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# The Battle of Words

**Uncovering the Narratives of the Conflict in Ukraine**



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## Abstract

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What if the true battleground lies not in the physical confrontations but in the complex realm of narratives? This study explores the use of narratives employed by Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelenskyy while shedding light on their techniques and the construction of competing narratives in the context of the conflict in Ukraine. Drawing on narrative theory and Philip Smith's narrative genres, the study aims to examine the leaders' competing understandings and their use of emotions and notions of threat in relation to the Ukrainian conflict. The research problem revolves around the role of political discourse in the narrative construction and legitimization of war. Through a comparative narrative analysis of Putin and Zelenskyy's public speeches, the study attempts to examine how they construct their objectivity, legitimacy, and appeal to cultural and historical aspects to frame their narratives. The findings highlight the contrasting points of view and strategic framing, with Putin emphasising Russian exceptionalism, historical kinship, and resistance to Western hegemony through character moral polarisation, while Zelenskyy focuses on presenting and encouraging unity, resilience, and the fight for justice. By unravelling the narrative strategies employed by the leaders, the study sheds light on the power dynamics, ideological contests, and cultural dimensions at play in the Ukrainian conflict. In particular, it emphasises how the portrayal of threat and emotion work together in their narratives. The findings are significant in advancing our understanding of the role of these political leaders who use storytelling techniques to influence public opinion, construct collective identities, and justify their actions in times of this crisis.

**Keywords:** *narrative criminology, presidential speech, conflict, war, emotion, threat*

## Popular Science Summary

What if conflicts are rooted in the stories people tell? This study looks at the speeches given by Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelenskyy, while revealing their methods for creating narratives surrounding the conflict in Ukraine. Using narrative theory and Philip Smith's (2005) narrative genres, the study examines the leaders' competing understandings and their use of emotions and notions of threat. The study centres on the function of political speech in justifying and constructing a narrative of war. The analysis examines how they build trust, credibility, and cultural references to shape their stories. The research reveals the opposing perspectives and rhetorical techniques used by Putin and Zelenskyy. Putin creates a divide between good and evil, emphasising Russian exceptionalism, historical kinship and resistance to Western hegemony. While Zelenskyy focuses on portraying and promoting unity, resilience and the fight for justice against Russia. By examining how the leaders use stories to influence their audience, we gain insight into the power dynamics, ideological clashes, and cultural aspects underlying the Ukrainian conflict. Studying this enables us to comprehend how political figures shape the viewpoint of the public, establish common beliefs, and explain their actions through narrative during times of emergency, while simultaneously forging credibility and legitimacy. Taken together, they show that the conflict in Ukraine is power-based, ideological and involves cultural dimensions. In particular, it highlights how the portrayal of threat and emotion work together in their narratives. The conclusions are important for better understanding the role of these political leaders who use storytelling techniques to shape public opinion, create collective identities and justify their actions in times of this crisis.

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# Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. <i>The Issue, Aim, and Research Questions</i>	2
1.2. <i>Background to the Conflict</i>	4
1.3. <i>The Role of Legitimate Authority in Presidential Discourse</i>	5
<b>2. Literature Review.....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1. <i>The Dynamics of Political Discourse</i>	7
2.2. <i>Inspiration and Mobilisation</i>	8
2.3. <i>National Identity and Unity</i>	9
2.4. <i>Vladimir Putin’s Discourse</i>	9
2.5. <i>Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s Discourse</i>	10
<b>3. Theoretical Framework.....</b>	<b>12</b>
3.1. <i>Narrative Theory</i>	12
3.2. <i>Narrative Approach to War</i>	14
3.3. <i>Genres of Narratives</i>	17
3.4. <i>Underdog Narrative</i>	20
<b>4. Methodology.....</b>	<b>22</b>
4.1. <i>Data</i>	22
4.2. <i>Coding</i>	24
4.3. <i>Ethical Considerations</i>	25
4.4. <i>Limitations</i>	26
<b>5. Results.....</b>	<b>28</b>
5.1. <i>Putin’s Narrative</i>	28
5.2. <i>Zelenskyy’s Narrative</i>	35
5.3. <i>Distinguishing Between Narrative Genres</i>	42
<b>6. Concluding Discussion.....</b>	<b>48</b>
6.1. <i>Future Research</i>	50
<b>7. References.....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>8. Appendix.....</b>	<b>57</b>

## 1. Introduction

On February 24th, 2022, as the sun started to rise over the city of Kiev, the air was filled with tension and strong emotions. It was then that an estimated 150 000 Russian soldiers, accompanied by various types of artillery, took their steps towards Ukraine (D'Anieri, 2023: 1). Thereafter, the two leaders, Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelenskyy, stepped on the stage with their voices in front of their nations and the whole of Europe. What they were saying was not just a reflection of their personal interests but also a battle for the hearts and minds of their people. The conflict is being conducted on land, air, sea and in human minds. On the one hand it is referred to as a 'special military operation', while also being referred to as Russian invasion and a full-scale war against Ukraine, which has many people on the edge of their seats. At the time of writing, the conflict is still ongoing. Two very different narratives are emerging from each president. Two very different types of authority figures with two different stories are reaching out to their people and the world.

In this sense, presidential communication can be seen as a psychological weapon with the ability to influence people's thoughts and attitudes, as opposed to physical or cyber weapons (Lange-Ionatamishvili, Svetoka and Geers, 2015: 104). This is because language is seen as more than just communication but as narrative-driven strategic tool, where words are deliberately and carefully chosen (Sarfo and Krampa, 2013: 378-388; Lange-Ionatamishvili and Svetoka, 2015: 104). Furthermore, people's rational calculations can be overridden by appeals to emotion and sentimental considerations (Mölder, 2016: 89). In particular, the use of emotion has been found to be key to connecting with audiences and gaining public support (Seaton and Wu, 2021: 10). In this way, political discourse as a strategic means uses communication and its ways to influence how people think about issues and their role in them (Balogun et al., 2014: 2).

Thus, in its simplicity, communication can be adapted to serve individual interests, whether in the form of false legitimation or a truth-telling wake-up call. Narratives work to enchant and captivate us, they guide but also sanction our actions (Presser, 2018: 134). Discourse and narrative play a number of roles, including using it as a body of knowledge, revealing its role in power relations, unfolding it as a story, using it as a tool for sensemaking, exploring it as an act of conversation and conceiving it as a form of inductive reasoning (Balogun et al., 2014: 178). In essence, narrative acts as a powerful tool for bridging the gap between the speaker and

the audience. Whether it is effective in its way depends on the needs and desires of the audience, making certain narratives more compelling than others (Presser, 2018: 142). Consequently, it all comes down to framing the cultural aspects of society to make one's narrative effective (Stanley, 2015: 4). For this reason, both Russia and Ukraine rely on a strong presidential discourse to portray justification in order to defend their interests.

### **1.1. The Issue, Aim, and Research Questions**

Drawing on cultural criminology combined with narrative criminology, this thesis examines political narratives surrounding a conflict. It is central to cultural criminology to unravel the ways in which culture plays a part in shaping the meanings of deviance and how these differences prevail across cultures (Ferrell, 1999: 398). In this way, culture and its various forms such as language, symbols and narratives have a role in constructing understandings of life and deviance (Ferrell, 1999). Narrative criminology takes this further by identifying key cultural elements that, in the form of a story, work to promote and direct deviant behaviour (Sandberg et al., 2014: 6). It is a form of criminology that takes a closer look at the narrative in order to see what it is that is being told and in what way (Sandberg and Presser, 2015: 86). The use of a cultural and narrative criminology approach provides a tool for examining the ways in which conflicts are legitimised and sustained, and helps to understand the reasons by which culture operates.

Thus, in order to understand the ways in which harm and mass violence are normalised and justified during war times, it is necessary to examine the discursive forms of language to understand how it is talked about (Presser, 2018: 23). As a result, it is worth investigating and understanding influential discourses and how narratives within them are used to both influence and bring us closer together. An integral part of political discourse has always been the use of emotions (Loseke, 2009: 498). Emotions are powerful tools that tell people how to feel, which in turn can affect their rationality and decision-making. Thus, the influence of narratives can go as far as inviting large numbers of people to cooperate and take direct action, as well as encouraging commitment and support for war.

The aim of this paper is to examine the speeches used by Putin and Zelenskyy and to examine the narrative representation of the conflict in Ukraine in them. As opposing parties, Putin and Zelenskyy are expected to have contrasting content based on the goals of their addresses. Not

only in the way they portray threat, but also in the means and ways they construct their narrative. It is important to note that this paper is not concerned with the degree of factuality of Putin's and Zelenskyy's speeches. Instead, it focuses on the ways in which leaders reconstruct their messages to the public and the cultural logic behind them (Smith, 2005: 10). Thus, the competing narratives of the conflict that the opposing presidential leaders present to their respective publics are of great importance. Therefore, the research questions that this paper will focus on are as follows:

- What narratives do Putin and Zelenskyy draw upon when addressing the conflict in Ukraine?
- How are emotions and notions of threat mobilised in their speeches?

In order to answer these questions, the research of this work is conducted by acknowledging the cultural, emotional, and symbolic dimensions in their narratives through the use of narrative theory. Narrative theory seeks to explain the extent to which stories influence identity, meaning and social understanding in different cultural contexts (Sandberg et al., 2014: 6). After all, people are social beings who are creators of the culture around them, while at the same time culture is a creator of them. The material for this study consists of transcripts of the presidential speeches given by the two leaders over a period of one year. Specifically, these are examined through the framework of Philip Smith (2005), who explored the role of narratives in constructing the legitimacy of war in the Iraq War, the Gulf War and the Suez Crisis. In fact, the power of narrative acts as an explanatory tool, but at the same time it has the capacity to facilitate harm (Presser, 2018: 134). Emotion and threat-driven narratives thus play a significant role in shaping our perceptions, reactions and engagement with complex issues such as conflict and war. The key lies in how one uses their voices to achieve the desired outcomes.

Based on the above, the structure of the paper will begin by presenting the background to the conflict and considering the role of presidential discourse in our society. The paper will then present existing research on presidential speeches, which mainly focuses on different aspects of discourse such as unity, power and emotion. It also considers the ways in which Putin and Zelenskyy engage in presidential discourse. This is followed by a theoretical discussion of the frameworks used, which consist of various elements of narrative theory. This will include scholars known for their contributions to narrative and cultural criminology, such as Lois Presser, Philip Smith and Donileen Loseke. It will provide insight into why it is crucial not to



dismiss the surrounding arguments for and against legitimising war (Smith, 2005: 10). This is followed by an account of the methodological choices made in the process of data collection and analysis. The methodology chapter concludes with ethical considerations, including personal reflexivity in relation to the thesis and the limitations of the work. This is followed by an analysis and, finally, by a concluding discussion, which will also provide insights for future research.

## **1.2. Background to the Conflict**

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there have been many scholarly discussions about Russia's motives for its actions against Ukraine (Masters, 2022: 8; D'Anieri, 2023: 3). Firstly, Russia was set to retain its status as a great power and domination in its surroundings (D'Anieri, 2023: 3). Secondly, many people in Russia still consider Ukraine to be part of Russia, as the roots of modern Russians are alleged to have originated in medieval Kiev (D'Anieri, 2019: 10-11). In this sense, it is seen that Ukraine and its people had an effect on the Russian culture (D'Anieri, 2019: 11). Therefore, in a way the fact that Ukraine is not part of the Russian Empire makes it feel incomplete, as if something important has been lost (ibid). As a result, from the Russian perspective, the goal of the special military operation that Russia has launched is to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine in order to protect the ethnic Russian population (Tabachnik, 2020: 307).

On the other hand, having gained its independence from the Soviet Union, Ukraine is determined to preserve its freedom (D'Anieri, 2023: 3). Ukraine has shown an interest in deepening its relations with important actors such as the European Union and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation), which has led Russia to become even more wary of Ukraine (Bebier, 2015: 49; Mykhnenko, 2020: 529). Not only has Ukraine's independence affected Russia's national identity and territoriality, but the various cultural and political differences in Ukraine have also created tensions in the country (Tabachnik, 2020: 303). Taken together, the Russian-Ukrainian war has been an ongoing conflict before the year 2022. In 2014, Russia annexed the Crimea region of Ukraine, which had a significant Russian-speaking population. Alongside the armed conflicts, in areas such as Crimea, the local population was subjected to one-sided information controlled by the Russian state (Bebier, 2015: 42; Tabachnik, 2020: 303). This was soon followed by the Donbass conflict, involving the eastern regions of Donetsk and

Luhansk, where pro-Russian separatists fought Ukrainian forces to declare independence with support from Russia (Bebier, 2015: 47).

In this vein, previous conflicts and wars work to inspire or justify upcoming conflicts (Bebier, 2015: 47). The current conflict is seen as a continuation of the tensions between the two countries sparked by these earlier conflicts (Mykhnenko, 2020). As a result, both countries seek to defend the status quo based on their own interests and perspectives, which seem to clash and cause people to blame one another. While some place the blame solely to Russia, others portray the West and Ukraine as having cornered Russia until it was forced to take action (D'Anieri, 2019: 4).

### **1.3. The Role of Legitimate Authority in Presidential Discourse**

As the focus of this study is on presidential speeches as part of presidential discourse, it is important to illustrate the role they play in society. Discourse includes a wide range of communication, including not only official speeches but also everyday interactions. Therefore, presidential speeches are a form of discourse, and within these speeches, narratives can be used to effectively convey messages to the audience. Simply put, discourse, which is extended verbal expression, serves as a means of storytelling. It is a fundamental feature of politics, especially in the times of crisis. In particular, given that we live in an age where social media is at the heart of our lives, people are increasingly connected to the crises and the debates that surround them (Lange-Ionatamishvili and Svetoka, 2015: 104). In these times, the public needs a legitimate authority that executes both power and a sense of unity among the nation. In most cases, a political leader, such as the president, takes up this role of legitimate authority. In order to influence the subjectivity of his audience, the legitimate authority must have credibility and legitimacy from the public (Balogun et al., 2014: 192).

In times of war, the nation must be prepared for the action of war, so a legitimate authority plays a central role in preparing the minds of the people for war. However, for one to engage in war in modern times, it must be morally justified through narratives. War is never without casualties, and its effects extend far beyond the borders of the nations in conflict. In this respect, war should be seen as a last resort to achieve a better outcome (Guthrie and Quinlan, 2007: 14). Moral justification relies heavily on the existence of a valid reason that is exercised by a legitimate authority (Regan, 2013: 4). Therefore, the legitimate authority is what society relies

on to ensure that the decision to go to war must be in the best interests of the nation (Regan, 2013: 20). It is argued that the just cause in modern times is the defence of one's nation, whether that is in the form of self-defence or the defence of others (Regan, 2013: 48-54).

In essence, narrative challenges our norms regarding the use of violence. Similar to Sykes and Matza's (1957) techniques for neutralising delinquent behaviour, our norms regarding the use of violence are influenced. To avoid being held accountable for our own or our nation's actions, we overlook or rationalise them (Sykes and Matza, 1957: 666). However, the judgement is not so black and white, as it still relies on balancing the harm in terms of loss of life, damage and disruption with future estimates (Guthrie and Quinlan, 2007: 21). Given that people tend to listen to those in positions of power (Presser, 2018: 7), this allows legitimate authorities to construct the objectivity and legitimacy of war through narratives in their discourse (Loseke, 2009: 498).

## 2. Literature Review

In order to contextualise and better understand the research question at hand, the following chapter will address and review the existing literature on political discourse. First, an overview of political discourse is discussed. It then presents other understandings of what is central to presidential communication and what function it plays as part of our society. Finally, the discursive elements of both Putin and Zelenskyy are discussed.

### 2.1. The Dynamics of Political Discourse

According to one of the founding figures of modern sociology, Max Weber (1968: 25), the definition of power in the context of political discourse refers to political domination that is utilised to lead one nation into conflict against another. This is to say that language alone is not powerful, but when used by certain people, it has a powerful influence (Kazemian and Hashemi, 2014: 1178). As an example, the research on Trump and his rhetoric has found that his popularity as a leader was attributed to his use of simple and direct language (Jordan et al., 2019: 3476) that calls up compelling stories (Polletta and Callahan, 2017: 8). This charismatic leadership is achieved through persuasive power, a politics of reassurance, and skilful utilization of narratives that appeal to the emotions of the public in order to generate public support (Homolar and Scholz, 2019: 3). Thus, it is argued that the power to persuade others is based on one's status, rank and privileged access to the public or media (Oddo, 2011: 289). Along with the expressions of confidence, which have been associated with even higher impression of power in leaders (Jordan et al., 2019: 3477).

Essentially, power is used and reproduced through discourse (Balogun et al., 2014: 17). This is to say that politicians are seen to exert power through the use of their voices (Kazemian and Hashemi, 2014: 1178). Political discourse is used to reflect and shape reality of the world and how we understand it (Sarfo and Krampa, 2013: 378). Persuasion or manipulation can be observed in a discourse where information is falsified or withheld in order to convince the public of certain beliefs (Oddo, 2011: 289). This is particularly necessary in the context of war, where there must be valid justifications and acceptable motives for the waging of war (Guthrie and Quinlan, 2007: 13). More specifically, this power is referred to as 'soft power' because it has the ability to influence people to act in a desired manner through the use of narratives and, more importantly, without the use of 'hard' power (ibid). In this sense, the term 'hard power' refers to the use of military or economic force (Oddo, 2011: 310). As an example, a recent study

by Seaton and Wu (2021) found that Bush's speeches contained repeated emotional appeals to convince people that military action is the only way forward. In this way, by referring to future prospects and potential difficulties, such as defeat in war, leaders justify the use of violent measures by referring to them as the only way to prevent harm (Oddo, 2011: 302). Essentially, legitimising discourse provides an answer to the question 'why' – 'why should we do this and in this way in particular?' (Oddo, 2011: 289). When the public is pleased with the rationale because they understand it and can relate to it, they are more inclined to support and advance the leader's agenda.

## **2.2. Inspiration and Mobilisation**

Political leaders tend to incorporate high emotional content into their discourse for several reasons. It has been shown to be of considerable importance in the stimulation of support and collective mobilisation around a shared moral purpose (Clément, Sangar and Lindemann, 2018: 182; Ojala, Kaasik-Krogerus and Pantti, 2019: 4). Essentially, the effective use of emotions works to form and affect public opinion and behaviour as these are culturally constructed and acted upon (Koschut, 2017: 485; Lynggaard, 2019: 1205). For example, climate change can be an emotive issue for environmentalists, who unite and take collective action based on the common principle of protecting and preserving the natural world. Although reasoning is often used to make decisions and form opinions, research suggests that emotions there is a connection between emotions and reasoning (Lynggaard, 2019: 1208). This means that emotions can guide and shape cognitive processes and have an impact on the way information is perceived and interpreted.

Clément, Sangar and Lindemann (2018: 180) argue that it is not just emotions that work to shape public opinion, but the whole production of the narrative that works to legitimise the use of harm as the most viable option. Furthermore, the narrative, which includes the identification of suffering and innocent victims as well as an illegitimate aggressor, has been found to be a way for the public to overcome resistance to the use of force (Clément, Sangar and Lindemann, 2018: 182). In particular, discourse that encourages negative emotions has been found to garner more public support and shape opinions than positive emotions (Seaton and Wu, 2021: 10). This may be due to the fact that non-negative language does not allow for the narrative construction of a dramatised evil enemy (Seaton and Wu, 2021: 11).

### **2.3. National Identity and Unity**

As mentioned, presidential speeches play a critical role in the times of crises. Especially, when nation is being attacked it is waiting for someone to take the lead and show guidance. In this dreadful moment, president is the person who can bring people together and provide reassurance (Homolar and Scholz, 2019: 346). A narrative that promotes national identity through remembrance and respect for shared history and achievements can serve as a way to inspire not only cultural identities but also feelings of national pride (Laine, 2020: 534). Consequently, it provides the need to defend or to fight for their nation (Laine, 2020: 539). In this sense, the role of nationalism is awakened when a nation perceives a threat from another nation (Jaworsky and Qiaoan, 2021: 300). This serves to strengthen cultural identity and fosters unity against the perceived external threat. When nationalism is aroused, it works to promote national identity while creating a sense of hatred towards the other group (Loseke, 2009: 510).

A sense of belonging, which is done by drawing a clear line between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ helps to strengthen the public’s collective identity, and is crucial when preparing the nation for warfare (Koschut et al., 2017: 484; Polletta and Callahan, 2017: 10; Ojala, Kaasik-Krogerus and Pantti, 2019: 14). This distinction also contributes to the creation of power imbalances between groups (Sarfo and Krampa, 2013: 388). Within this binary posturing tactic of othering, there is positivity associated with ‘our side’ through, for example, glorification, whereas negativity is associated with ‘them’ in order to demonise the others (Oddo, 2011: 289; Homolar and Scholz, 2019: 351; Ojala, Kaasik-Krogerus and Pantti, 2019: 4). This is accomplished by employing highly moralising names and attributes (Oddo, 2011: 296; Koschut, 2017: 286). As an example, Oddo (2011: 296) found that words used in combination with ‘us’ were valued qualities such as ‘peace’ or ‘strength/strong’, while ‘them’ was characterised in combination with words such as ‘terror’ or ‘destruction’.

### **2.4. Vladimir Putin’s Discourse**

Since Vladimir Putin became president of Russia, he has been an influential public speaker. His unique background of service in the KGB (Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti; in English State Security Committee) and a black belt in judo, builds on the narrative that he is seen as “competent, straight-talking, tough, individual, who acts decisively to strengthen Russia” (Wilson, 2021: 80). As a political speaker with a wide audience, he uses emotions and expressions, often using both direct and indirect meanings, which allows him to deliver his

message more effectively and efficiently (Sedykh et al., 2020: 455-462). Combined with the perception of a strong leader, the public is keen to support him (Wilson, 2021: 81). It has been demonstrated that Putin's narratives emphasise the importance of Russia's exceptionalism, its historical and cultural relationships, and its resistance to Western dominance (Roberts, 2017: 55).

Aspects of Russian history and what it means for the country are often mentioned, because Russian history is a source of national pride in Putin's speeches (Laine, 2020: 534). A major turning point in Russian history was the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, which not only diminished the country's power but also sparked a resurgence of nationalism and its maximisation (Mölder, 2016: 105). For this reason, Putin's narratives generally aim to establish Russia as a great power (Mölder, 2016: 104). As Roberts (2017: 40) depicts it:

"Putin's efforts to restore Russian exceptionalism seem less about expanding Russian state power into foreign lands (as in the Soviet era) and more about restoring Russian leadership among ethnic Russians, many of whom have been separated from the motherland".

In his narrative construction of Russia as a moral nation, he commonly distinguishes between the internal and external groups, dividing them into 'us' and 'them' with the aim of dividing not only Russia but the whole world (Laine, 2020: 539). A recurring theme in his narrative, therefore, is the threat to Russia's security, particularly from the West (Mölder, 2016: 90). Especially after the East-West rivalry of the Cold War, this pressure from the West and NATO promotes a Russian exceptionalism in which Putin claims a cultural right to lead Russia without being influenced by Western values (Roberts, 2017: 43). This means that Putin's discourse is driven by emotional and historical ties to the West and Russian national pride (Tsygankov, 2014: 346).

## **2.5. Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Discourse**

In contrast, Ukraine's young president has a background in acting and comedy and no previous political experience prior to his candidacy (Marchenko, 2022: 102-104). Despite the fact that he is an unconventional leader with a short, neat beard who wears a green army T-shirt in his speeches (Kostusiak et al., 2022: 212), the public has described him as smart and clever (Marchenko, 2022: 104). His communication style has been found to be very brief but sociable,

with efforts to defend the country, convey patriotism, unity, and resilience among the Ukrainian people, and preserve the country's independence and integrity (Kostusiak et al., 2022: 213). As such, comparable to influential speaker Trump (Jordan et al., 2019: 3476), Zelenskyy employs concise, simple and clear sentences (Kostusiak et al., 2022: 210). According to Kostusiak et al., (2022: 209), Zelenskyy's discourse follows the main laws of rhetoric, which contribute to the discourse's effectiveness and impact. The main laws consider the discourse as a gradual process, with details focusing on the key points at the beginning and end, while connecting with the audience (ibid). It consists of persuasive arguments and emotional impact, and it aims to have a strategic impact in order to achieve the discourse's objectives (ibid). Combined with his background of extensive stage experience and his ability to read an audience, this allows him to improvise and deliver emotional speeches to the public (Lytvyn in Kostusiak et al., 2022: 211). Whether it is to appeal to emotions, demand support or ensure a decent defence (Kostusiak et al., 2022: 209).

In addition, Zelenskyy has a tendency to speak in a positive way (Kostusiak et al., 2022: 209; Petrovych and Oleksiivna, 2022: 197). This allows him to express gratitude while appealing for support and cooperation from the local and international public (Petrovych and Oleksiivna, 2022: 197; Maia Polo, Saxena and Alexopoulos, 2023: 9). However, this positivity is neutralised and balanced by talking about Russia's wrongdoings against Ukraine (Kostusiak et al., 2022: 211; Maia Polo, Saxena and Alexopoulos, 2023: 9). By using the 'we'-discourse, Zelenskyy creates a connection with the people with the emphasis on unity and solidarity by highlighting shared struggles (Kostusiak et al., 2022: 211; Petrovych and Oleksiivna, 2022: 199). This allows him to identify himself among the people (Petrovych and Oleksiivna, 2022: 198).



### **3. Theoretical Framework**

This paper seeks to explore the complex narrative aspects that underpin presidential speeches. These speeches have the power to capture and engage a wide audience, an entire nation, using emotions and notions of threat to create a powerful impact. With this in mind, this paper aims to use narrative theory as an analytical tool to unravel the different ways in which presidential discourse strategically uses different aspects of these. Narrative theory will help to show how these discourses are more than speeches, but compelling stories that, in their own way, can resonate with and mobilise audiences. Using various aspects of narrative theory such as the underdog narrative, emotional appeals and genre-based narrative construction, this theoretical framework will highlight how discourses are cultural products. Scholars, such as Lois Presser (2018), Donileen Loseke (2009) and Philip Smith (2005) are central to the narrative theory that is presented in this paper. Taken together, this will allow us to gain a deeper understanding of the storytelling in presidential discourse that is used as sensemaking to reach and connect with their audiences.

This chapter first introduces narrative theory and its key components which work to make narrative interactive. It then introduces a variety of narrative genres that allow for the study of narrative in the context of war. Finally, an example of a narrative type is presented to illustrate how these elements and narrative genres work together to create compelling stories that evoke emotion and action.

#### **3.1. Narrative Theory**

Stories and storytelling are what makes us human and distinct from other species. The act of storytelling is deeply ingrained in our cultural practices. We engage in storytelling from a young age and continue to do so throughout our lives in various forms such as hearing bedtimes stories, retelling old tales, and consuming historical and fictional narratives (Loseke, 2012: 252). Narrative is therefore considered a crucial element of cultural expression and social communication. The stories we hear and tell are interconnected. Stories leave traces in our minds, cultural resources such as the emotions they evoke, which are drawn upon when telling a story from previously heard stories (Presser, 2018: 4-5). In this way, they serve to guide us in how we begin to perceive and interpret reality. Essentially, the purpose of narratives is to serve as an extended invitation to relate to the narrator's discourse (Presser, 2018: 81). They serve as a tool to shed light on the narrated events and their potential underlying reasons (Presser, 2009:

177). In this sense, narrative has a temporal dimension because while they present an understanding of the past, they also communicate about the future (Presser, 2018: 137). This means that they help us to make sense of past and future events. Importantly, they serve not only as record of past events, but also as a means of comprehension (Presser, 2018: 71). However, narratives and meanings are shaped by culture as much as they create culture (Kusenbach and Loseke, 2013: 22). This being said, culture is fragmented into social, political, economic, and religious differences, which is why culture alone does not function as a defining factor of subjectivity (Loseke, 2009: 501).

### **3.1.1. The Building Blocks of Narrative**

In her work, Presser (2018: 60) highlights how narrative is tightly connected to human experience, and thus the creation of harm relies not only on legitimation, but also on arousing passion for action. Yet it is not just any kind of persuasive rhetoric that can arouse the passion for action to do harm. The effectiveness of rhetoric is largely based on its logic and emotion (Kusenbach and Loseke, 2013: 21). Logic relies on socially circulated narratives and cultural systems of meaning, which in turn are frameworks of thought and emotion based on socially circulated symbolic and emotion codes (Loseke, 2012: 262; Kusenbach and Loseke, 2013: 23). These codes are used by the storyteller to appeal to the audience, while the audience uses them to comprehend the story. Symbolic codes are cultural coherence systems, ways of thinking about how the world works or how it should work, while emotion codes are “rules of feeling” that one is expected to feel (Loseke, 2009: 498). They are based on beliefs and transmitted through language, which makes them cultural products (Kusenbach and Loseke, 2013: 23). To put it another way, emotions are not just individual experiences in our lives but are largely shaped by the environment and cultural context in which they exist. Loseke (2009: 500) underlines that “the experience of emotion requires cognitive appraisals and cognitive appraisals require language”. Given this, society would essentially not know what to feel if emotion codes rooted in larger systems of meaning were not communicated through narrative (Kusenbach and Loseke, 2013: 35). The success of the narrative lies in its clear communication and the use of codes that allow the audience to identify the moments that call for celebration or sadness. This is reinforced by the use of a narrative structure familiar to the audience, which helps to make the stories easier to understand. In addition, Kusenbach and Loseke (2013: 25) argue that the use of systems of meanings in narratives builds on the credibility and meaningfulness of the narrative.

However, it is always up to the narrator to use, modify or omit these systems of meaning according to the audience for whom they are intended (Kusenbach and Loseke, 2013: 27). Essentially, their purpose is to act as a shortcut to cognitive and emotional evaluations of ourselves and the social world around us (Kusenbach and Loseke, 2013: 25). This means that a narrative that uses familiar plots, characters and moral values allows the audience to begin to identify and predict the future, so the narrative acts as a guiding force for the audience (Loseke, 2012: 254). To illustrate this, consider the story of Rocky Balboa or Oprah Winfrey, both of whom came from disadvantaged backgrounds but overcame them through hard work, talent or luck. The stories work to captivate and inspire audiences with tales of resilience, ambition and the triumph of the human spirit, inspiring us to strive for greatness no matter our background.

That being said, the sharing of the same codes varies greatly within a culture, from universally shared codes to small subcultural codes (Kusenbach and Loseke, 2013: 27). While some codes are widely agreed, there are diverse and controversial codes with sometimes circulating ideas that can lead to confusion, so understanding varies greatly (Loseke, 2009: 500). An example of these differing codes is the concept of God, which is understood differently according to one's religious beliefs. Therefore, codes can compete in terms of what they are and how they encourage people to feel (Kusenbach and Loseke, 2013: 27). In this way, presidential discourse tends to know how to use the right narrative features to encourage its nation to think and feel in the desired way (Loseke, 2009: 498). For this reason, politicians and their communication are known to be understandable with the compliments of emotions, thus making them appealing and interesting to large audiences (Loseke, 2012: 253). In particular, the use of emotions in discourse opens up a wider domain of access to power and violence (Loseke, 2009: 516).

### **3.2. Narrative Approach to War**

In his book “Why War?: The Cultural Logic of Iraq, the Gulf War and Suez”, Smith (2005) takes a closer look at understanding the role of culture and deliberate democracy. Despite the fact that the book was published 18 years ago, it retains its relevance and applicability to today's circumstances. Smith (2005: 2) emphasises that “war is not just about culture, but it is all about culture”, suggesting that culture is one of the many factors at the heart of war. Culture plays its part in how war is perceived and reasoned by people. Thus, it is important for leaders to lay the cultural foundations for war in order to persuade the public along, especially before action is

taken (Smith, 2005: 7). As previously mentioned, the symbolic and emotion codes are used to define the actors in times of crisis or war. Fundamentally, the storytelling nature of narratives is the key for justifying war actions. For example, one way in which harm is legitimised is through the negotiation of meaningful conflict in the context of the future (Presser, 2013: 40), as well as through the use of cultural frames of 'right' and 'wrong' (Smith, 2005: 4). In this sense, storytelling can be strategic and effective because it is manipulated and it can manipulate the direct agents and bystanders (see also Presser, 2018: 24). Social actions are linked to narratives, and it is through narratives that people perceive and make sense of the world (Smith, 2005: 12).

### 3.2.1. Narrative Construction

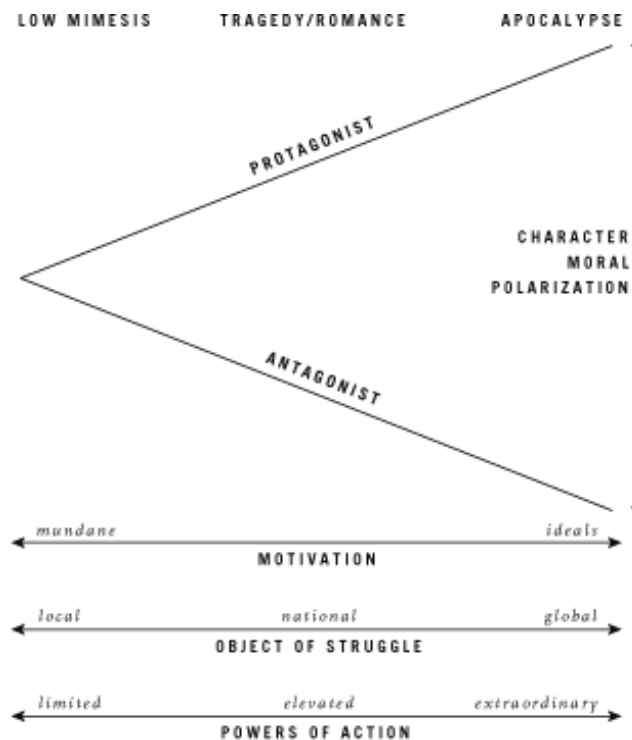
Narratives are dynamic agencies that set out integrated common sense of action while providing explanation and moralisation (Presser, 2018: 57). Given that Putin and Zelenskyy hold opposing views on the conflict, it is essential for each leader to get their message across to the public. However, the mere presentation of a narrative may not be enough, but the construction of the narrative is what is important. As Presser (2018: 50) notes “narrative creativity allows the narrator to broaden the appeal of his discursive project.” Subsequently, it is emphasised that narratives cannot just exist in any form, but need to have defined characteristics (Smith, 2005: 23). Whether a narrative is accepted and has an impact depends on how its structure is constructed (Presser, 2018: 7). In particular, Presser (2018: 51) considers a narrative to be superior when it implements elements such as temporality, causality that explains cause-and-effect relationships, action that drives the narrative, conflict as a central challenge, transformation that shows character development, meaning that conveys significance, and situatedness that sets the context of the narrative.

Furthermore, Smith (2005: 23) proposes in his book the examination of the following characteristics to aid in the construction of narrative genres:

(...) protagonists and antagonists in terms of their relative polarization and potential for moral transformation; powers of action in terms of their world-ordering potential; patterns of motivation as mundane or extraordinary; and objects of struggle as trivial or world-historical.

These can be seen in Figure 1, where their intensity is pictured to vary depending on the narrative genre and will be explored in more detail in the next subchapter. Simply put, the

narrative is based on the characters and their portrayed values as well as on their goals or objectives. The more a narrative structure refers to a previously familiar structure, the more it is internalised through the emotions associated with them (Presser, 2018: 135). Which is why, the symbolic and emotion codes surrounding the characters are used to structure the narrative (Kusenbach and Loseke, 2013: 26).



**Figure 1:** Smith's Structural Model of Genre (Smith, 2005: 23)

Narrative structures allow actors and events to be placed in plots. This enables the expression of responsibility, actors and their motivations, the past, and the anticipation of the future (Smith, 2005: 12). Accordingly, through storytelling, the narrative structures use cultural constructs to publicly identify the enemy and the hero (Smith, 2005: 209). In this way, the codes in the stories tell us that the good guys are not to be attacked. Threats can be downplayed, exaggerated, or countered through narrative inflation or deflation, and this is largely based on narrative genres. When opposing parties attempt to promote their own narratives through a pervasive and influential interpretive genre, it becomes a fight between the narratives (Smith, 2005: 19).

Yet, Presser (2018: 137) points out that:

“Some narratives are more impactful than others because they instate the moral oppositions and make the identity statements that we favour or at least accept, such as concerning our position vis-à-vis others.”

This is to say that, when narrative aligns with audience's values, beliefs, and sense of right and wrong they are more likely to accept them. Thus, it is the symbolic codes and socially circulating narratives that construct the basis of our thinking (Kusenbach and Loseke, 2013: 25). In a way, narratives create moral codes that we believe in and live by in our everyday lives. It is therefore through their use that future actions can be proposed, justified, and socially accepted (Smith, 2005: 12). However, narratives alone do not define violent action, but rather allow the public to identify the threat and assess the costs and benefits of proposed violent action. For example, war is most often described in stories where overcoming the threat is a necessary means to survival (Presser, 2018: 21). The events are situated within a wider narrative, telling what they mean and the wider implications they have (Smith, 2005: 19).

### **3.3. Genres of Narratives**

As mentioned above, all these codes work to construct the narrative and thus make sense of the world around us. The way the story is told, based on a genre, shapes the understanding and interpretation of the conflict or war. This is because in one narrative genre certain facts are considered relevant and significant, whereas in another genre their significance may be downplayed or minimised (Smith, 2005: 29). Yet, it is through the use of symbolic and emotion codes and narrative genres that narratives work to justify and legitimise violent actions. Therefore, in order to gain insight into the different cultural underpinnings of the conflict, whether in Ukraine or Russia, it is necessary to analyse the use of these narrative genres. Smith (2005) presents four different genres of narrative through which he analysed different conflicts and which will be discussed in the next section. In describing the different nature of each genre, the aspects from Figure 1 (p. 16) are central.

#### **3.3.1. Low Mimesis**

Flat, dry everyday politics are an example of narrative of low mimesis according to Smith (2005: 24). The characters have low moral values and are like any other human being. In other words, characters do not evolve over time, especially if the plot lacks important characters. There is more attention to detail, but the motives are more mundane, which means that it reflects on themes such as routines, procedures and prices (Smith, 2005: 25). The narrative is more realistic compared to other genres because the object of the struggle is on a smaller side. The portrayal of life is uneventful, and the actors are reliable in their practical actions. This is not an adequate justification or concern for military action, as the situation is not considered

alarming but manageable. Therefore, the powers of action are limited for instance to the imposition of regulations or sanctions. The lack of dramaturgical structure does not mean that low mimesis narratives are only passive and descriptive, they can also be very forceful (Presser, 2012: 150).

### **3.3.2. Tragedy**

The narrative category of tragedy has more emotional images than the low mimesis category. It has clearer and more dramatic descending plot development, where things are depicted as going horribly wrong (Smith, 2005: 25). There is a motivation to fight, but also a pathos (quality of pity or sadness) about what the characters are fighting for. Commonly, tragedy employs a presence of innocent characters such as the victim/s, who have suffered or are to suffer (Smith, 2005: 25). The symbolic and emotion codes surrounding victim characters often call for sympathy or sadness (Kusenbach and Loseke, 2013: 25). These emotion codes, in turn, evoke people's desire to help them because they seem to need help (Kusenbach and Loseke, 2013: 26). The character is seen as weak and not responsible for the experienced harm (Loseke, 2009: 503). Thus, this narrative category calls for strong emotions such as moral empathy, pity and fear (Smith, 2005: 25). Tragedy is fundamentally based on the idea that the outcome is predetermined as fate, and ultimately leads to a hopeless struggle that results in suffering and failure despite all efforts (Smith, 2005: 25). Such as the disintegration of society, the crumbling of the people and the transition from the community to the loneliness and division. Following this, the genre does not perpetrate war actions, does not invite or encourage action, but rather takes a passive perspective that accepts the situations as a destiny for which nothing can be done.

### **3.3.3. Romantic**

Having said that, the romantic narrative category focuses on the hero's triumph over the challenges and difficulties (Smith, 2005: 26). Looking from a more optimistic perspective, this is a more simplified and idealised genre. The character moral polarisation can be found as there is a split of heroes and villains. As Presser (2013: 19) puts it “the greater the social distance between parties, the greater likelihood of harm.” Yet, in this genre the distance is not drastic enough to give up actions as the villain has a chance of doing good. The character of the hero is associated with symbolic codes such as pride, patriotism, perfection and the conquest of evil (Loseke, 2009: 511). Consequently, the symbolic code of pride asks for feelings of happiness

and joy, and patriotism for love (Loseke, 2009: 515). The polar opposite of the hero is the villain that symbolises hate, fear, anger, nationalism and intent of creating harm without feeling remorse (Loseke, 2009: 500, 506). The underlying message is to keep fighting for reaching relief or peace. The focus is on proactive themes that promote social development and unity towards a better world, and it is believed that action can be taken to achieve it (Smith, 2005: 26). Because of this, the romantic narrative genre is a powerful tool for generating collective action, asking for support, and creating a sense of unity (Smith, 2005: 26). However, the narrative can be unstable because there are ups and downs in the plot, but overall, it has feel-good elements (Smith, 2005: 26). That being said, in the context of war it can be found problematic on occasions as it assumes that crises can be resolved without leading to large-scale and systematic violence.

#### **3.3.4. Apocalyptic**

Lastly, the most powerful narrative to legitimise and justify violent actions is the apocalyptic narrative genre (Smith, 2005: 27). It depicts a catastrophic future in which the last and only resort is violent actions to destroy the enemy. The characters' moral polarisation is at the greatest. In doing so, the use of binary oppositions clearly states that one is good and the opposite is bad (Loseke, 2009: 507). In this sense, the opposite of a villain can be therefore either a victim or a hero (Loseke, 2009: 511). The use of binary codes in storytelling helps us understand the world better, but it is the narrative as a whole that tells us what to do next (Smith, 2005: 11). In apocalyptic, the evil will never attain trust, and it cannot be reasoned into being better. Because of this the motivation and powers of action are at the highest as there is no holding back. This means that when absolute evil is confronted in the world, there is no need for negotiation to maintain the balance of power, but all means are accepted to destroy the evil (Smith, 2005: 27). The villain's symbolic and emotion codes evoke the public's desire to punish the bad (Kusenbach and Loseke, 2013: 26). As Smith (2005: 27) puts it:

“When radical evil is afoot in the world there can be no compromise, no negotiated solution, no prudent efforts to effect sanctions or to maintain a balance of power”.

In turn, this allows the breaking of cultural constraints that may be associated with the use of violence and, in a way, supports the deprivation of priceless human lives (Smith, 2005: 27). Notably, central to the genre, and in order to keep the narrative intact, is the moral polarisation



between villain and victim or hero. Because, if the gap between them starts to look less apocalyptic, the narrative, the actors and their motivations will be re-examined and may have to be negotiated away from the apocalyptic to something more mundane (Smith, 2005: 27). Simply put, as long as there is a dramatic struggle between good and evil, the apocalyptic narrative genre works to feed into the audience's emotional responses of urgency and crisis.

### **3.4. Underdog Narrative**

Thus, dramatic narratives, in particular, inspire people to take immediate action. These narratives appear essential and almost inevitable to the audience because of the significant and unexpected changes in the plot (Presser, 2018: 88). The narrative creates a 'palpable excitement' that leads us to overlook or neutralise the promotion of violence (Presser, 2018: 86). In the vein of this, Presser (2018) offers an alternative type of narrative, an underdog narrative, which in turn evokes a different kind of emotion. An underdog story is surrounded by the character of someone who is seen as disadvantaged, or who has less chance of success than others in the story (Presser, 2018: 86, 88). As a result, it evokes different kind of emotions such as sympathy and support.

The narrative is built around a struggle or crisis caused by uncontrollable circumstances (Presser, 2018: 88-89). Whether or not the conflict in the narrative has taken place or is over is not important, as the focus is on the persistent and committed struggle for it (Presser, 2018: 89). Every aspect of the narrative works to signal to the audience about the characteristics of the underdog. These are the heroic traits of courage, success, perfection and the conquest of evil (Loseke, 2009: 511). Most importantly, it signals being loyal to the fight for justice (Presser, 2018: 96). The disadvantage of the underdog is a significant lack of material resources compared to the opponent (Presser, 2018: 90). Resulting in the protagonist appearing weak, outnumbered, and inadequate. This creates a power imbalance between the characters but does not stop the protagonist from moving forward. All the negativity is seen to belong to the opponent who has caused the conflict in the narrative (Presser, 2018: 95). The protagonist and the antagonist are the binary opposites of each other, with one representing the evil and the other embodying admired values (Loseke, 2009: 511). Consequently, the binary opposition brings out negative feelings toward the antagonist. These negative feelings that belong to the opposition not only create the image of heroism for the protagonist but are also the ones that keep the audience engaged in the narrative (Presser, 2018: 94-95).

Yet, the main message of the story is not about physical strength or resourcefulness, but about the importance of the protagonist's moral resources (Presser, 2018: 92). In essence, the underdog story and character convey how defying the odds can be worthwhile. The emotion codes of help, anger and realisation, all central to the underdog narrative, are therefore included in suffering and sympathy of the underdog (Loseke, 2009: 518). The dramatic underdog narrative is effective in inspiring audience to take action together while building collective identity and solidarity (Presser, 2018: 97). As Presser (2018: 91) puts it:

“The story tells us that we ought not hesitate to act – we ought not doubt the moment or our abilities: all will be well.”

Thus, the story of the underdog is a good example of how a story can be constructed in a variety of ways, while involving and drawing on cultural understandings (Presser, 2018: 88). It works as much as a narrative can to explore what is moral values and distinction between right and wrong (Smith, 2005: 18). Consequently, it works to cultivate emotions that have the potential to legitimise harm in certain circumstances (Presser, 2018: 102).

## 4. Methodology

This chapter provides insight into the methodological choices made for this paper, as well as describing the research process. The study is a comparative qualitative content analysis of the presidential speeches of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. It was considered important to select the leaders of the countries involved, as an analysis of their speeches can shed light on how they comprehend their self-perception and power (Koschut et al., 2017: 493). This in turn influences the construction of their narratives. The study uses the case study method to provide an in-depth understanding of a specific case, in this instance the conflict between the two leaders. It begins with a description of the steps taken in relation to the data of this study, followed by the coding process. The decisions made before and during the analysis process are also described. At the same time, it identifies patterns and themes that might otherwise be overlooked in broader studies. Following this, ethical considerations and self-reflection related to social positionality are discussed. The chapter concludes with some of the limitations of the study.

### 4.1. Data

The invasion of Ukraine took place on 24 February 2022. The data collected for this study includes a total of 95 presidential speeches delivered between 21 February 2022 and 24 February 2023. Of these, 15 speeches were delivered by the President of Russia and the remaining 80 speeches were delivered by the President of Ukraine. The transcripts of the speeches of the President of Ukraine were available in Ukrainian, Russian and English, while the transcripts of the President of Russia were only available in Russian and English. At the time of the study, these were publicly available on the websites of both presidents. For the purposes of this study, only the English transcripts of both presidents were used as the primary data source for analysis.

The rationale for focusing on presidential speeches on the conflict was important because of their function in offering insight into micro and macro perspectives. It provides an opportunity to examine the conflict through the lens of the president's point of view, while also providing insight into the broader intended message to the public. As Koschut et al. (2017) note:

“(...) because the interaction of states inevitably takes place in a discursive and emotional environment that frames how an individual and collectives perceive and experience the world and therefore also how they act in it.”

Narratives are ultimately interdiscursive, as they not only draw from other narratives but also contribute to them thereby forming a network of interconnected narratives (Presser, 2018: 144). Thus, this perspective offers a distinctive way of capturing not only the interplay between the president's narrative and that of the public, but also the complex dynamic between the two presidents' narratives.

#### **4.1.1. Data selection**

The initial selection of speeches was based on the dates they were given, with a particular focus on those that fell within the timeline of the invasion (Clément, Sangar and Lindemann, 2018: 194). The decision to select speeches prior to the invasion was based on the presumption that there might be some encouraging and preparatory communications prior to the invasion, particularly from Putin. As a result, the timeframe was narrowed to begin on that date and end one year after the invasion. The difference in the number of speeches analysed between Putin and Zelenskyy is due to the length of their speeches. Putin's speeches were fewer but longer, while Zelenskyy's speeches were shorter and more frequent, with an average length of around seven minutes. Therefore, the selection process for Zelenskyy's speeches was one speech per week for the entire period. With the exception of the first week of the invasion, where one speech per day was used for analysis. If there was no speech on the chosen day, the next day was chosen. In particular, if there were multiple speeches on a given day, both were selected. This is because the first months of the conflict were considered as the most importance. Putin had a total of 16 suitable speeches within the given timeframe. The total length of the speeches was 13 hours, of which Putin's was almost five hours and Zelenskyy's almost eight hours. This data collection is noteworthy because public speeches and statements over time are particularly useful for examining the underlying narrative constructions of leaders (Tsygankov, 2014: 346).

The second selection criterion took into account the title of the speech and included those that were considered to be addressed to the public, as opposed to press conferences where the focus was on answering questions related to other issues. This provided a stable discourse style for analysis. Therefore, speeches titled as presidential addresses were selected. This was considered most appropriate and relevant given the research questions, which focused on the narratives used by leaders to communicate with the public. Specifically, Zelenskyy's speeches that were selected had the title 'Address by the President of Ukraine'. However, as Putin had fewer

speeches, it was also considered appropriate to include speeches on national holidays, or those that were topic related, which I considered appropriate given the nature of the study. For example, speeches entitled 'Day of the National Guard' and 'Day of the Border Guard'. All the speeches used in the study can be found in the appendices (p. 57).

## 4.2. Coding

First, the transcripts of the speeches used in the study were compiled into a separate Word document to create a text corpus to ensure consistent data management and facilitate analysis. During the initial coding process, the speeches were separated by presidents. Before diving into the coding process, the data was read through to get an overview of the content. At the same time, the text corpus was highlighted, focusing on nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs with emotional charge or narrative implication that were considered significant. As noted by Loseke (2012: 257), the close reading then allowed the narrative context to be established as the narrative features were collected and categorised. This is important as most presidential speeches deliberately consider the words and their formats in order to make an impact on the audience and shape their reality (Ng and Kidder, 2010: 198; Sarfo and Krampa, 2013: 379). Given that the study concentrates on the presidents who are on opposing sides of the conflict, another focus was the use of pronouns such as 'we', 'our', 'they' and 'their'. In the context of conflict, 'we' and 'they' are generally represented with high moral qualities and ambitions, with positivity associated with the representation of the self and negativity with the representation of others (Oddo, 2011: 296). Thus, the formation of 'us' and 'them' can be examined through the use of pronouns and the moralisation of these groups.

This was followed by a closer examination of the data with the intention of finding initial codes. The initial coding was based on the elements of narrative genres given by Smith (2005). These code bases were 'motivation', 'agency', 'the object of struggle' and 'moral polarisation' with the sub-codes 'enemy', 'hero' and 'victim'. There was also a separate code for 'emotion codes' and 'symbolic codes', following Loseke's (2009) aspects of presidential speeches. Throughout the coding process, it was necessary to add a few more codes that included 'legitimation' and 'threat'. In addition, based on previous research, a unique code was created for Putin's discourse, which was 'exceptionalism' (Roberts, 2017: 55). On the other hand, when reading through Zelenskyy's discourse, the codes 'harm' and 'call to action' were added. However, these were later added as

subsections to other codes. Thus, the analysis involved several rounds of coding to ensure the reliability and validity of the results.

#### **4.2.1. Process of analysis**

The analysis process began with the identification of codes from the speeches. After this initial step, the codes were grouped together to identify the broader themes that emerged in the presidents' speeches. In Putin's speeches, it was found that he used more moral polarisation to divide the different parties, which formed the themes. In Zelenskyy's speeches, on the other hand, the 'object of the struggle' was more prominent, which served as a basis for the formation of his themes. Accordingly, based on the theoretical framework of Smith (2005), the narrative flow was used to categorise the codes into themes. These themes of each president were presented and discussed in the findings chapter in dialogue with the theoretical framework. This was followed by a comparative discussion to identify differences between the discourses, incorporating previous research into the analysis and finally answering the research question. To this end, the selected speeches were carefully read to identify the use of emotional expressions and the structure of the narratives. By using discourse as a starting point, it allowed access to emotional meanings and framing of narratives (Petrovych and Oleksiivna, 2022: 195). Notably, similar to Clément, Sangar and Lindemann (2018), the coding and analysis did not rely on background knowledge of the data, but solely on the semantic meanings in the speeches.

### **4.3. Ethical Considerations**

It was of the utmost importance to conduct the research in the most respectful way possible. The data used for the analysis was obtained from the official websites of the Presidents of Ukraine and Russia. As this is a case study of two well-known public figures, the participants may already be familiar to many. Since the data used in this study is publicly available, there were no issues of privacy or confidentiality. For these reasons, and due to the nature and focus of the study, it was not considered necessary to ensure the anonymity of the participants and their responses, as this was critical to the comparative analysis. This allowed the identities of the participants to be taken into account and the potential influence of these identities to be considered.

### **4.3.1. Self-reflexivity**

Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault (2016: 24) point out that when conducting research, the focus is on what is being studied and how the data is understood and presented depends on the researcher. Thus, the personal background of the researcher is an important aspect that can potentially influence, and even bias, the way the research is conducted and the data interpreted. Looking more specifically at my own case, as a researcher with partial Ukrainian heritage, Russian as my mother tongue, and acquaintance with Slavic customs and food culture since childhood, my personal background and biography may have had some influence on the interpretation of the data. On the one hand, this may have led to bias, but on the other hand, it may also have provided valuable cultural insights into the analysis of the data. For example, (Heller, 2018: 96) notes that the use of native speakers as decoders seems to be of great importance, which can then also be said of native cultures.

As a researcher, my own background and biography cannot be separated from the findings and interpretations of the study (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2016: 25). However, it is important to acknowledge that my personal background and biases may limit my research. I have therefore paid close attention to this aspect and made a conscious effort to approach the material with an open mind, while critically reflecting on my own position throughout the research process.

## **4.4. Limitations**

For the purposes of this case study, the participants were selected in relation to a specific event and the time frame of the data was limited. This means that all decisions in data collection were made with determination. Although this provides a relevant case study, the main limitation of the study is the lack of generalisability of the findings to other similar cases. That is, the results cannot be generalised, but the methodological choices can be used as a vision for further studies.

Similarly, the methodological choices made to limit the scope of the data by time period do not provide the fullest picture of the situation. As with generalisability, data limitations make it difficult to transfer the findings to other contexts. In addition, other thematic areas may have been more prevalent if the data had been delimited differently, but this aspect was not addressed in this study and could be explored in another study if desired. However, these decisions were made because the coding and analysis relied on human coding, which makes time precious and limited. For this reason, the scope of the work was sought to fit within the time available and

to work to the best of the researcher's ability. In addition, the work was based on a single coder and researcher, therefore codes and themes were developed according to one perception and understanding and may have been different if working with a team.

Another limitation is the use of English transcripts as data, which was done to ensure that the speeches were all of the same value and quality. Because most of the speeches were not written in English, some meanings may have been lost in translation or cannot be translated into another language at all (Koschut, 2017: 483). This is also true for emotion or cultural concepts related to cultural understanding. Most likely, this has an impact on the accuracy of the analysis and completeness compared to using transcripts in the original language. Because the researcher's understanding of the speeches was limited to Russian and English, hence the speeches in Ukrainian could not be used. However, it is believed that this did not affect the study, as the aim was to try to uncover larger structures presented in the narratives, rather than to focus on the specific linguistic concepts.



## **5. Results**

In the following three sub-chapters, the main themes that were prevalent in the narratives used by Putin and Zelenskyy in their public addresses will be addressed. First, there will be an analysis of Putin's speeches and its core themes, after which Zelenskyy's speeches are analysed. Finally, the third chapter examines the genre construction of the narratives presented by both presidents, using the genres outlined by Smith (2005).

### **5.1. Putin's Narrative**

In this part, we begin with an investigation of Vladimir Putin's political discourse. What exploring the data has showed us is that it is customary for him to start his speeches with "Citizens of Russia, friends". By addressing his audience in this friendly tone, he establishes a more personal connection with them while maintaining his authority as the nation's leader. Given that he is the leader of Russia and his speeches are primarily in Russian, it is reasonable to assume that his primary audience is domestic. However, due to his considerable influence, his speeches attract worldwide attention and therefore reach an international audience. As a result, his point of view on the issues is spread and may have an impact through the stories he tells (Smith, 2005: 12). One of the most prominent features of his narrative found in this study is the presentation of the moral polarisation between the different parties and the details of the driving forces behind their actions and goals. In other words, his discourse presents Ukraine as a victim and a threat, Russia as the good, heroic defender of its own nation, and the West as the enemy which will be explored next.

#### **5.1.1. The West, the Concept of Evil**

A major theme in Putin's speeches is the depiction of the enemy, with him referring to the collective West as the enemy of Russia. Specifically, he refers to the West as the United States in particular, but also regards other countries as a threat, such as NATO and the European Union (Mölder, 2016: 100-101). The construction of the enemy is closely linked to moral values that imply evil (Loseke, 2009: 502). In relation to his narrative, these are dishonesty, selfishness and untrustworthiness. These negative moral qualities work to create negative attitudes towards the enemy, perceptions of threat and, consequently, the feelings of hatred (Loseke, 2009: 509). In addition, the promotion of negative emotions increases the audience engagement and the formation of preconceived opinions (Seaton and Wu, 2021:). In effect, in Putin's narrative, the West is seen as hungry for power and will seek it by any means necessary, even by causing

further harm. As such, the power it is seen to be after is Russia. This means that it has always played a key role in Russia's perception of its own power (Roberts, 2017: 45) and therefore sees the power-hungry West as a threat to its own great nation. Essentially, the creation of a symbolic enemy code leads to the production of the emotion code of anger in the narrative (Loseke, 2009: 500). These two quotes are examples of Putin's creation of an image of the West as an enemy, which can be seen as an attempt to evoke anger:

“Such self-confidence is a direct product not only of the notorious concept of exceptionalism – although it never ceases to amaze – but also of the real “information hunger“ in the West. The truth has been drowned in an ocean of myths, illusions and fakes, using extremely aggressive propaganda, lying like Goebbels. The more unbelievable the lie, the quicker people will believe it – that is how they operate, according to this principle.” (Putin, 30/9/22)

“Meanwhile, the West continued and continues looking for another chance to strike a blow at us, to weaken and break up Russia, which they have always dreamed about, to divide our state and set our peoples against each other, and to condemn them to poverty and extinction. They cannot rest easy knowing that there is such a great country with this huge territory in the world, with its natural wealth, resources and people who cannot and will not do someone else’s bidding.” (Putin, 30/9/22)

In relation to Christianity, Putin refers to the West as having misguided values. In his narrative, liberalism is generally symbolised by negative values (Mölder, 2016: 105). More specifically, it is being associated with misguided values such as gender neutrality and same-sex marriage, thereby condemning the public to 'spiritual disaster'. To this end, Putin constructs another threat of unholiness that is emanating from the West and involving greater power. An example of this can be seen in the following quote:

“But here is what I would like to tell them: look at the holy scripture and the main books of other world religions. They say it all, including that family is the union of a man and a woman, but these sacred texts are now being questioned. Reportedly, the Anglican Church is planning, just planning, to explore the idea of

a gender-neutral god. What is there to say? Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Putin, 21/2/23)

By suggesting that the West is a threat not only to Russia but to the world, Putin both generates hatred of the West and helps to blame and demonise it. Having said that, Loseke's (2009: 513) research suggests that while the leader may dramatise the threat, he may also promote an understanding that the threat is controllable. In this sense, Putin repeatedly asserts that the enemy is not greater than Russia as a defender. Thus, the narrative does not label Russia as a victim, but rather Putin portrays Russian exceptionalism as threatening to the West and thus provoking Western aggression (Roberts, 2017: 6). Simply put, his narrative portrays an exceptional nationalism that shows how powerful and dominant the Russian nation is. In this way it challenges other nations. This creation of an enemy in the narrative can be seen as providing a common moral purpose to defeat and protect against external evil. Similarly, to build Russian pride as a nation, which can help to inspire collective mobilisation and unity. The following quote is one of many in which Putin creates a sense of threat while at the same time reassuring the audience that there is no need to worry about the threat:

“Properly speaking, the attempts to use us in their own interests never ceased until quite recently: 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. No one has ever succeeded in doing this, nor will they succeed now.” (Putin, 24/2/22)

### **5.1.2. Ukraine as a Victim and a Threat**

The portrayal of Ukraine in Putin's narrative is dualistic. Dualistic in the sense that Ukraine is pictured as deserving both hostility and salvation. First of all, Putin's narrative of Ukraine and its people is based on the emotional and cultural aspect of seeing them as part of the same group. This means that instead of creating a hard distinction between 'us' and 'them', his narrative suggests a unity between them. In particular, it refers to the historical unity of the East Slavic people and at the same time implies the otherness of Western culture (Laine, 2020: 526-539). The Soviet era is mentioned several times, as it is emphasised how important it was not only

for Russia but also for Ukraine to prosper. By interpreting history in this way, the narrative allows for the construction of national identity beyond the borders of Russia (Roberts, 2017). A case in point can be seen in this quote taken from the data:

“I would like to emphasise again that Ukraine is not just a neighbouring country for us. It is an inalienable part of our own history, culture and spiritual space. These are our comrades, those dearest to us – not only colleagues, friends and people who once served together, but also relatives, people bound by blood, by family ties.” (Putin, 21/2/22)

This has resulted in the people of Ukraine, more specifically ethnic Russians in Ukraine, being constructed as victims in the narrative. To this end, those who are judged as victims claim emotion code of compassion and are judged as deserving of help (Loseke, 2009: 505). As such, this point can be seen to work as part of the legitimisation process of the Russia’s ‘special military operation’. Moreover, Loseke (2009: 508) points out that the notion of threat emerges when something is evaluated to be important and surrounded by either uncertainty or uncontrollability. In this way, Putin presents the population of ethnic Russians, as well as their language and culture, as being important and under a threat in Ukraine, as exemplified by the following quote:

“The policy to root out the Russian language and culture and promote assimilation carries on. (...) People who identify as Russians and want to preserve their identity, language and culture are getting the signal that they are not wanted in Ukraine.” (Putin, 21/2/22)

While this promotes his message of collective identities and sense of belonging, it also more clearly distinguishes the boundaries of ‘our people’ (Polletta and Callahan, 2017: 10). Taken together, these elements in the narrative underline the importance of the situation and the need for salvation of ‘our people’. To this end, those who are portrayed as being in a particularly strong moral position of threat to Russia and Ukraine itself are the rich and the oligarchs (Sedykh et al., 2020: 456), who wield more power and influence than ordinary citizens in Ukraine. Putin criticises the way these oligarchs use their power for their own benefit, without regard for the Ukrainian people. In this respect, the narrative places blame and responsibility

on these people for dismissing their own people, creating a sense of anti-elitism. The following quote encapsulates this:

“Essentially, the so-called pro-Western civilisational choice made by the oligarchic Ukrainian authorities was not and is not aimed at creating better conditions in the interests of people’s well-being but at keeping the billions of dollars that the oligarchs have stolen from the Ukrainians and are holding in their accounts in Western banks, while reverently accommodating the geopolitical rivals of Russia.” (Putin, 21/2/22)

It creates a villainous perception of Ukraine and especially of its wealthy people. This narrative strategically highlights sanctions against Russia, Ukraine's increasing acquisition of arms, its pursuit of NATO membership, and the West's growing presence on Russia's border through Ukraine. Since the West is portrayed as the antagonist, Ukraine's cooperation with the West reinforces the perception of Ukraine as threatening. However, the narrative does not evoke hatred towards Ukraine. This is because the perceived threat must be seen as evil for it to evoke feelings of hatred (Loseke, 2009: 509), which is not the case with Ukraine, as it is also seen as a victim in his narrative. In this sense, the danger is not only directed at the Russian state, but also at the Russian people and their culture. This is best summed up by the repeated call to acknowledge the notion of threat posed by Western attitudes and actions:

“They used indiscriminate Russophobia as a weapon, including by nurturing the hatred of Russia for decades, primarily in Ukraine, which was designed to become an anti-Russia bridgehead.” (Putin, 21/9/22)

In this sense, rather than acknowledging Putin's concern for cultural and national security interests, the West's actions contribute to Putin's narrative in which Russia feels more vulnerable and threatened (Polletta and Callahan, 2017). Thus, on the one hand, he downplays Ukraine as a threat, but on the other hand, the Western cooperation reinforces the heightened threat to Russian national security, as the following quote shows:

“If Ukraine acquires weapons of mass destruction, the situation in the world and in Europe will drastically change, especially for us, for Russia. We cannot but

react to this real danger, all the more so since, let me repeat, Ukraine's Western patrons may help it acquire these weapons to create yet another threat to our country. We are seeing how persistently the Kiev regime is being pumped with arms." (Putin, 21/2/22)

The narrative surrounding Ukraine can also be seen as minimising the importance and autonomy of Ukraine. By stating "So, I will start with the fact that modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russia or, to be more precise, by Bolshevik, Communist Russia" (Putin, 21/2/22), Putin strategically emphasises the legacy of the Soviet era and its influence on Ukraine's history and development. By highlighting Ukraine's historical ties to the Soviet Union, the narrative aims to convey the idea that Ukraine is inherently linked to and subject to its former Soviet identity (D'Anieri, 2019: 11). Given that discourse is used for sensemaking (Balogun et al., 2014: 178), this narrative shapes how the public perceives Ukraine's governance in the past, present and future. Not only does it diminish the perception of Ukraine as an independent and self-governing entity, but it is also used to generate public support for actions in Ukraine. As a result, Ukraine is portrayed in Putin's narrative as the victim of Western exploitation rather than the evil itself, as the following quote illustrates:

"The United States and NATO quickly deployed their army bases and secret biological laboratories near Russian borders. They mastered the future theatre of war during war games, and they prepared the Kiev regime which they controlled and Ukraine which they had enslaved for a large-scale war." (Putin, 21/2/23)

### **5.1.3. Russia, the Hero Against the West**

It is natural that where there is evil, there is also its binary opposite, good (Loseke, 2009: 511). Therefore, the presence of the villain leads to the logical existence of its opposite, the hero. The creation of a hero in narratives is based on the attributes and values that are commonly associated with heroism. While these values vary depending on the cultural context, commonly portrayed characteristics for heroes may include being courageous, compassionate, and conquering evil (Loseke, 2009: 514). In addition, as a symbolic code, the hero brings out the emotion codes of pride, loyalty and patriotism (Loseke, 2009: 511). In line with Laine's (2020: 523) work, these are recurring features of the representation of the Russian nation throughout Putin's discourse. There is an emphasis on the importance of these Russian values, which are

then used to contribute to the heroic image of the whole country. The heroic portrayal is based on the fact that Russia is a large and powerful nation, capable of fighting for justice for those who have been wronged. In this way, the narrative suggests that Russia is here to save not only itself but the whole world. It also invites people to recognise Russia as a great power as it once was during the Soviet era (Mölder, 2016: 104).

“The criminals who committed that atrocity have never been punished, and no one is even looking for them. But we know their names and we will do everything to punish them, find them and bring them to justice.” (Putin, 21/2/22)

Putin considers not only soldiers as heroes, but also those who have been part of their lives, who have raised and trained them. Given that narratives can be triggers as a means of scripting one's behaviour (Tutenges and Sandberg, 2013: 543), hearing such laudatory stories can subtly inspire and motivate the public to do their best for the betterment of the nation and society. Accordingly, Putin presents Russia as a dominant authority of 'good', expressing how it has extended a helping hand to those in need, sought peaceful solutions and taken drastic measures only when deemed necessary:

“In the meantime, as you know well, we were doing everything in our power to solve this problem by peaceful means, and patiently conducted talks on a peaceful solution to this devastating conflict.” (Putin, 21/2/23)

Putin portrays that there are real achievements in the past and in the future, which in turn evokes a sense of pride and patriotism (Loseke, 2009: 515). As a result, his narrative not only builds on national identity, but also continues to enforce a sense of unity and community by referring to the future and what is needed for the nation to prosper. This then gives Putin the ability to persuade and legitimise the public, which is particularly necessary for violent action (Smith, 2005: 7). Particularly when Russia's future and representation is threatened, the narrative becomes more explicit that something must be done to stop it. This is consistent with Roberts (2017: 6): "the more threatened Russia feels by Western dominance, the greater the rationale for providing an alternative." For this reason, it is clear that Putin's approach to public engagement involves legitimising harm rooted in a perspective of future significance (Presser, 2013: 40). As a result, actions to preserve Russia's heritage are sufficiently legitimised, as can

be seen in the following quotes, where he creates a sense of need to act for the greater good, for Russia's greater good. In other words, he shows that Russia is defending its community and the basic principles of its cultural identity. This is done by presenting Russia as a great power defending its nation against Western hegemony (Roberts, 2017: 38). This is illustrated by the following quote:

“The battlefield to which destiny and history have called us is a battlefield for our people, for the great historical Russia. (Applause.) For the great historical Russia, for future generations, our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. We must protect them against enslavement and monstrous experiments that are designed to cripple their minds and souls.” (Putin, 30/9/22)

## **5.2. Zelenskyy’s Narrative**

The next chapter will consider Volodymyr Zelenskyy's presidential speeches and the thematic patterns that emerge from its analysis. The following quotation, made a year after the invasion, can be taken as an example that sums up the general atmosphere of his speeches:

“A year ago, on this day, from this very place, at about seven in the morning, I addressed you with a short statement. It lasted only 67 seconds. It contained the two most important things, then and now. That Russia started a full-scale war against us. And that we are strong. We are ready for anything. We will defeat everyone. Because we are Ukraine!” (Zelenskyy, 24/2/23)

Central to Zelenskyy's speech is the naming of the external enemy, Russia, which begun the war. In particular, he addresses not only the Ukrainian audience but also the international community. With his short speeches and brief sentences, he creates a sense of seriousness and urgency, inviting people to act against Russian aggression. His speeches consistently convey a message of resilience and patriotism while highlighting the qualities he associates with Ukraine, such as strength and determination to overcome all obstacles. Thus, the emerging major themes of his discourse are ‘constructing an external enemy’, ‘fostering national spirit’ and ‘blame for inaction’.



### 5.2.1. Constructing an External Enemy

In each of Zelenskyy's speeches, he always mentions the progress made each day. He mentions the successes and small victories of their own progress, but more importantly he also talks about the setbacks which are Russian victories. Zelenskyy places a great deal of moral blame on Russia and its violent actions that threaten Ukraine. These acts of violence are described in a number of ways that are even more condemning. First, he draws comparisons with the Holocaust, comparing Putin's actions to the atrocities that took place during that period. As Zelenskyy notes: "Ukrainian cities have not seen such inhuman cruelty since the Nazi occupation" (Zelenskyy, 4/3/22). This, in particular, can evoke strong negative emotional reactions from the public, as it is widely regarded as one of the most horrific events in human history (Fedor, Lewis and Zhurzhenko, 2017: 11; Maia Polo, Saxena and Alexopoulos, 2023: 9). Furthermore, given that Ukraine was one of the countries affected by the Holocaust, it serves as a way to engage the public through the cultural connection (Kostusiak et al., 2022: 209). In this way, it can be argued that it invites a sense of unity not only among Ukrainians, but also among all the countries affected by the events (Sandberg, Tutenges and Copes, 2015: 12).

Secondly, Zelenskyy's speech contains several repeated references to victims, especially child victims. Even though war is already a deviant environment that violates the norm of everyday life, there could be some unwritten rules about war. For example, that women and children should not be targeted in attacks. Children symbolise purity and innocence that needs to be protected, so children suffering and dying has a strong emotional connotation that is seen as immoral (Loseke, 2012: 253). In this way, messages about children casualties have a significant practical impact on the public and their emotions (Kostusiak et al., 2022: 210). To this end, Putin is portrayed as a violator of these rules, which helps to portray Russia as a serious aggressor, from which no one is safe, not even children:

"It's simply cannot be such a truth that could clarify why kindergartens and housing infrastructure are fired from a missile artillery. In Vorzel, Kyiv region, they fired "Grads" at an orphanage. Okhtyrka, Sumy region, was shelled by "Uragans". Housing quarters, shelter, kindergartens were under the shelling. What is this war against Ukrainian children in a kindergarten? Who are they? Are they neo-Nazis from kindergarten as well? Or were they NATO soldiers that threatened Russia? Killed and injured children are the sentence to this invasion.

(...) If even kindergartens are a permissible target for invaders, you must not leave them any chance.” (Zelenskyy, 26/2/22).

Zelenskyy’s narrative not only does he explain how Russia has become the worst enemy, but he also assures that anyone involved in the attacks will taste the consequences:

“We will punish everyone who committed atrocities in this war. On our land. We will find every bastard. Which shot at our cities, our people. Which bombed our land. Which launched rockets. Which gave the order and pressed "start".” (Zelenskyy, 6/3/22)

Zelenskyy implies that these individuals will be punished, either by the legal system or by God. In this way, he uses Christianity as a means of further condemning Russia’s actions. In doing so, he makes use of symbolic codes related to religion, which have a long history in Ukraine, but also in Russia (Tabachnik, 2020: 301). Through this narrative, he portrays the gravity of the situation, which leads Ukraine to seek justice by demanding accountability. This is illustrated by the following quote. It is presented in Zelenskyy's characteristically concise and clear style (Kostusiak et al., 2022: 210):

“We. Will. Not. Forgive. Hundreds and hundreds of victims. Thousands and thousands of sufferings. And God will not forgive. Not today. Not tomorrow. Never. And instead of Forgiveness, there will be a Day of Judgment.” (Zelenskyy, 6/3/22)

On the other hand, Zelenskyy portrays Russian soldiers as having a way out. Not from their actions and the consequences, but as a wake-up call to the situation, allowing them to leave the war and return to their families. Basically, in his narrative he characterises the soldiers as children. In this context, children could be seen as inexperienced, new to the world and unaccountable. In doing so, he belittles their public persona as soldiers, while at the same time making an emotional appeal to their loved ones and their rational selves to leave the battlefield, as he states: “These are not warriors of the superpower. These are confused children who were used. Take them home.” (Zelenskyy, 3/3/22). It can be seen as working to diminish their value and support as soldiers (Smith, 2005: 211).

All this is to say that Zelenskyy's narrative invites the public to recognise the enemy. The discourse can be seen as a call to action not only for Ukraine, but also for the international community, especially Europe. This is done by constructing the narrative in such a way as to create sense of collective urgency by appealing to consequences that would affect the whole of Europe. The following quote is one of many in which Zelenskyy highlights the many threatening implications of Russia's actions:

“Radiation terror at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant. Six power units! The presence of Russian troops at the plant, constant Russian provocations and shelling of the plant's territory alone put Ukraine and all of Europe on the brink of a radiation disaster.

Energy terror. Residents of many countries around the world are suffering due to the painful increase in prices for energy resources - for electricity, for heat. (...)

Hunger terror is a very cynical and completely deliberate tactic of Russia. And it is directed not just against poor countries, but specifically against those regions of the world from which a new inflow of refugees may come to Europe. Severe migrant crisis in Europe - this is the calculation of the terrorist state.” (Zelenskyy, 12/9/22)

### **5.2.2. Fostering National Spirit**

The most fundamental message of Zelenskyy's narrative is the depiction and promotion of the Ukrainian spirit. He refers not only to history, but also to the collective memory of past, present and future events. This is done by evoking the emotions associated with remembering of the socio-cultural context and its history (Koschut, 2017: 485). This is an opportunity for him to make sense of a collective identity using the temporal dimension of narratives (Presser, 2018: 151). In particular, it allows him to inspire the audience's cultural identities as well as their national pride (Laine, 2020: 534). In doing so, he not only connects with but motivates them by evoking these emotions through narrating shared history. All in all, it is an appeal to the European identity to unite and act together against the Russian aggressor, which is another obstacle for the Ukrainians to overcome. The following quote is an example of how Zelenskyy presents the common events of the past while promoting pride and patriotism.

“We have survived in our history and on our land two world wars, three Holodomors, the Holocaust, Babyn Yar, the Great Terror, the Chornobyl explosion, the occupation of Crimea and the war in the east. We do not have a huge territory - from ocean to ocean, we do not have nuclear weapons, we do not fill the world market with oil and gas. But we have our people and our land. And for us - it's gold. That is what we are fighting for. We have nothing to lose but our own freedom and dignity.” (Zelenskyy, 3/3/22)

In this context, the events of the past are used to point to achievements and lessons learned, which in turn serve to legitimise future acts of violence (Oddo, 2011: 298). Furthermore, Zelenskyy makes references to the Ukrainian flag, which can be seen as inspiring pride and patriotism because it can symbolise a nation and represent values that people respect and aspire to. Fundamentally, pride and patriotism promote strong positive emotions such as love for one's nation (Loseke, 2009: 515). Together with patriotism, the narrative evokes a nationalism that fosters deep affection for one's own country but hatred for the other group (Loseke, 2009: 510). Taken together, they can make the audience feel the need to defend their nation (Laine, 2020: 539). In this sense, the Russian flag is portrayed in a more negative light:

“It is obvious to everyone what Ukraine is, what the presence of our flag is. When there is a Ukrainian flag, there is civilization, there is freedom. There is social security. There is infrastructure. There is security. There is someone to take care of people. There are all the things that disappear and that are destroyed when the occupier comes.

This is what the Russian flag means - complete desolation. There is no electricity, no communication, no Internet, no television. The occupiers destroyed everything themselves - on purpose. This is their special operation. On the eve of winter, the Russian occupiers destroyed absolutely all critical infrastructure for the people. Absolutely all important objects in the city and region are mined.” (Zelenskyy, 14/11/22)

In addition, the narrative presents several heroic qualities associated with being Ukrainian. Firstly, Zelenskyy emphasises the importance of the existing unity of the Ukrainian people and encourages them to maintain it. As Zelenskyy says in his speech: “In this difficult time, the

strong Ukrainian people have shown their best qualities - unity and the will to win.” (Zelenskyy, 14/2/22). Unity and perseverance are presented as essential and central qualities that prevail and are promoted in his narrative. Likewise, Zelenskyy seeks to connect with the audience as fellow Ukrainians, emphasising their unity and solidarity by highlighting their common struggles through the use of ‘we’- discourse (Petrovych and Oleksiivna, 2022: 199). Consequently, portraying these as essential parts of becoming a stronger nation that is capable of fighting the enemy together.

Secondly, the character of the hero is often characterised by qualities such as courage, selflessness, resilience and the fight for justice (Loseke, 2009: 514). In his narrative, Zelenskyy presents these traits as accustomed to Ukrainians. In this way, the act of fighting is portrayed as honourable. Through this notion of honour, it can consequently motivate and encourage individuals to remain committed and persistent (Presser, 2018: 91). This can be seen in these two quotes, where he emphasises their strength and unity as a nation, while speaking in a way that empowers the audience:

“Because it is impossible to win against people who stop military equipment without weapons in their hands. Who refuse to take anything from the hands of the invaders. Whose situation is tough and dangerous. But they do not lose their dignity. And will never lose it.” (Zelenskyy, 5/3/22)

“But when we see a threat to our way of life, to our spirit, when we see a threat to Ukraine, our state, we do not hesitate even for a moment. If we are Ukrainians. We unite. We do everything to protect what’s ours. Ukrainians do not need to be persuaded to become volunteers. Ukrainians do not need to be encouraged to start helping each other.” (Zelenskyy, 14/3/22)

Importantly, the narrative uses language that emphasises the future. A future that is better and brighter. This future-focused communication serves as a source of inspiration, fostering optimism and a belief in a better tomorrow. In this way, Zelenskyy gives a sense of purpose and direction to those involved in the conflict by setting goals such as the defeat of the enemy and the rebuilding of the society and the nation. In doing so, the narrative feeds into the understanding of ongoing events, building confidence and hope. Overall, as Oddo (2011: 300-

301) shows, because the perception of 'our' future is positively framed, it serves to justify current violent actions in the hope of a better future. Moreover, the presentation of the future can not only help to maintain collective mobilisation, but also helps to maintain public motivation and spirit. One such example of Zelenskyy's presentation of a brighter future is shown below:

“We are developing a comprehensive plan that provides for the reconstruction of what’s destroyed, the modernization of state structures and the maximum acceleration of Ukraine's development. It is not just about the amount of physical work - to build housing, restore businesses, attract new businesses that will work to rebuild infrastructure and renew economic relations in our country. It is also about rethinking how our country will develop in the future. What industries can be the basis of growth after the war. What solutions and resources are needed to increase the level of processing in Ukraine and stop selling raw materials, as it was before. Which cities will become the locomotives of economic and technological growth, pulling up the surrounding areas.” (Zelenskyy, 18/4/22)

### **5.2.3. Blame for Inaction**

Alongside the moral condemnation of the enemy and the empowering messages directed at the Ukrainians, the narrative also places blame on the inaction of other nations. The threat is described as universal, which implies that Ukrainian efforts to combat it are also universal. According to the narrative, the enemy is not limited to Ukraine, but poses a threat to the whole of Europe. As a result, Zelenskyy stresses the urgent need for help from various sources to defend Ukraine's sovereignty against the Russian aggression. In order to call for help, his narrative relies on evoking a sense of compassion, which in turn is linked to the need to help (Loseke, 2009: 518). Firstly, Zelenskyy tries to reach out to Russians in order to raise their voices in protest against the actions of their government. Importantly, he then goes on to thank those who have shown their efforts and unity with the Ukrainians and encourages them to continue to do so:

“To all the citizens of the Russian Federation who come out to protest, I want to say - we see you. This means that you heard us. This means that you begin to trust us. Fight for us. Fight against the war.” (Zelenskyy, 25/2/22)

Second, while Zelenskyy calls for unity among Russian citizens, he also appeals to the international community for help. He does this by reinforcing the image of ‘our’ enemy, which can be defeated through joint action. In this way, the narrative targets other peoples’ norms of violence by rationalising them through the shared enemy (Sykes and Matza, 1957: 666). The following quote illustrates this:

“This is the help that the world should provide not just to Ukraine, but to itself. To prove: humanity will win. As soon as possible.”. (7/3/22)

Throughout the narrative, he introduces and acknowledges the sanctions that have been imposed on Russia, but he consistently points out that they fall short of what is needed. In other words, the narrative shows that the amount or lack of support is not matched with the gravity of the situation because it is not seen enough to contain the conflict or prevent future attacks, let alone put an end to it. This is done in a subtle way by creating Ukrainian victimhood. This is linked to the emotion code of sympathy that encourages other nations to provide aid (Loseke, 2009: 505). Thus, the discourse critically seeks to promote the need for support and assistance from the international community through the use of emotion codes. The following quote illustrates the blame for inaction in the form of insufficient and late assistance:

“The sanctions response to Russia’s massacre of civilians must finally be powerful. But was it really necessary to wait for this to reject doubts and indecision? Did hundreds of our people really have to die in agony for some European leaders to finally understand that the Russian state deserves the most severe pressure?” (Zelenskyy, 23/5/22)

### **5.3. Distinguishing Between Narrative Genres**

This chapter draws on Smith's (2005) proposed narrative genres and explains what these narratives advance with their discourse. The development of these genres consists of aspects including character depiction, motivations, focal point of struggle and powers of action (Figure 1). Therefore, these will be examined in terms of how they are represented and what they are intended to achieve. This chapter is structured into two main sections: first, the structural investigation of the genre used by Putin, and then, correspondingly, by Zelenskyy.

### 5.3.1. Putin's Romantic Justification of Action

The central theme of Putin's narrative revolves around the presentation of the characters. The underlying character presentation forms of the antagonist West and the protagonist Russia. This is emphasised with the use of 'us and them' between the antagonist and protagonist. Good values are closely associated with 'us' while bad values are closely associated with 'them', with the aim of enhancing one's own status while undermining that of the opponent (Petrovych and Oleksiivna, 2022: 196). Therefore, his narrative encourages resentment towards the opposition by portraying the West as selfish, dishonest and unreliable. Meanwhile, Russia is portrayed as the opposite, possessing a variety of heroic qualities such as including bravery, compassion, loyalty and the conquest of evil. In this regard, it is typical for Putin to take on the role of an anti-hero in his narratives against Western hegemony (Mölder, 2016: 102). This can be seen as a result of the Cold War era, when the East vs. West competition was notable (Mölder, 2016: 90). Furthermore, the narrative employs aspects of temporality, where it can be seen that he relies on the historical context of the Soviet Union period and the vision of the future (Presser, 2018: 52). Fundamentally, portraying Russia being able to overcome obstacles and enemies (Smith, 2005: 26). Roberts (2017:48) points out that sanctions and other measures used against Russia work in favour of the narrative, promoting Putin's narrative.

In this sense, Ukraine has been given a middleman role in the narrative of the conflict. It is portrayed as a potential threat to the Russian ethnic groups. However, the moral polarisation of the characters between Ukraine and Russia is moderate, as the threat is not based on emotions of hatred (Loseke, 2009: 509). In other words, Ukraine is portrayed more as a threatening victim. Thus, the positioning between Ukraine and Russia does not have the same impact on the course of the war as the polarisation between the West and Russia. For this reason, the description of the conflict as a 'special military operation' is more consistent with the narrative of heroism and salvation in Ukraine than with outright aggression. Nevertheless, although the narrative revolves around character division and recognition, the moral polarisations of the characters take a moderate stance which would be found in the tragic or romantic genre (Smith, 2005: 26). That is to say, there is split into good and evil, but does not become as extreme and drastic as it could be in the apocalyptic narrative genre.



Examining the object of struggle depicted within this narrative, it can be seen to revolve around the intention of the saviour of the people, particularly the ethnic Russian people in Ukraine. Whilst, when considered from a larger perspective, Putin's discourse can be seen as striving for the revival of Russian exceptionalism (Roberts, 2017: 12) and recognition as a great power (Mölder, 2016). These then are tied up tightly to encourage patriotism, pride and a sense of historical superiority. These promote positive emotions to be evoked in the audience, such as happiness and joy, while also promoting the act of rescue as another great accomplishment (Loseke, 2009: 515). As a result, they act as driving forces behind the violent actions. As a result, it seems to fall into a romantic genre rather than a tragic one, as the protagonist is portrayed as being motivated by high ideals to succeed in order to bring about positive change (Smith, 2005: 26). In this regard, the motivation is not explicitly stated but is presented through these other elements of the narrative, such as objects of the struggle and moral polarisation of the characters. This is a common feature of storytelling where things are left unsaid while the story is still conveying the message (Presser, 2018: 56).

In terms of the powers of action, they are not extraordinary, but slightly elevated, as in the romantic genre (Smith, 2005: 26). Putin does not explicitly call for large-scale violent action as a solution to the actions in his narrative (Smith, 2005: 26). Rather, the action is the goal of peace and peaceful behaviour that is narrated, as can be seen in this quote:

“For eight years, for eight endless years we have been doing everything possible to settle the situation by peaceful political means.” (Putin, 24/2/22).

This shows that he is not primarily seeking to encourage collective action, but rather to unify and shape the nation's perception of Russia's actions. Both of which Smith (2005) sees as a function of the romantic genre. Overall, the author's narrative appears to use the structure of the romantic genre to essentially generate support for and justify Russia's actions in Ukraine.

### **5.3.2. Zelenskyy's Genre Shift: From the Apocalyptic to the Romantic**

Based on the previous discussion related to Zelenskyy's narrative, it can be concluded that his narrative can be romantic or apocalyptic. This is because the arising themes of recognising the enemy, preserving the national spirit and calling to action are dominant characteristics of these genres. In the start of the conflict, his speeches engage in large character moral polarisation

between the antagonist as Russia and the protagonist as Ukraine. He constructs this through emotionally charged speeches that create a big contrast between the good and evil (Maia Polo, Saxena and Alexopoulos, 2023: 9). Zelenskyy draws on cultural understanding of evil when the narrative invites to recognise and blame Russia for its actions. This is done by making comparisons to Holocaust, mentioning God's judgement and highlighting Russia's horrific practices that lack guilt and understanding such as the attacks on children. These are reinforced by the ironic tactics he uses to publicly criticise Russia (Petrovych and Oleksiivna, 2022: 204). Moreover, he appeals to the emotion of hatred, because important things are threatened by evil (Loseke, 2009: 509-510). In this way, an absolute evil is created and "(...) there is no possibility of trust or of an upward conversion of the evil by reason or by chance", corresponding to an apocalyptic genre (Smith, 2005: 27).

Similarly, the narrative can be seen to evoke feelings of nationalism which involves the distinction between the nations and the hatred against the others (Loseke, 2009: 510). Together, hatred has the effect of encouraging and motivating people to take action against evil and fight back against Russia (Smith, 2005: 27; Loseke, 2009: 510). By expressing this through his narrative, he engages in collective mobilisation among Ukrainians while also attempting to reach an international audience. This is central to both the romantic and apocalyptic genres as they aim to evoke strong emotions while encouraging collective action against the threat (Smith, 2005: 26-27). The narrative motivates and encourages national identity of the Ukrainian people by creating heroic qualities associated with them. These include the qualities identified by Loseke (2009: 514) such as unity, perseverance, courage, selflessness, resilience and a willingness to fight for justice. This adds to the contrast between the absolute evil and the protagonist's heroism. In addition, Zelenskyy maintains a high ideal of motivation by creating a positive mental state that includes expressions of gratitude to those who have made the effort to fight for them (Petrovych and Oleksiivna, 2022: 197).

Moreover, the object of struggle in the narrative is essentially to stop the war. However, the scale of it is not only national but rather on global scale. As a result, Zelenskyy employs a temporality in his narrative that allows him to draw on the past, but more importantly, to emphasise the prospect of a catastrophic future if no action is taken to change it. Thus, the narrative continues to seek more international support from other nations which is needed to destroy the evil (Maia Polo, Saxena and Alexopoulos, 2023: 9). In addition, his other theme of

blame for inaction refers to the failure to achieve the extraordinary powers of action that the narrative demands to end this war. Taken together, the high motivation to end a global threat against absolute evil by extraordinary means falls into the apocalyptic narrative mode (Smith, 2005: 27). In other words, it is the genre which is most powerful in encouraging and justifying acts of violence, and which can therefore be a support for the act of war (Smith, 2005: 18).

Notably, these findings also suggest that Zelenskyy's narrative is an underdog story. Firstly, the narrative works to evoke immediate action to fight against a large nation of Russia (Presser, 2018: 88-89). In this way, Zelenskyy associates all negative emotions with the antagonist (Presser, 2018: 95). Especially, the emotion codes of help, anger and realisation are central to both the underdog narrative and Zelenskyy's war narrative. At the same time, the narrative highlights the resilience of the Ukrainians, who continue to fight even when the odds seem to be against them and encourages them to carry on. This is evident in the following quote from his last speech:

“We withstand all threats, shelling, cluster bombs, cruise missiles, kamikaze drones, blackouts, and cold. We are stronger than that.

It was a year of resilience. A year of care. A year of bravery. A year of pain. A year of hope. A year of endurance. A year of unity. (...)

Its main result is that we endured. We were not defeated. And we will do everything to gain victory this year!” (Zelenskyy, 24/02/23)

Towards the end of Zelenskyy's narrative, as the underdog theme remains prominent, there is a shift in his genre. As in underdog story, the underdog stays resilient and persistent (Presser, 2018: 91), which similarly happens in Zelenskyy's narrative. From emphasising the moral polarisation of the characters, his narrative gradually shifts to highlighting the importance of external help and resources. As a result, there is a shift in themes that leads to a more romantic mode of narration. This is because the narrative begins to rely on the understanding that Russia is already recognised as evil, and therefore focuses more on signalling unity, loyalty and the will to win in pursuit of justice. In this way, the use of the romantic narrative genre together with underdog narrative work to promote the understanding that great deeds are possible (Smith, 2005: 20; Loseke, 2009: 91). In other words, Ukraine has a chance against the aggressor. As a result, the power of the action goes from extraordinary to elevated. However,

in order to destroy the evil, the narrative continues to seek more international support and resources from other nations to be able to put an end to the evil (Maia Polo, Saxena and Alexopoulos, 2023: 9).

## 6. Concluding Discussion

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has complex, controversial, and deeply rooted causes, which involve historical, economic, and cultural connections (Mykhnenko, 2020). The aim of this case study was to identify the narratives that emerged during the hard times in Ukraine. For this reason, the interest has been particularly focused on the two leaders against each other and their different points of view. The previous studies presented in this paper have contributed to a better understanding of the thematic aspects of the political discourse and thus to the progress of the objectives of this study. This study aimed to analyse the construction of speeches and narratives instead of their factual accuracy. The main research questions of this study were:

- What narratives do Putin and Zelenskyy draw upon when addressing the conflict in Ukraine?
- How are emotions and notions of threat mobilised in their speeches?

Both leaders present constructed narratives that aim to resonate with the public through cultural logic (Smith, 2005: 6). This logic is constructed from socially circulated ways of understanding and feeling that rely on various symbolic and emotion codes (Kusenbach and Loseke, 2013: 23). As such, presidents are skilled at encouraging the public to feel a desired way by overriding the public's rationality (Loseke, 2009: 498; Mölder, 2016: 89; Presser, 2018: 81). In this sense, discourse is a crucial aspect of our society as it encompasses story, knowledge, sense-making and power relations (Balogun et al., 2014: 178). Therefore, utilizing narrative and cultural criminology perspectives is helpful when examining presidential communication as means of promoting and continuing harmful actions (Presser, 2013: 29; Sandberg et al., 2014: 6).

This study has identified that both presidents, Putin and Zelenskyy, propose persuasive narratives from different angles and with varying objectives. As such, Putin emphasises Russia's role as a defender against perceived threats, while Zelenskyy emphasises Ukraine's resilience against aggression. This narrative therefore constructs the causality of the conflict (Presser, 2018: 52-53) in order to provide the public with the desirable answer to the question of 'why' the conflict is taking place (Oddo, 2011: 302). Furthermore, leaders incorporate temporal dimensions for sensemaking, referring to past, present and future implications (Presser, 2018: 52). The strategy used by both Putin and Zelenskyy, which proves effective in justifying harmful actions, involves considering the future consequences of death, damage, and further disruption (Guthrie and Quinlan, 2007: 7).

By systematically analysing ongoing conflict data that begs for scrutiny, this study uncovers the central messages in Putin's and Zelenskyy's narratives regarding the conflict in Ukraine. Both presidents rely on the portrayal of good and evil as the basis for legitimising the conflict (Loseke, 2009: 508). Moreover, through the use of either romantic or apocalyptic narratives, leaders effectively unite people while encouraging them to act against a threat (Smith, 2005: 17). Putin strategically presents a predominantly negative view of the West, which aims to mobilise public support and shape opinions (Seaton and Wu, 2021: 10). In this sense, Putin draws on a rationale for violent action justified under the narrative of a 'special military operation' to protect ethnic Russians in Ukraine and preserve Russian cultural heritage. With a similar design, Zelenskyy assigns responsibility while emphasising Russia's role as the aggressor in the conflict. In this way, Zelenskyy relies on a narrative of resilience and collective action as a means of self-defence and to underline Russia as the global threat. Fundamentally, the sense of threat is based on the contrasting representation of 'us and others' (Oddo, 2011: 289; Homolar and Scholz, 2019: 351; Ojala, Kaasik-Krogerus and Pantti, 2019: 4), using the symbolic code of evil and consequently the emotion code of hatred (Loseke, 2009: 509).

Essentially, it is the combination of depiction of threat and emotions that work together in the narrative to guide the public on how to act. In this way, Russia's exceptionalism works as a source of pride, contributing to the distinction of others, but most importantly aims to build up the public's collective identity through arousal of pride and patriotism in the nation (Loseke, 2009: 515; Polletta and Callahan, 2017: 10). On the other hand, Zelenskyy's underdog story highlights the narrative transformation from victim to fighter for justice (Presser, 2018: 88). Notably, Zelenskyy's ability to engage in the apocalyptic genre indicates that the war in Ukraine should not be taken lightly (Smith, 2005: 88). Overall, both Putin and Zelenskyy propose increased narrativity by incorporating commonly found elements of narratives: "temporality, causality, action, conflict, transformation, meaning and situatedness" (Presser, 2018: 51).

All in all, by breaking down the analysis based on emotion, threat perception, and narrative genre, we arrive at a deeper understanding of the underlying motivations, power plays, and cultural dimensions of political communication between Putin and Zelenskyy. The narrative is formed through culturally dependent factors, which is why some narratives become more relatable than others (Loseke, 2009: 516). The methodological and theoretical framework

equips us with a navigational toolkit to understand why this conflict began and still persists. Namely the use of narrative theory and Smith's (2005) narrative genres in analysing presidential public speeches. This not only enhances our understanding of the situation in Ukraine, but also provides important insights into possible paths to peace.

### **6.1. Future Research**

One of many questions that arose during this study concerned how the audience receives the storytelling and engages with it. How powerful is the presidential narrative and what makes it more relatable than other? It is not a straightforward matter, as societies are becoming increasingly diverse in their population (Loseke, 2009: 517) with different interpretations of the messages conveyed by presidential speeches due to cultural differences (Loseke, 2012: 256). This being relevant especially, when considering the different social, political or religious positions of the audience (Loseke, 2009: 501). Specifically, given that there may be significant differences in how cognitively and emotionally appealing narratives are understood by audiences other than those for whom they are intended (Kusenbach and Loseke, 2013: 27). As Loseke (2009) puts it:

“As elements of culture, the contents of symbolic and emotion codes are not fixed or agreed upon; multiple versions of codes compete with one another, and codes always are subject to contention and modification.”

Therefore, in order to effectively persuade audiences with diverse understandings, the president must "deploy the most common and agreed upon symbolic and emotional codes and use them in increasingly dramatic ways" (Loseke, 2009: 517). This would significantly contribute to the understanding of narrative usage in political communication allowing perspectives from both the speaker and the audience. Also, it would provide a form of 'confirmation' as to whether the message was received and to what extent it had an impact on the recipient.

Moreover, besides this study's focus on verbal presidential communication, the performative aspect also holds significance. Non-verbal and visual elements of discourse may also be crucial in this regard (Koschut, 2017: 483). By observing the storyteller's verbal and non-verbal cues, it can lead to a more holistic understanding of the process behind the storytelling (Tutenges, 2019: 31). This raises the question of the extent to which the appearance and behaviour of political leaders during speeches affects the effectiveness of their narratives and public perceptions. For example, one might ask how Putin's appearance differs, given that he has a

rather stoic demeanour and is always seen in a dark suit and tie in his office, compared to Zelenskyy, who has a more friendly face, dresses more casually and can be seen walking the streets of Kiev.



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## 8. Appendix

### Appendix A

<b>Vladimir Putin's speeches</b>	
<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>
21.2.2022	Address by the President of the Russian Federation
23.2.2022	Greetings on Defender of the Fatherland Day
24.2.2022	Address by the President of the Russian Federation
18.3.2022	Concert marking the anniversary of Crimea's reunification with Russia
27.3.2022	Address on National Guard Day
16.4.2022	Address to participants and guests of the 10th Moscow Conference on International Security
28.5.2022	Greetings on Border Guards Day
30.6.2022	Vladimir Putin congratulated current staff and veterans of the Foreign Intelligence Service on the centenary of illegal intelligence
30.6.2022	Address to participants of 10th St Petersburg International Legal Forum
22.8.2022	Video address on National Flag Day
21.9.2022	Address by the President of the Russian Federation
30.9.2022	Signing of treaties on accession of Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics and Zaporozhye and Kherson regions to Russia
8.12.2022	Presenting Gold Star medals to Heroes of Russia
31.12.2022	New Year Address to the Nation
21.2.2023	Presidential Address to Federal Assembly

### Appendix B

<b>Volodymyr Zelenskyy's speeches</b>	
<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>
14.2.2022	Address of the President of Ukraine on the unity of Ukrainian society
24.2.2022	Address by the President of Ukraine
25.2.2022	Address by the President to Ukrainians at the end of the first day of Russia's attacks
25.2.2022	Address by the President on the second morning of the large-scale war
25.2.2022	Address by the President of Ukraine

26.2.2022	Address by the President of Ukraine in the evening of the second day of the large-scale war
26.2.2022	We withstood: address by the President of Ukraine on the third day of the war
27.2.2022	President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy addressed the citizens of Belarus
27.2.2022	Address by the President of Ukraine to the citizens on the fourth day of the war
27.2.2022	Address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to the citizens
28.2.2022	Stand firm: Address by the President of Ukraine
1.3.2022	The missile at the central square of Kharkiv is terrorism, and Russia must be held accountable for this in international courts
2.3.2022	Address by the President: Ukrainians are a symbol of invincibility
3.3.2022	For us, this is a patriotic war, and we know how such wars end for the invaders - address by the President of Ukraine
3.3.2022	They wanted to destroy Ukraine so many times, but failed - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
4.3.2022	We have survived the night that could have stopped the history of Ukraine and Europe - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
4.3.2022	We continue to fight, we will protect our state and liberate our land thanks to our heroes - address by the President of Ukraine
5.3.2022	I am sure that soon we will be able to tell our people: come back, because there is no more threat - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
5.3.2022	Ukrainians do not retreat, do not give up, do not stop the resistance - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
6.3.2022	Ukraine receives support from partners backed by concrete steps - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
6.3.2022	The audacity of the aggressor is a clear signal that sanctions against Russia are not enough - President's address
7.3.2022	The future of the continent is being decided by us with our resistance and by our friends with their help - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
7.3.2022	Every day of resistance creates better conditions for Ukraine in the negotiations to guarantee our future in peace - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
14.3.2022	We will win thanks to our ability to unite and always care for our people - address by President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy

14.3.2022	Today, volunteers are all those who feel a free call to defend Ukraine - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
21.3.2022	We are working to make the whole world friends of Ukraine - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
21.3.2022	Drive the occupiers out, drive these slaves out: President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's address to the residents of Ukrainian cities
28.3.2022	The week is planned to be very busy, so no one will be able to hide the Ukrainian interest somewhere in political offices - address by the President of Ukraine
28.3.2022	We have to fight, we can't burn emotions so as not to burn out - address by the President of Ukraine
5.4.2022	There is ample evidence that it is Russian troops who destroy peaceful cities, torture and kill civilians - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
12.4.2022	The new package of sanctions should be such that Russia does not even talk about weapons of mass destruction - address by the President of Ukraine
18.4.2022	We, the world and history will take from Russia much more than Russian missiles will take from Ukraine - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
25.4.2022	The Orthodox world has seen that Easter means nothing to Russia - address by the President of Ukraine
25.4.2022	Ukraine is a real symbol of struggle for freedom - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
2.5.2022	The whole free world has united so that no one justifies Nazism, kills children or destroys peaceful cities as Russia does - address by the President of Ukraine
9.5.2022	Russia is the only culprit that peace has been destroyed, and this is its historical responsibility - address by the President of Ukraine
17.5.2022	Ukraine needs Ukrainian heroes alive - this is our principle - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
23.5.2022	The coming weeks of the war will be difficult, yet we have no alternative but to fight and win - address by the President of Ukraine
30.5.2022	In any case, Europe will have to give up Russian oil and oil products, because it is about the independence of Europeans themselves from Russia's energy weapons - address by the President of Ukraine
6.6.2022	Everyone should talk about what is happening in Ukraine so that the attention to our struggle for freedom is not decreased - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy



13.6.2022	Tell people in the occupied territories about Ukraine, that the Ukrainian army will definitely come - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
21.6.2022	We are moving towards the decision of the European Council on Ukraine's candidacy; Russia is very nervous about our activity - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
21.6.2022	Every day we fight for a positive decision of the European Union on the candidacy for Ukraine and for the supply of modern weapons - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
27.6.2022	Russia has become the largest terrorist organization in the world, and this must be a legal fact - address by the President of Ukraine
4.6.2022	The recovery of Ukraine is not only about what needs to be done after the victory, but also about what we and our partners should do now - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
11.7.2022	The decision on the exception to sanctions will be perceived in Russia exclusively as a manifestation of weakness - address by the President of Ukraine
18.7.2022	Provide information and emotional support to our people in the occupied areas, tell them about Ukraine - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
25.7.2022	The gas war that Russia is waging against Europe is a form of terror, so it is necessary to hit back - address by the President of Ukraine
1.8.2022	The power of the democratic world is well felt on the battlefield in Ukraine these weeks - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
8.8.2022	After this Russian war against Ukraine, neither smoldering nor frozen conflict should remain - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
15.8.2022	Russian troops must be immediately withdrawn from the territory of the Zaporizhzhia NPP without any conditions - address by the President of Ukraine
22.8.2022	These days, if you are abroad, be there with the flag of Ukraine and spread the truth about the crimes of the occupiers - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
22.8.2022	Russia will cut itself off from negotiations if it organizes a show trial of captured Ukrainian defenders - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
29.8.2022	The occupiers should know: we will oust them to our border, the line of which has not changed - address by the President of Ukraine
5.9.2022	The shelling of the territory of the ZNPP means Russia does not care what the IAEA says and what the international community decides - address by the President of Ukraine

12.9.2022	We still need to strengthen our cooperation with partners to overcome Russian terror – address by the President of Ukraine
19.9.2022	The pace of providing aid to Ukraine by partners should correspond to the pace of our movement - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
26.9.2022	Russia felt that it will lose and is now trying to delay this moment, to ensure some activity at the front - address by the President of Ukraine
3.10.2022	Ukraine appreciates people, saves people – these are fundamental rules for our state – address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
10.10.2022	We are Ukrainians, we help each other, we believe in ourselves, we restore the destroyed - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
10.10.2022	Ukraine cannot be intimidated, we united even more instead - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
17.10.2022	The fewer terrorist opportunities Russia has, the sooner this war will end - address by the President of Ukraine
24.10.2022	We defended the independence of Ukraine, and Russia cannot change that already, but we still have to go the way to victory - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
31.10.2022	Every Russian attack on our civilian objects brings the international consensus on Russia's liability closer - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
7.11.2022	Escalation of Russian missile and drone terror only led to the world responding with new aid to Ukraine - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
14.11.2022	The reparations that Russia will have to pay for what it has committed are now part of the international legal reality - address by the President of Ukraine
21.11.2022	We now have a historic opportunity to protect the Ukrainian freedom once and for all - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
28.11.2022	Ukraine will never be a place of devastation - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
5.12.2022	When a terrorist destabilizes everyone's lives, stopping terror is a joint task - address by the President of Ukraine
12.12.2022	Blackouts are the last hope of terrorists, but even without light, we know well where to shoot and what to liberate – address by the President of Ukraine
19.12.2022	The key task for all of us now is to increase international support for Ukraine next year - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy

26.12.2022	The situation in Donbas is difficult; I thank our guys who hold their positions firmly and find opportunities to "subtract" the occupiers - address by the President of Ukraine
2.1.2023	Now everyone involved in the protection of the sky should be especially attentive - President's address
9.1.2023	Due to the resilience of our warriors in Soledar, we have gained additional time and power for Ukraine - President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
16.1.2023	We work every day and night to reduce the enemy's potential - address by the President of Ukraine
23.1.2023	Officials will no longer be able to travel abroad for non-governmental purposes - President's address
30.1.2023	Russian terror must lose everywhere and in everything - both on the battlefield and in the absence of ruins in our country - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
6.2.2023	Good motivation plus good training equals the ability of our defense forces to regain what belongs to Ukraine - President's address
13.2.2023	Every new result achieved for Ukraine means a shorter time to victory - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
24.2.2023	The Staff considered the production and supply of ammunition and weapons; even in such circumstances, we have the appropriate potential - address by the President of Ukraine
24.2.2023	Address by President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy "February. The year of invincibility"