political rhetoric and strategies in contemporary Russia.

3.3 Politicization and Geopoliticization of LGBTQ+ rights in Putin's Russia

Since the mid-200s, LGBTQ+ issues have become increasingly politicized in Russia (Wilkinson 2014: 366). Stella and Nartova (2016: 17) put the regulation of sexual rights under scrutiny, advancing that it is justified on both pragmatic and ideological grounds. Partly, it is legitimized in the name of national survival, aimed to increase the Russian population. On an ideological level, it constructs the ideals of the nation by framing heteronormative models of relationships as Russian (Stella & Nartova 2016: 18, 32). Edenborg (2017: 76) examines the construction of Russian 'traditional values' by providing insights on the historic regulation of queerness in Russia. He contends that Russian history entails both progressive and repressive laws on sexuality, thus that the narrative of 'safekeeping traditional values' used in the regulation of sexuality gives an historically inaccurate picture. Sleptcov (2017: 141) on the other hand argues that the state strategy of political homophobia employed by Putin is a well-known pattern in Russia's political history, referencing the political homophobia practiced by Joseph Stalin to undermine political opponents. As such, he argues that it is a policy of

nation-building which is enmeshed in Russian history and used by Putin to recreate a sense of national unity that is not based on ‘Western’ ideals (Sleptcov 2017: 146).

The politicization of queerness in Russia has further been investigated in relation to geopolitical contestations. Wilkinson (2014: 373) names the anti-LGTBQ+ policies of Russia ‘a regime of moral sovereignty’ which reflects a long-standing Russian skepticism towards the liberal human rights discourse as well as the discontent over the impositions of foreign norms on sovereign states. Altman and Symons (2016) describe the homophobic rhetoric of Putin as part of an international campaign to form alliances with other states that value religious and collectivist traditions. Along the same lines, Edenborg (2018) frames the strategy of political homophobia as a geopolitical positioning. He argues that it should be understood as a tool to separate Russia from the West and strengthen Russia’s position in global politics.

Some gendered and sexualized aspects of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine have been examined. Romanets (2017: 159) suggest that sexualized discourses are employed strategically in Russian virtual warfare to portray Russia as masculine in opposition to a subordinated feminine Ukraine. Riabov and Riabova (2014) identify a similar pattern in Russian political rhetoric which frames Ukraine as torn between the West and Russia, representing Ukraine as feminized under the influence of a sexually decadent ‘Gayropa’ in opposition to a masculine Russia. Edenborg (2017: 183) also investigates gendered and sexualized discourses in Russian media during the invasion of Ukraine in 2014, concluding that media narratives portrayed Ukraine as a legitimate target of violence based on gendered imaginaries.

As outlined, scholars have investigated state’s both internal and external contestations over sexualized and gendered imaginaries and LGBTQ+ rights. While the trend of polarization over queer rights has been investigated, the instrumentalization of such in interstate armed conflict leave room for further research. The homophobic rhetoric and politics of Putin is likewise often highlighted, but the examination of how such discourses are enacted in the war against Ukraine is not sufficiently researched. In my thesis, I build on important insights concerning the role of gender and sexuality in state contestations to investigate how discourses on SOGIE are instrumentalized as a specific political effort in the war in order to construct particular national boundaries of belonging.

4. Theoretical framework

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework of the essay. I will first present queer theory and its theoretical assumptions, then outline the theoretical considerations of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA is considered an analytical approach which consists of both method and theory, whereas its methodological aspects are elaborated in the methodological section. Queer theory informs Queer Linguistics which this thesis employs within an embedded CDA framework, whereas this section gives insights to the ideational foundation of queer theory. Lastly, the theoretical approach of ‘Politics of belonging’ as formulated by Nira-Yuval Davis (2011) is outlined and situated in relation to CDA and Queer theory.

4.1 Queer Theory

Queer Linguistics (QL) is informed by queer theory. Queer theory is not easily defined, as its foundational tenet is anti-foundationalist, opposed to rigid categorizations. However, there are some central characteristics. Queer theory applies an interdisciplinary outlook to advance new critical perspectives on sexualities, gender identities, and beyond (Leap 2015: 662). It is normative and political, questioning established social, economic, and political power relations. It assumes the standpoint that identity is performatively and discursively articulated and opposes the idea of essentialist identity categories (Leap 2015: 661). The central tenet of queer theory is the resistance to specifically two dominant discourses: *heteronormativity*, which includes all mechanisms that prescribes heterosexuality as the norm in society, and *gender binarism*, which constructs gender differences as essentialist and natural (Motschenbacher & Stegu 2013: 522).

Queer Theory distinguishes itself from other academic perspectives by employing sexuality and gender identity as the starting point for its questioning practice (Motschenbacher 2011: 153). It is important to highlight that queer theory does not primarily concern sex (having a certain kind of body), but gender identity (living as a certain kind of social being). Both are however interconnected as they are influenced by the same norms, thus constructed by the same discursive practices (Motschenbacher & Stegu 2013: 522). Queer theory does not offer any final solutions to certain problems, rather it assumes the long-term goal of destabilizing and reconceptualizing dominant sexuality and gender identity discourses. Due to this goal,

queer theoretical research has often placed the study of non-heteronormative sexualities and identities at the center of investigation, seeking to recognize the experiences of queer communities and identities (Motschenbacher 2011: 150, Motschenbacher & Stegu 2013: 520). However, queer theory also includes a broader field of interrogation, critically examining all sexual identities, including heteronormative identities, and their discursive power regimes (Motschenbacher 2011: 150).

For the purpose of this thesis, queer theory is applied as a foundational theoretical perspective, using the analytical categories of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression as a starting point for interrogation. It as such opposes the idea of ‘natural’, essentialist identities, assuming that the meaning of sexual and gender identities are socially and discursively constructed and closely connected to authority and power. The discursive aspect is further elaborated in section 5.1 on Critical Queer Discourse Analysis.

4.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a discourse analytical research practice that provides theories and methods for the study of the relation between discourse and sociocultural development in various social contexts. ‘CDA’ does not represent a single direction of research, rather it is a critical perspective that can be found in all areas of discourse studies. As theory and method are intertwined in CDA, the researcher must be aware of and accept its basic ideational and philosophical premise (Jørgensen & Phillips 2011: 4). CDA is based on social constructivism, reflecting the assumption that discursive practices, such as our way of speaking, play an active role in creating and changing our social world and constructing knowledge, including identities and social relations.

Although CDA approaches may differ, they generally share common characteristics. CDA is concerned with the relation between social reality and language, investigating the ways in which discourses give meaning and legitimacy to social practices and institutions (Jørgensen & Phillips 2011: 2). Nevertheless, it also assumes the standpoint that some dimensions of social reality are non-discursive, thus recognizing the *dialectical relationship* between discourse and the social world. Concrete language use is seen to build on earlier discursive structures, *intertextual elements*, emphasizing that discourse not only shape social structures

but reflect them (Phillips & Jørgensen 2011: 3). A discourse can be understood as a “particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of it)” (Phillips & Jørgensen 2011: 2). CDA seeks to situate discourses in its historical and cultural context. Our worldviews are considered a product of historically situated interchanges between people, thus representing historically specific and contingent understandings that are subject to change (Phillips & Jørgensen 2011: 6).

Importantly, as queer theory, CDA is a *normative*, critical approach which is committed to political change. It emphasizes the *ideological function* of discourses, contributing to the production and reproduction of unequal power relations between social groupings. Thereby, CDA is most often concerned with examining discourses in relation to social structures and how discursive produce and legitimize relations of power dominance and abuse in society (Van Dijk 2015: 466).

4.3 ‘Politics of belonging’

The theoretical approach of ‘politics of belonging’ as formulated by Nira-Yuval-Davis (2011) is a constructivist approach to questions of belonging. It concerns national collectives and the negotiations of such collective’s *boundaries*, and thereby the collective itself (Edenborg 2017: 21). Yuval-Davis understands struggles within and between states as ‘boundary work’, which she refers to as ‘politics of belonging’. It examines the negotiations of who is *perceived to belong* to a national community, as well as who is *perceived to be a stranger*.

Projects of belonging are understood as specific political efforts aimed at constructing belonging to particular collectives which are themselves constructed in specific ways within specific boundaries (Ibid: 10). Politics is seen to involve the exercise of power and different political projects of belonging represent symbolic power orders carried out by the hegemonic political power. It is important to differentiate between ‘belonging’ and ‘politics of belonging’. Belonging concerns an emotional attachment, about feeling ‘at home’. Politics of belonging, on the other hand, constitutes when ‘belonging’ becomes articulated, structured and politicized, which occurs when ‘belonging’ is perceived to be threatened in some way (Ibid: 10-11). Thereby, the boundaries which the politics of belonging concern are the *politically constructed communities of belonging*; the boundaries which sometimes physically,

but always symbolically, separate the world population into 'us' and 'them' (Ibid: 20). Projects of belonging thus not only concern the construction of boundaries, but also the inclusion or exclusion of particular people and social categories within these boundaries by those who have the power to do this (Ibid: 18).

Yuval-Davis (2011: 2) suggests that the boundaries are continuously modified in a globalized world with growing ethnic, cultural, political, and religious tensions within as well as between states. The anxieties related to growing tensions are seen as effective to construct communities of belonging which produces strangers not only as Others, but also as threats to the cohesion of the community (Ibid: 57). It is when the national community is perceived to be under threat that the need for defense and protection of the community of belonging arise. Political projects of belonging are thereby effective for the mobilization of populations in various struggles (Ibid: 167).

The basis on which belonging is constructed is complex. In different projects of belonging, various facets of belonging such as ethnicity or political values, can become the requisites for the negotiation of boundaries. The important aspect of politics of belonging is that the distinction between 'us' and 'them' continues to be 'naturalized' through discursive practices (Ibid 2011: 57). Exclusionary national boundaries which include some people and exclude others creates a distinction of people, constructing people of particular ethnic origins or sexualities as deviating from the 'normal' or 'typical' members of the imagined communities; as belonging or not (Ibid: 91). The practice of constructing national communities relies on the sharing and reproduction of symbolic content in public discursive spaces. The act of addressing or displaying something to the public has a performative function, producing the public as a social entity and as a community of belonging (Edenborg 2017: 31). The theoretical approach thus pays attention to the narratives which are told about belonging as well as the spaces in which they are told.

Politics of belonging assumes a critical, constructivist approach to belonging, recognizing its discursive and performative nature. In such a way, it aligns well with both Queer theory and CDA. For the purpose of this thesis, I specifically lean into belonging which relies on particular sexualized and gendered conceptions of a community. The theoretical approach of 'politics of belonging' is employed as it enables an examination of how discourses on SOGIE

are used as a tool to construct the boundaries of the national collective, and how the boundaries create Others which are constructed as threats to the national cohesion.

5. Methodology

The analysis is carried out with the use of an embedded approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA) and Queer Linguistics (QL), Critical Queer Discourse Analysis. I follow the methodological understanding of an embedded CDA and QL approach as outlined by Motschenbacher and Stegu (2013), further employing the analytical tool of ‘gender and sexuality triggered points’ as described by Helen Sauntson (2021).

5.1 Critical Queer Discourse Analysis

Critical Queer Discourse Analysis is an embedded methodological approach to CDA within an overarching Queer framework, drawing on insights of QL. As CDA represents a multitude of methods, various types of linguistic analyses can be used to uncover discursive practices of power (Wodak 2001: 2, Sauntson 2021: 344). As outlined by Motschenbacher and Stegu (2013), all disciplines can in theory be practiced from a queer perspective. It is, however, particularly useful in studies of linguistic character, as queer theory views formations of sexuality- and gender-related categories as *discursive undertakings* (Motschenbacher and Stegu 2013: 521).

There is as much diversity of thought in QL as there is within the field of CDA (Leap 2015: 662). As a basic guideline, QL is concerned with analyses of language that are informed by Queer theory. As highlighted in the section on Queer theory, all Queer inquiries are normative, seeking to expose the underlying preconditions for the construction and regulation of gender and sexuality identities (Tambunan & Sembiring 2022: 241). As described by Motschenbacher and Stegu (2013: 633), studies of QL explore the processes through which categories of gender and sexuality identities are enacted through *discursive practices* as well as how *discursive acts* lend authority to specific categories of sexual identity and gender binaries. QL thereby also investigates normative practices and regulatory processes, identifying dominant discourses which shape gender and sexual identities as well as their alignment with normative authority (Leap 2015: 676). QL maintains that the discursive constructs of gender identity and sexuality cannot be understood only in reference to discursive practices but needs to be processed in relation to the political, social and ideological context in which they operate. Motschenbacher and Stegu (2013) contend that

while QL employs sexuality as its point of departure, its interests lead to a broader interrogation of structures of normative authority and regulatory power (Leap 2015: 661-662).

CDA and QL is a fruitful methodological combination as they share foundational methodological and theoretical assumptions, but also complement each other with important insights. CDA is mostly concerned with the examination of discourses in relation to social interactions and social structures and how these produce and legitimize relations of power dominance and abuse in society (Leap 2015: 676, Motschenbacher and Stegu 2013: 528). QL on the other hand is concerned with a specific form of ‘social wrong’ linked to normative discourses on sexuality and gender identities (Leap 2015: 676). It is this difference in scope that makes the fusion effective. QL provides CDA with valuable insights on gender and sexuality discourses, while CDA enables a broader interrogation of complex systems of power (Leap 2015: 676).

5.2 Operationalization

This kind of CDA/QL embedded approach enables a focus on how discourses and ideologies on sexuality and gender identities are embedded and inscribed in systems of power and dominance. Practically, this translates into the examination of sexuality and gender identity discourses in relation to larger societal structures and constructs of regulatory power and abuse, in this case the constructs of national boundaries during war.

Operationalizing the theoretical framework, I draw on the analytical tool of Helen Sauntson (2021), employed by her in an embedded approach to CDA and QL, making use of ‘gender identity and sexuality triggered points’ (GTSPs). GTSPs are particular lexical items (a single word or a chain of words) and intertextual references which identify when gender identity and/or sexuality are negotiated into relevance through a discursive interaction (Sauntson 2021: 344). As an example, a GTSP could be explicit prescriptions of heteronormativity onto a subject or stereotypical or non-stereotypical representations of homosexuality. Additionally, as discourses on gender identity and sexuality often connect to wider narratives on family, normality or morality, this approach is particularly useful as it allows for any explicit or implicit references to sexuality or gender identity in speech acts (Ibid: 345). Within a CDA

and QL framework this further enables the dissemination of how values and ideologies on sexuality and gender identity are embedded in discourses.

Through the analytic tool of GTSPs I make note of anything relating to sexuality or gender identity in the speeches. Employing the aspects of CDA, I further analyze the context in which they are employed to distinguish codes and construct themes. The themes generated from the analysis are: *Male soldiers protect the Motherland*, *Western perversion vs Russian values*, *Protecting the Children*, and *Invading Western Perversion*.

Table 1. The constructed themes with examples of GTSPs.

THEMES	EXAMPLES OF GTSPS
Male Soldiers Protect the Motherland	<p>“Happy holiday that commemorates the honour of our <i>fathers, grandfathers</i> and <i>great-grandfathers</i> who glorified and immortalised their names by defending our <i>Fatherland</i>“ (A7)</p> <p>“I know how difficult it is for their <i>wives, sons</i> and <i>daughters</i>, and for their parents, who raised real heroes” (A5)</p>
Western Perversion versus Russian Traditional Values	<p>“They are forcing the priests to bless <i>same-sex marriages</i>” (A6)</p> <p>“They say it all, including that <i>family</i> is the union of a <i>man</i> and a <i>woman</i>, but these sacred texts are now being questioned.” (A6)</p>
Protecting the Children	<p>“Do we want to drum into their heads the ideas that certain other genders exist along with women and men and to offer them gender reassignment surgery? Is that what we want for our country and our children?” (A4)</p> <p>”It is all about the destruction of the <i>family</i>, of cultural and national identity, <i>perversion</i> and abuse of <i>children</i>, including pedophilia, all of which are declared normal in their life.” (A6)</p>
Invading Western Perversion	<p>“Do we want to have here, in our country, in Russia, “parent number one, parent number two and parent number three” (they have completely lost it!) instead of <i>mother</i> and <i>father</i>?” (A4)</p> <p>“Russia will always be Russia. We will continue to defend our <i>values</i> and our <i>Motherland</i>.” (A4)</p>

5.3 Material

The material consists of seven national addresses given by Putin since the day of the large-scale invasion of Ukraine on the 24th of February 2022. Examining the national addresses given by Putin since the large-scale invasion of Ukraine allows for the investigation of discourses on SOGIE during the war, assessing how discourses are constructed. The analysis

only concerns national addresses given to the citizens of Russia and the Russian federal assembly. This limitation is motivated as such addresses are aimed at the citizens of Russia, whereas I argue it reveals details on the national boundaries relating to SOGIE in the war. However, as the speeches are translated by national authorities and published on official governmental sites it arguably also works as a form of speech act of concern to the global community as well. The fact that the analysis is performed on translated speeches might be considered a weakness, as it includes the risk of false translations or the loss of important nuances. This is a delimitation which I am aware of and hold in mind throughout the process.

Any critical interrogation requires critical reflections of reflexivity. As this is a qualitative study, I am, as the researcher, part of the research process (Halperin & Heath 2017: 357). This aspect is crucial to acknowledge as the material and findings are interpreted by me. With this in mind, I seek to provide the reader with transparency concerning the process of analysis. I previously emphasized the normative character of the theoretical and methodological foundation, which moreover give insight into the foundational assumptions which guide me in the process. Additionally, practicing positionality, it is of importance to acknowledge that I hold an 'outside perspective', namely that I interrogate from a perspective outside the community being studied (Bukamal 2022: 331). This is important to underline, particularly from a critical point of view, as our predispositions are seen to influence the production of meanings (Holmes 2020: 3).

Examining the discourses of the President does not give insight to other national discourses on the topic. It fails to highlight counter narratives, micro-level discursive events and does not acknowledge the voices of the concerned LGBTQ+ citizens of Russia, which could be considered a weakness. Head of states, however, hold major political power and exercise influential discursive power with major channels for establishing moral, social and political reference points for the whole society. They also represent national discourses which are of particular significance during war as it represents official state discourses. With this in mind, I consider the limitation motivated.

The speeches selected for the analysis are all national addresses aimed at all citizens of Russia since the large-scale invasion of Ukraine. Additionally, a national address given three days prior to the invasion is included as it concerns the forthcoming invasion. In total, there are seven speeches between the period of February 21, 2022, and May 9, 2023. The speeches are

coded as A1-A7, which I use to reference the addresses in the analysis. ‘A’ represents ‘address’ and the number indicates the chronological order of the speech. As an example, the first address given by Putin on the 21st of February is coded as A1, the second address as A2.

Table 2. The national addresses in chronological order with assigned codes.

DATE	ADDRESS	CODE
February 21, 2022	” Address by the President of the Russian federation”	A1
February 24, 2022	“Address by the President of the Russian federation”	A2
September 21, 2022	“Address by the President of the Russian federation”	A3
September 30, 2022	“Signing of the treaties on accession of Donetsk and Lugansk people’s republics and Zaporozhye and Kherson regions to Russia”	A4
December 31, 2022	“New Year Address to the Nation”	A5
February 21, 2023	“Presidential Address to Federal Assembly”	A6
May 9, 2023	“Victory Parade on Red Square”	A7

6. Analysis

All national addresses are aimed at the citizens of Russia and center around the invasion of Ukraine, by Putin named ‘the special military operation in Ukraine’ (A2). As will be demonstrated, the invasion is narrated as an act of defense for the protection of the existence of the Russian nation. Within the portrayal of the Russian nation as threatened, several discourses on SOGIE can be identified. The findings are divided into four themes, which interrelate and build on each other.

The first section of the analysis is devoted to answer RQ1: *How are discourses on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression produced in the war?* The second section builds on the findings of the first section, answering RQ2: *In which ways are discourses on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression employed in the construction of the Russian politics of belonging?*

6.1 Discourses on SOGIE in national addresses

6.1.1 Male soldiers protect the Motherland

In the addresses directed at the citizens of Russia, the soldiers serving the nation-state is an occurring theme. *Soldiers* are inscribed with gender, pronounced to be men. The soldiers are mentioned in relation to their actions; defending the nation, sacrificing their lives (A4, A6). They are given praise, gratitude and appreciation for their actions, but also implicitly exhortations (A5, A6). The soldiers of today are referenced in relation to the men serving before them - their fathers, grandfathers, and great grandfathers (A1, A2, A4). The commitment of serving Russia is invoked in other historical fights for Russia, narrated as a task carried by generations of men in Russia which is upheld by the Russian men of today. Within this narrative, the soldiers of today are also pressured not to disappoint previous generations. An example of this is found in speech A2: “Your fathers, grandfathers and great grandfathers did not fight the Nazi occupiers and did not defend our common Motherland to allow today’s neo-Nazis to seize power in Ukraine”. The men are also prescribed with attributes of *strength*: dignity, courage, and loyalty (A5). As such, the soldiers are given agency, portrayed as active subjects protecting the state.

Soldiers are also repeatedly prescribed heterosexuality, with multiple references to their *wives* at home. Putin frequently offers gratitude to the wives of the defenders (A3, A6, A7). The deaths of soldiers are also depicted as a sacrifice which is made not only for the nation, but for the protection of the nation's women (A6). Women are thus deprived of agency within this discourse, narrated only as wives and further in the need of the protection their husbands provide. *Family* is a reoccurring theme. The families of soldiers are often invoked, with references to the parents who raised the defenders, or the children missing their fathers. It is not explicitly articulated which type of family formation, but in relation to its context it stands clear that it is the *nuclear family*. In speech A6, Putin references the Bible to pronounce that a union is between a man and a woman, while also denouncing same-sex marriages, thus also such family formations. The multiple references to *family* represent a discourse which emphasizes the importance of the *family unit* in the Russian nation.

The nation-state of Russia is equally described in gendered terms - as '*motherland*' or '*fatherland*'. A pattern could be identified: the '*motherland*' is referenced as what is being protected, whereas the '*fatherland*' is referenced when it entails portrayals of the soldiers defending the state. To demonstrate: "We will continue to *defend* our values and our *Motherland*" (A4) in opposition to "We all understand, and I understand also how unbearably hard it is for their wives, sons and daughters, for their parents who raised those dignified *defenders of the Fatherland*" (A6). This indicates a gendered coding, where the Motherland is passive, in need of protection, whereas the Fatherland represents strength and courage. It is, however, important to underline that the addresses are translated, and this could differ in Russian.

The findings give important insights into the underlying assumptions about gender identity and sexuality as expressed by Putin. The discourses on gender identity and sexuality in relation to the subjects and objects referenced (*the soldiers, parents, children, wives of soldiers, the family, the motherland, fatherland, fathers, grand-fathers and great-grandfathers*) indicate two elements which are highlighted by Queer theory: gender binarism and heteronormativity. The discourse prescribes heteronormativity to all citizens of Russia as well as entails a strict gender dichotomy with categorizations of male/female which are assigned different characteristics. Men are the strong defenders of the Fatherland, and women are the vulnerable wives/mothers of the soldiers protecting the Motherland.

As the theoretical foundation of CDA recognizes, discursive practices produce and provide legitimacy to our social world, including identities (Jørgensen & Phillips 2011: 2, 4). The discursive undertaking by Putin can thus be seen to enact specific gender and sexuality identities by lending normative authority to heteronormativity. As discursive practices further are seen to cooperate with other social and political arrangements, which in the case of Russia extends to political regulation of sexual rights and the silencing of other discourses (referencing the ‘anti-gay’-legislation), it institutionalizes heteronormativity in Russia. It also contributes to what Peterson (2013: 67) proposes, the ‘naturalization’ of heteronormativity as it is narrated ‘normal’ and the alternatives are silenced, and/or denounced. The latter is explored in the next section.

6.1.2 Western perversion versus Russian values

In addition to prescribing heteronormativity as the natural order in the Russian nation, other forms of gender- and sexuality identities are condemned. The separation between ‘normal’ and ‘unnatural’ gender identities and sexualities are further enmeshed in a discursive separation between Russian versus Western values.

The Western ‘*ideology*’ of SOGIE is portrayed as “the radical denial of moral, religious and family values” (A4). It is linked to Western ‘*moral dictatorship*’ and ‘*hegemony*’ which is described to aim at the destruction of *family* and *traditional values* (A7). Referencing the previous section, the family which is threatened is the nuclear family within a union of a man and a woman. Putin further links Western values to same-sex marriage and non-binary gender identities which are pronounced as contrary to human nature (A6). He further interrelates non-heteronormative identities and sexualities with *perversion*, *degradation* and *degeneration*, moreover describing such as something ‘normal’ in Western societies (A6). The displacement of non-heteronormative identities and sexualities highlights a discourse of dislocation, which further aligns with Bleys (1996) earlier mentioned concept of ‘geographies of perversion’. The use of phrases such as ‘ideology’, ‘dictatorship’, ‘hegemony’ can further be seen as a discursive undertaking which indicates the politically constructed nature of Western ideas, in opposition to the naturalization of Russian values.

Religion is a recurring theme which provide a moral foundation for the denunciation of sexual diversity. The moral values of the Orthodox Christianity is said to have created a strong

Russian state (A4), which interlocks religious and national values. Putin invokes the Bible “the holy scripture” (A6) to provide legitimacy to his discourse by anchoring the values of Russia in a higher dimension, as following God’s will. He also uses the Anglican church, implicitly understood as a representation of Western religion, as an opposite. He references its portrayed exploration of a gender-neutral god, which leaves him to say: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (A6). The discursive act of portraying the West as going against God’s will is effectively invoking the idea of Western values as sinful. This is reinforced as Putin names the Western ‘ideology’ a case of “religion in reverse” and “pure satanism” (A4).

Discourses on SOGIE are also expressed in relation to temporality; to the past, present and the future. The moral and cultural values of Russia are narrated as the historical truth, inherently linked to the ‘*historical homeland*’ which previous generations have fought to preserve (A2, A3, A4). The use of ‘*traditions*’ is in itself an expression with historic connotations: it suggests norms which are carried on. The *future* is also incorporated in the discourse, interrelated to the history. The historical legacy of Russian values is described as the “destiny of Russia” (A3). An example is found in speech A6: “We have been raised on the example of our great ancestors and must be worthy of their behests that are passed down from generation to generation”. The use of the phrase ‘*behest*’ is commanding, indicating a bid from previous generations that must be honored. As such, the historical past as well as the future is positioned in relation to the present: the present Russia needs to preserve the historical values for the future of Russia (A3, A6).

As recognized in section 3.3, Putin’s invocation of history has been examined. Edenborg (2017) states that the history of regulation of Queerness in Russia varies, while Sleptcov (2017) maintains that a pattern of political homophobia in Russia can be identified. Undoubtedly, historical legacies are important, but as CDA recognizes - discourses represent a particular way of talking about the world, or *an aspect of it*. When Putin highlights the historical past, he can choose to include certain aspects of history and exclude others. It can thereby be considered a discursive construct of a particular historic past which gives legitimacy to the ‘traditional’ values Putin seeks to maintain.

The ‘Western values’ are clearly separated from Russian ‘traditional values’. What Russian ‘traditional values’ include is not as distinctly articulated, but implicitly suggest the opposite

of the narrated Western values. As mentioned, Western values are depicted to include same-sex marriages, gender-neutral gods, non-binary identities, non-heteronormative family formations, implicitly anything deviating from heteronormative ideals, in turn framed as perversion, degeneration, degradation, sinfulness. In opposition, the Russian values are represented as in line with heteronormativity, gender binarism, the nuclear family, the Orthodox church as moral foundation and the preservation and honoring of historical traditions.

6.1.3 Protecting the children

Putin's discourses on SOGIE often entails a narrative of 'protecting the children'. Non-heteronormative relations, sexualities and identities are pronounced to be a Western strategy that specifically targets the younger generation of Russia (A6). It is named "monstrous experiments that are designed to cripple their minds and souls" (A3). The experiments in question are implicated to be the idea of non-heteronormative identities and sexualities as 'normal', which enters the mind of the younger generation as a consequence of Western "aggressive information attacks" (A4). Non-heteronormative sexualities and identities are equated with "*perversion and abuse of children, including pedophilia*" (A6). The linking of non-heteronormative sexualities and identities with pedophilia must be understood as a powerful discursive act of dominance as it connects non-normativities with acute danger for children. In address A4, Putin poses a rhetorical question: "Do we want our schools to impose on our children, from their earliest days in school, perversions that lead to degradation and extinction? Do we want to drum into their heads the idea that certain other genders exist along with women and men and to offer them gender reassignment surgery?". The answer is narrated as obvious: such things do not belong in Russia. The use of phrasings such as 'impose' and 'drum into their heads' also implies that such ideas are not naturally occurring but indoctrinated into children.

The protection of children from Western perversion is constructed to concern the future of Russia. In itself, *children* represent the generation that will grow up to carry the future of the nation. The safekeeping of 'traditional values' is portrayed as struggle for "future generations, our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren" (A4). *Children* also carry a biological, reproductive symbolism. This is invoked as non-heteronormative sexualities and identities are narrated to lead to extinction (A4). This aspect connects to the research by Stella and Nartova

(2016: 18), proposing that regulation of sexual rights in Russia is partly justified with an aim to increase the Russian population. The wider context in which the discourse of ‘protecting the children’ is produced also strengthens this thesis. In address A6, following the articulation of concern for children’s safety, Putin devotes time to the topic of economic support for family and children. Family reproducing are proposed to receive increased financial support through the expansion of the children’s budget and enhanced maternity capital is brought up (A6).

The theme of ‘protecting the children’ is constructed as this is a recurring sentiment. As the embedded approach of CDA and QL maintain, while sexuality functions as a starting point, its interests lead to a broader interrogation of regulatory power (Motschenbacher & Stegu 2013). The incorporation of children’s safety in discourse on SOGIE must be understood as a powerful discursive act of regulatory power which constructs an image of innocent children as threatened by dangerous sexual perversions. It can be seen as appealing to emotions: families need to protect their children from danger.

6.1.4 Invading Western perversion

The identified discourse of Western perversion is further narrated as threat to the Russian nation. It is expressed as constituting both an existential and physical danger, whereas both aspects are interrelated.

On an ideological level, Putin refers to the danger of Western attempts to destroy Russian traditional values that bear the Russian nation. The moral and cultural underpinnings of the Russian nation, as highlighted in section 6.1.2, are framed as providing the foundation for the wellbeing and existence of the Russian nation (A2). Putin portrays the imposition of ‘pseudo-values’ as a part of a Western strategy to “weaken, divide and ultimately destroy” the Russian nation (A3). The existential threat is thus framed to constitute a physical danger. Another connection between the existential and physical threat is expressed in A4: “They see our *thought* and *philosophy* as a *direct threat*. That is why they *target* our *philosophers* for *assassination*”. The use of wordings such as ‘*force*’, ‘*erode*’, ‘*destroy*’, ‘*target*’, all insinuate the threatening character of the Western ideology. The phrasings of ‘*us*’ ‘*divide*’ ‘*our*’ further construct the Russian nation as a unity which shares the values that are threatened by the West.

The invasion of Ukraine is incorporated in the discourse of the threatening Western ideology. The Western ‘dictatorship’ is described to control Ukraine as the Ukrainian government is narrated to have been taken hostage by the Western elite and to serve Western interests at the expense of the Ukrainian population (A1, A2, A3, A6). Putin invokes a historical dimension to separate the Ukrainian population from the Ukrainian government, referring to Ukraine as the “historical homeland” (A4) and that the populations share historical, cultural and moral values (A2). An example of this is found in A4: “Our compatriots, our brothers and sisters in Ukraine who are part of our united people”. Putin also states that the West “are openly encouraging Kiev to move the hostilities to our territory” (A3). The discourse is thus seen to present the invasion of Ukraine in two lines of argumentation: as defending the Ukraine from Western aggression as well as protecting the Russian nation from an approaching existential and physical threat. This is further reinforced in a passage where Putin states that the Ukrainian regions occupied by Russia are suffering under “a policy to root out Russian language and culture” and that the populations are subjected to an assimilation campaign which amounts to “genocide” (A1).

Western acts of violence carried out through the aggressive imposition of sexual values are thus narrated to target Russia as part of a Western strategy. Related to this, Putin articulates the need for a response. He calls the Russian population to a “battlefield” for the sake of the “great historical Russia, for future generations, our children, grand-children and great grand-children” (A4). The urgency is made clear in address A2: “For our country, it is a matter of life and death, a matter of our historical future as a nation. This is not an exaggeration: this is a fact. It is not only a very real threat to our interests but to the very existence of our state and its sovereignty.”

6.2 Sexualized discursive constructs of National Politics of Belonging

Building on the findings of the first part of analysis, the following section answers RQ2: *In which ways are discourses on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression employed in the construction of the Russian politics of belonging?*

With the standpoint in Yuval-Davis' 'politics of belonging' (2011), the addresses given by Putin to the citizens of Russia since the invasion of Ukraine is assumed to be discursive acts with a performative function. The very act of addressing the 'citizens of Russia', in addition to the discursive constructions of unity ('we', 'us', 'our'), produces the Russian population as a social entity in the Russian nation. This entity becomes the discursively produced *national community of belonging*. The space in which the speech acts are enacted are important (Edenborg 2017: 31). Putin holds significant discursive influence in addition to political power as the President of Russia, and he is able to address the citizens of Russia from a position of power. His speech acts should thereby be considered an exercise of power. His discursive practices further work in a dialectal relationship with other social dimensions of social reality, such as the political regulation of sexual identities and the censoring of anything related to non-heteronormative gender identities or sexualities. The limitation of counter-discourses reinforces his discursive power which give meaning and legitimacy to social practices (Jørgensen & Phillips 2011: 2). In accordance with Yuval-Davis' (2011: 10), conceptualization, the discourses on SOGIE as produced by Putin constitute a political effort which construct a national community of belonging that includes and excludes certain subjects. In other words, it is a *performance of boundary work*.

As identified in the first part of the analysis, the discourse that provide basis for the construct of the national community of belonging are centered around sexualized, gendered, ethical and moral values, which are interrelated and work to reinforce each other. The national community is constructed in heteronormative terms, prescribing heterosexuality and female/male binarism as the 'natural order'. The emphasis on the nuclear family indicates a requisite for belonging which stresses a particular idea about how family and social life should be organized. The discursive production of moral and ethical values defines an idea of proper behavior in the national community. The boundary is also negotiated on the basis of

historical and religious values which work to naturalize the negotiation and disguise the political construct of it.

The act of producing the boundaries of belonging defines what is considered as deviating from the community of belonging. However, in this case, the boundaries are further reinforced by the articulation of what/who is *excluded* from it. The excluded subjects have been identified in the first part of the analysis: any forms of non-heteronormative gender identities, sexualities, or family formations, summarized as the ‘Western ideology of perversion’. This accordingly provides the basis for the distinction of ‘us’ and ‘them’, but the excluded subjects are not only constructed as ‘Others’ but as dangerous threats against the cohesion of the national community of belonging. The ‘Other’ is portrayed as dangerous, sinful and as constituting an existential and physical threat to the national community. The depicted nexus between the ‘West’ and non-heteronormative identities and sexualities must be understood as particularly important within this context. Non-heteronormative identities and sexualities become representations of the intrusion of the West which seeks to destroy the Russian nation. The displacement of sexualities to the West also highlights a discourse of dislocation, which is a clear boundary-making move.

An important aspect of Putin’s discursive construct of the national community of belonging is the incorporation of the Ukrainian population within the boundaries, as discussed in section 6.1.4. The discourse includes the Ukrainian population in the national community of belonging through the portrayal of a shared historic past as well as common cultural and moral values. The Ukrainian government is constructed as outside of the community, as it is described as controlled by the Western elite which imposes foreign sexual values. In that regard, it is implied that the Russian national community is threatened by the Western ‘dictatorship’ operating in Ukraine.

Concluding this section, the discourses on SOGIE are employed in a political construct of the Russian national community of belonging which produces a clear boundary of ‘us’ and ‘them’. Sexualized and gendered discourses of heteronormativity are instrumentalized to construct a dangerous, intruding Other which threatens the Russian national cohesion. It is further constructed in a way that turns non-heteronormative identities and sexualities into a symbol for Western intrusion which if not met with action will erode the Russian nation. As Yuval-Davis (2011) maintains, ‘politics of belonging’ constitute the articulation and

politicization of boundaries of belonging which occurs when it is perceived to be threatened. The need for defense of the community arises from this articulation, which is why projects of belonging are effective for the mobilization of populations. In this case, it concerns the support and mobilization for the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

7. Discussion

The analysis provided insights on the underlying gendered and sexualized assumptions in Putin's speech acts which works to naturalize heteronormativity and gender binarism. It further identified the denunciation of other non-heteronormative gender identities and sexualities as entangled in moral, historical, and religious values. The discourse of 'Western perversion' constructs an ideology which is neither seen as native nor compatible with Russian traditional values. With the standpoint in 'politics of belonging' this is recognized as boundary negotiation. This must further be viewed as a powerful discourse of power and dominance, as the Western ideology which is narrated to control the Ukrainian government consequently constructs the invasion of Ukraine as crucial for the survival of the nation accordance with two motivations. The first one is that the Ukrainian population is seen as part of the Russian national community. The second one is that the Ukrainian government, in the hands of West, is approaching the Russian border with its ideology which will erode the Russian nation. Within this logic, *saving Ukraine is saving Russia*.

From this analysis, my first conclusion is that antagonistic discourses on non-heteronormative sexualities and identities are used as crucial building blocks which provide a foundation for the production of a national community of belonging. My following conclusion is that such antagonistic discourses are instrumentalized to construct an acute existential threat against the Russian population within the context of the war. The boundaries of belonging articulates *what/who needs to be protected from whom* which is effective for the mobilization of populations. As such, I contend that Putin employs the demonization of queer identities as a tool which carries an important function in the war against Ukraine in that it provides a legitimizing and mobilizational foundation.

The entanglement of contestations over sexuality and gender identities and 'West'/'East' contestations is highly present in Putin's discourse. Elaborating on Dhawan's (2016) research on the symbolic linking of LGBTQ+ rights as representing Western 'modernity', Putin is seen to continue this association, but instead of 'modernity', narrating it as 'perversion'. This discourse resembles a 'clash of civilization' narrative which reinforces a construction of 'West'/'East' with moral and cultural underpinnings. In line with the critical approach to any essentialist categorizations, this needs to be highlighted as a political construct which makes

queer communities the hostage in a wider contestation of power and influence. Expanding to a larger perspective, the dangers of over-politicization of queer people apply regardless of which direction it comes from. As Yuval-Davis (2011) maintains, the anxieties of a globalized world with cultural, religious, and political tensions are effective to produce 'Others'. Further elaborating on this aspect, Putin is seen to invoke multiple issues through the antagonizing of non-heteronormative identities and sexualities: religion, history, dangers to children, morality, Western intrusion. In that sense, it becomes a particularly powerful discourse as it becomes the representation of various anxieties.

This thesis has high internal validity as it focuses on one particular case. Due to this, it however, has limited generalizability. The theoretical framework and the use of gender identity and sexuality as analytical categories could be applied to other cases where state strategies of homophobia have been observed. With increasing global polarization over sexual and queer rights in broader struggles of power and influence, I also further suggest the application of queer theories to other studies within the broader field of conflict studies or IR. Given the extent of anti-Western narratives in Putin's discourse in the national addresses, another fruitful future research could include the incorporation of post-colonial theory, critically examining 'clash of civilization' narratives embedded in legacies of imperialism and colonialism.

8. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to examine discourses on SOGIE expressed by Putin in national addresses during the Russian-Ukraine war, further analyzing how such discourses are employed in the political construct of the Russian national community of belonging. This was achieved through an embedded approach to CDA and QL, with the use of the analytical tool of GTSPs. Yuval-Davis (2011) theoretical approach of ‘politics of belonging’ was further employed to analyze the findings. The research questions were:

- *How are discourses on sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression produced by Russian President Vladimir Putin in the Russian-Ukraine war?*
- *In which ways are discourses on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression employed in the construction of the Russian national belonging?*

The analysis demonstrated that Putin’s discourses are produced in a way that naturalizes heteronormativity and gender binarism as well as antagonizes non-heteronormative gender identities and sexualities. This is done partly by the invocation of moral, cultural, historical and religious values which is represented as ‘Russian traditional values’. It is also partly done by opposing Russian values to the ‘Western ideology’ represented as ‘perverse’ and ‘degenerate’, further incompatible with Russian values. These discourses form the foundation of a particular Russian community of belonging which creates an inside / outside distinction. This is recognized as a political effort which construct non-heteronormative identities and sexualities as a threatening ‘Other’ which poses a to the national cohesion. Additionally, the Ukrainian population is narrated as part of the national community on the basis of a particular historical past and shared common values, whereas the Ukrainian government is portrayed as controlled by the West. This construction is instrumental as it contributes to the construction of the Russian national community under acute threat. On the basis of the analysis, I conclude that Putin uses the demonization of queer subjects as a tool to construct justification for the invasion of Ukraine.

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10. Appendix: National addresses

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