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Cultural heritage under attack

Putin's motives for attacking Ukrainian cultural heritage

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Abstract

On February 24th 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. Since then Ukraine has reported damage to more than 1000 sites of cultural importance. There are plenty of studies which map out the destruction of culture in war, however there is still no clear understanding of exactly *why* cultural heritage is under attack - what the motives are for targeting cultural heritage in conflicts. I therefore deemed it interesting to study Putin's motives for attacking cultural heritage in Ukraine. This paper analyses Putin's statements through McWilliams (2022) framework to analyse motives for attacking cultural heritage. The study used postcolonial theory as a theoretical framework and Fairclough's critical discourse analysis as methodological framework. The main findings were those that Putin draws from colonial and imperial discourses in his speeches, and that his motives for attacking cultural heritage are mainly based on a misuse of history and as a part of ethnic and cultural cleansing. Attacking cultural heritage is not only a crime against international law, but also a loss of valuable parts of human history. In order to be able to protect cultural heritage in war, it is crucial we understand what the underlying motives for such attacks are, which is why studies like this are essential.

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1. Introduction

On the 24th of February 2022 Russia initiated the now over a year long, and still ongoing war against Ukraine. Only four days after the first attack, the news started to spread reporting the destruction caused by the Russian forces to paintings made by the well-known and loved Ukrainian artist Maria Prymachenko. ART news and The New York Times both stated 25 of her paintings had been burned as a result of the Russian invasion. Holland (2022) a reporter for CNN conducted an article portraying the attack. He tells the story of the self taught Ukrainian artist, and calls Prymachenko an “*icon of Ukrainian national identity*”. Prymachenko learned folk arts in the 1930’s and was heavily influenced by Ukrainian crafting traditions, as well as Ukrainian folklore, wildlife and traditional motifs (Holland, 2022). A woman interviewed by Holland states:

“I’m sure it was intentional,” she said. “It was the first building (destroyed in Ivankiv) and the task of the occupants is to destroy our Ukrainian roots, to destroy our Ukrainian culture – they hate it.”

The Russian president Vladimir Putin has several times asserted that Ukraine culturally and historically is a part of Russia, something that made the Ukrainian people worried Russia would keep targeting Ukraines unique artistic traditions (Holland, 2022). Today the ministry of culture in Ukraine has reported destruction or damage to more than 1000 places of cultural importance (2023).

In December 2022 the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) released a report regarding the importance of cultural heritage in war and conflict (McWilliams, 2022). They discuss how cultural heritage can be perceived by different people, and why it has become a strategic target in war and conflict. The purpose of the report is according to the Swedish Defence Research Agency to highlight the fact that further research is needed within the subject, in order to further preserve the cultural heritage. This served as one of the key reasons on why I wanted to conduct the following study.

This paper therefore aims to understand what Putin’s motives for attacking cultural heritage in Ukraine are. This will be done by analysing statements made by Putin on the Kremlin's official website. Attacking cultural heritage in war is not a new phenomenon however the

research on the motives behind such actions is still scarce, thus I found it interesting to explore the gap. There are several potential reasons for such actions, which will be discussed in this paper. Trying to categorise the statements made by Putin, will lead us to a better understanding of the possible motives Putin and the Russian government has. To put this into context, a postcolonial framework will be applied along with a critical discourse analysis to understand the possible reasons behind said motives.

1.1 Purpose and Problem Definition

The purpose of this research will be to study what Putin's motives for attacking Ukrainian cultural heritage are. The motivation for this study is the aim to explore the gap in the research about cultural heritage in conflicts, in hopes to gain a better understanding of the importance of cultural heritage in war, and the reasons behind using cultural heritage as targets. By analysing statements made by Putin regarding the Russian attacks, we will gain a better understanding of his motives. This paper does however not claim to give a full picture of Putin's motives, since only a limited portion of his statements will be analysed. Important to note is that this is an *interpretation* of Putin's motives.

1.2 Research Questions

After having presented the aim for this research, the research question for this paper will therefore be:

“What are Putin's motives for attacking cultural heritage in Ukraine?”

2. Background

To gain more understanding on the reason for this research a brief background will be presented. Initially this will include a presentation on the damage done on Ukrainian cultural heritage, following this will be a brief introduction to Russia's war on Georgia and the cultural damage done in the area. Lastly the 1954 Hague convention and a definition of Cultural Heritage will be presented.

2.1 Russia - Ukraine War

On the 24th of February 2022 the Russian invasion of Ukraine was initiated. Since then, Russia has attacked multiple cultural heritages in Ukraine. As of December 25 2022, The ministry of Culture of Ukraine reported the attacks to have damaged or destroyed 453 libraries, 63 museums and galleries, 92 institutions of art education, 18 theatres or philharmonic halls and 563 so-called creative hubs (Mcip, 2023). As of November 2nd 2023, UNESCO has reported and confirmed the following damages on cultural sites in Ukraine (Larcan, 2023): “*124 religious sites, 142 buildings of historical and/or artistic interest, 28 museums, 19 monuments, 13 libraries, 1 Archive*”. In total, 327 sites of cultural importance in Ukraine.

2.2 Russia - Georgia War

In 2008 Russia invaded another neighbouring country - Georgia. The Russian military took control of both the regions Abchazien and South Ossetia and drove out the Georgian Military (Utrikespolitiska Institutet, 2022). Even though the Russo-Georgian war did not last a long time, Georgian authorities reported damage had been done by Russia on cultural sites in Georgia (Council of Europe, 2023). Following was said in the report by the European Council regarding the war between Russia and Georgia: “*The Georgian authorities continued to express concern about the state of monuments of cultural, historical and religious heritage located in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, some of which were reported to have suffered irreversible damage.*”

If the damage done to Georgian cultural sites was collateral damage or actually targeted for specific purposes is however not stated clearly in the report.

2.3 1954 Hague Convention

During the second World war there was widespread damage on cultural heritage sites on all sides of the war. Due to these attacks, the *Hague 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict* was established in order to protect cultural heritage in war. Ever since the Hague 1954 convention was established it has been a war crime to purposely attack cultural heritage sites in war and conflict. The 1999 protocol was an addition to the convention and sought to be more extensive than before. Russia has ratified the 1954 convention but not the second protocol.

2.4 Defining cultural heritage

Since this study is partly based on UNESCO's reports on damage to cultural heritage in Ukraine, and since the 1954 Hague convention was adopted under the auspices of UNESCO, this study will thus also follow UNESCO's definition of Cultural heritage which includes tangible heritage such as artefacts, museums and monuments which are related to values like historic, artistic, ethnological or social significance (etc). It can also include intangible cultural heritage embedded into tangible cultural and natural heritage, however it excludes ICH such as festivals and celebrations (UNESCO, 2009).

3. Previous Research

The fact that cultural heritage sites are being attacked in conflicts and war is well documented and researched, however the reasoning behind it and the motives for doing so is not as

well-researched. In this section an overview of the current field of research is presented and how they draw from, support and contradict each other.

3.1 Early research

In 2003 Kevin Chamberlain researched the phenomena of cultural heritage as a target in war and sought to examine how existing laws worked to protect cultural property in armed conflict. He mentions the 1907 and 1954 Hague convention and what it was obliged to protect. He concludes in his research that the introduction of the two regulations has undoubtedly led cultural heritage to be seen as higher priority in conflict than before, partially mentioning the war in Iraq (Chamberlain 2003, pp. 238-239). He however states that there will be little to no possibility to protect cultural property in war unless these laws are widespreadly ratified (Chamberlain 2003, p. 239).

3.2 The destruction of cultural heritage

Peter G. Stone has done extensive research on the topic, and in one study he describes the challenge of protecting cultural heritage in armed conflict (2016). According to Stone (2016, p. 3) cultural property is in conflict damaged or destroyed for seven reasons:

Its protection is not regarded as important enough to include in pre-conflict planning; it is regarded as legitimate 'spoils of war'; it becomes collateral damage; lack of military awareness; looting; enforced neglect or specific targeting.

In his research Stone discusses the importance of legislation and ratification of laws which aim to protect cultural heritage, mentioning the 1954 convention as one of the primary ones (2016, p. 5), building on the arguments made by Chamberlain (2003) little over a decade earlier. Stone (2016) also mentions the destruction in Iraq in 2003 by the UK and US, and later by ISIS.

Stone is not alone in researching ISIS's destruction of cultural heritage in Syria and Iraq. Isakhan (2018) describes ISIS' extensive destruction of cultural heritage sites. Ancient archaeological sites were looted and blown up, state institutions such as museums and

libraries were desecrated and ransacked. Furthermore religious sanctuaries were reduced to rubble. ISIS also televised much of their destruction to the rest of the world (Isakhan 2018, p. 344). Isakhan (2018) argues these were not random outbursts of aggression, but rather strategic well-planned attacks. Several possible reasons are presented, among these the most popular way to interpret ISIS's attacks - through the lens of *religious iconoclasm*, but also *political iconoclasm* (Isakhan 2018, p. 346). Other ways to interpret the attacks are *symbolic sectarianism*, *erasing minorities*, *looting for revenue*, *propaganda fodder* and *rejection of the west* (Isakhan, 2018).

3.3 Setting a framework

Ishakan's study mainly focuses on the specific case of ISIS and their destruction, and how these attacks may be interpreted in terms of motives. Within the field which studies possible motives for attacking cultural heritage several other researchers have been influential, apart from Ishakan. Van der Auwera (2012, p. 49) discusses knowledge on destruction of cultural property in armed conflict, in relation to nationalism, which she found was a key factor in increased violence toward cultural heritage. What van der Auwera (2012, p. 49) strives to do is understand the main factors which enhance the risks for cultural heritage being targeted and sets a theoretical framework for this. Van der Auwera (2012, pp. 61-62) argues that identity is largely connected to the reason for targeting cultural property, and that identity is closely tied to nationalism. She also points out that the destruction of cultural property is more probable in weak or failed states. Within the same field we encounter Brosché, Legnér, Kreutz & Ijla (2017) who present a study called *Heritage under attack: motives for targeting cultural property during armed conflict*. This study mentions several attacks on cultural heritage, the most recent being the destruction of Palmyra (Brosché et. al 2017, p. 248). They - like van der Auwera - highlight the scarcity in research on why cultural heritage is attacked whilst studies on circumstances and the extent of destruction in specific cases is more widely researched (Brosché et. al 2017, p. 250). Brosche, et. al. (2017, p. 251) moreover discuss van der Auwera's work - among others such as Bevan (2006) and Coward (2009) - and argue that while they provide context in motives for specific cases, they do not provide a broader framework for understanding motives since they do not open up for the possibility of situating individual studies. Because of this Brosche et. al. (2017, pp. 248-260)

developed a framework for understanding motives in individual cases, and implemented four categories of motives. These four broad groups of motives are not not mutually exclusive. The four groups are called:

- “(i) attacks related to conflict goals, in which cultural property is targeted because it is connected to the issue the warring parties are fighting over*
- (ii) military-strategic attacks, in which the main motivation is to win tactical advantages in the conflict*
- (iii) signalling attacks, in which cultural property is targeted as a low-risk target that signals the commitment of the aggressor, and*
- (iv) economic incentives where cultural property provides funding for warring parties”*

The authors state that this theoretical framework can be used academically to draw valuable insights on why cultural heritage sites are targeted in conflict (Brosché et. al 2017, p. 248).

McWilliams (2022) further expands the field of research that tries to map out the motives for attacking cultural heritage, and in her turn discusses the work done by Brosche et. al (2017). She states in her report that these earlier presented categories of motives are too broad and only gives us the strategic and somewhat tactical underlying motives, therefore McWilliams (2022, p. 17) argues that a more nuanced set of categories should enter the discussion. These have to portray the motives on an operative level as well, and because of this McWilliams (2022, p. 17) presents a new set of categories through which motives can be analysed (not mutually exclusive). The categories which McWilliams present are:

- 1. A misuse of history*
- 2. Psychological influence*
- 3. Ethnic and cultural cleansing*
- 4. Theft and illegal trade*
- 5. Protection of soldiers and military use*
- 6. Preservation and conservation*
- 7. Cultural heritage after war.*

These will be further explained in 4.3 since this is the chosen framework for the study. The framework set by Ishakan (2018) could be argued to better suit this study since the categories relate to theoretical elements closely linked to the Russian case - such as political iconoclasm, however the framework by McWilliams (2022) contains broader categories meant to be applicable on a variety of cases, which is why it was deemed interesting to test it out as a framework on this specific case.

4. Theoretical framework

Since this study follows an abductive approach, the theoretical framework has been chosen in regards to McWilliams framework and the most frequent motives in Putin's speeches. In this section initially the background for Imperialism, and specifically Russian imperialism is presented. This section is followed by an introduction to Postcolonial theory. They are placed in this order since the term of imperialism is discussed in Postcolonial theory in relation to

colonialism. It was therefore decided it was preferable to present the background on Russian imperialism first. Lastly McWilliams framework is introduced more in depth.

4.1 Russian Imperialism

Imperialism according to Britannica (2023) means “... *state policy, practice, or advocacy of extending power and dominion, especially by direct territorial acquisition or by gaining political and economic control of other areas. Because it always involves the use of power, whether military or economic or some subtler form, imperialism has often been considered morally reprehensible...*” it is also often “... *excused as the means of liberating peoples from tyrannical rule or of bringing them the blessings of a superior way of life.*”

Burbank & Cooper (2010, p. 271) describe the Russian Empire as an enormous continental empire, even the largest in the world between 1700 and 1900 (but started long before then). During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Russian empire expanded in three different directions. It fought against Europe's empires in the west over Poland, Lithuania and the Baltic littoral. In the south Russia battled against the Ottoman empire in order to gain control over Ukraine, the Caucasus and later on Istanbul. Russia took parts of Ukraine and Poland bit by bit, by spreading both from the east and the west, and the gradual absorption of Ukrainian and Polish territories was part of Russian flexible and strategic imperial strategies (Burbank & Cooper 2010, pp 271-273).

As new cultural and political ideas travelled inside imperial boundaries, the imperial leaders faced their worst nightmares - uprisings from within the empire, in territories they had previously taken control over. In Russia there were major rebellions against its rule and sovereignty. For example the Polish rebels in 1830 created the slogan “For your freedom and ours” in a protest against Russia (Burbank & Cooper 2010, pp 331 - 332). However Russia (later the USSR) remained an empire, even after some territorial restructuring during the first half of the 20th century. For example today’s Ukraine still remained under Russian/Soviet control. During the 1930’s, Stalin's dictatorship began and he introduced the forced collectivization of peasant agriculture through executions, expropriation, deportation and starvation brought out with a particular thoroughness in Ukraine (Burbank & Cooper 2010,

p. 398). During the late 1900s many former empires fell, in a period of decolonization. In 1991 the Soviet Union was broken up and replaced with the Russian federation. Burbank & Cooper (2012, p. 455) then describes Vladimir Putin's reforms as he entered into power:

“As he and his protégés reconnect magnates to the state, tighten control over religious institutions, bring the media to heel, transform electoral process into a “sovereign democracy” supported by a single party, compel loyalty from the federations governors, flirt with nationalism in Russian areas, re-enter the competition for Russia’s borderlands, and effectively wield Russia’s prime weapon - energy - in the international arena, Russian empire has reappeared in yet another transmutation on its Eurasian space.”

Putin insists on rebuilding the former Great Russia as he has claimed repeatedly, and Ukraine was one of the most important territories under Russian control for a very long time. Ukraine has now built up its own nation and with it, national cultures and traditions which are separate from the Russian ones. Although Putin claims Ukraine is a part of Russia culturally - which was mentioned in the introduction of this paper - Ukrainians think otherwise. As Lieven (1998, p. 269) puts it: *“... Russia's post-Soviet and post-Imperial political identity, that void still very much remains.”*

4.2 Postcolonial theory

To be able to analyse the material, the text needs to be tied to a discourse and theory. For this paper a postcolonial theory will be applied, with ties to Russian imperialism. Since this paper will be exploring and utilising both the concept of *colonialism* and the one of *imperialism* a distinction between the both needs to be made. Imperialism is different from colonialism in being the practice, theory and attitudes of a central regime ruling a distant region, whilst colonialism can be seen as a consequence of imperialism in the way that it implants settlements on distant territory. Imperialism can also entail the Europeanisation of the world - even today’s cultural imperialism can be included, where cultural dominance is asserted through media, power and hegemony (Burney 2012, p. 190). However Russian imperialism is slightly differentiated from European imperialism, which was explained in 2.1. Conclusively

colonialism can be seen as the aftermath of imperialism in the way that the coloniser implements its ideas, culture and systems in the other territory.

Burney (2012, p. 173) describes Postcolonial theory as an interdisciplinary critical field with ties to literature, anthropology, history, psychology and sociology. In colonisation, language, literature and culture have all played a big part, which is why terminology and language is central in postcolonial inquiry (Burney 2012, p. 173). Since this paper aims to study the use of language this theory is fit to apply to this study. Postcolonial theory has been extensively applied within the discursive field. According to Burney (2012, p. 174):

“Postcolonial analysis is critical of the discourse of cultural imperialism, which is manifested in several different spheres of thinking, from literary writing and criticism to historical and cultural analysis of artifacts and ideas.”

making it an appropriate theory for this paper which will apply a critical discourse analysis in regards to Russia's attacks on Ukrainian cultural heritage. When applying colonial discourse theory one analyses texts and visual representations critically, in order to reveal how a colonial discourse exists in social patterns and manifests through underlying structures and codes. This analysis is based on the power relations between the colonised and the coloniser (Burney 2012, p. 181). To understand Postcolonialism and postcolonial theory, some key concepts also have to be defined. Burney (2012, p. 182) describes *Colonialism* in the following way:

“Colonialism is the establishment, maintenance, acquisition, and expansion of colonies in one territory by people from another territory. Colonialism is a process whereby sovereignty over the colony is claimed by the metropolis and its social structure is ruled and changed by the colonizing power.”

Furthermore Sarah Amsler (2007) describes the concept of *cultural colonialism* which refers to either the extension of power from the coloniser over the colonised through cultural knowledge activities and institutions (especially media and education), or to the systematic subordination of cultural identity or one conceptual framework over others. This can refer to

the domination of an internal group of people such as minorities within a state, territory or institution. It can also mean hegemonies of knowledge, norms and epistemology that underpin social, economic and political systems (Amsler 2007, p. 1). She highlights the connection between social, political and cultural power, and mentions the role of language and symbolic power and what is called “colonisation of the mind”. Amsler (2007, p. 1) states: *“In this tradition, which has been central to post-colonial and feminist theories of culture, the internalization of language and meanings produced by dominant social groups normalize domination by reproducing the ideological hierarchies of “superior” and “inferior” cultures upon which it depends”*

Conclusively cultural colonialism is the extension of colonial, political power through language and symbols and maintaining a system where some cultural elements are manifested as superior, and some as inferior.

Weynand Tobin (2020) describes *cultural imperialism* as a dominant group of people enforcing its culture on to the nondominant community as an extension of its imperial rule in the area. She states the colonisers are often fueled by their view of themselves as superior in how they live their life and therefore use law, education and/or military use to impose their culture onto the non-dominant group. This can also be done by powerful countries onto less powerful countries, somethings that have become more usual in the 20th century.

4.3 A framework for analysing attacks on cultural heritage

This paper will in combination with postcolonial theory be using the framework set by McWilliams (2022). The categories were briefly introduced in 3.3, but will be given a further explanation in this section.

- (1) **A misuse of history** which means rewriting history to one's own advantage, or changing the narrative. Understanding history and archaeology is always a matter of interpretation and selection which is why transparency is crucial. When analysing material cultural heritage the interpretations need to be empirically grounded (McWilliams 2022, p. 18). However these rules can be broken in order to elevate or minimise a certain groups' history. At times when history is used as a strategy to

heighten one groups' position, cultural heritage is a useful weapon (McWilliams 2022, p. 18). This can for example be used by claiming the right to certain geographical areas or by forcefully displacing and killing other groups of people.

(2) **Psychological influence** signifies attacking cultural heritage in order to attack the others identities since they are often closely tied to psychologically. An attack on cultural heritage can therefore influence groups of people or individuals on a personal level. The attacks can feel targeted towards oneself and their history, which makes destroying cultural heritage a psychological weapon (McWilliams 2022, pp. 19-21). Usually these kinds of actions are portrayed in the media and a part of a war on information. Cultural heritage can be important for the will-to-defend and according to The Swedish Contingencies Agency cited in (McWilliams 2022, pp. 19-21) it is possible to undermine a populations' moral or resistance since identity is closely tied to culture.

(3) **Ethnic and cultural cleansing** is closely tied to genocide where the goal is to wipe out and erase another groups existence. Destroying cultural heritage is not necessarily the end goal in this process, however it can play an important part in erasing the group and its culture (McWilliams 2022, pp. 21-22). The relation between cultural heritage and genocide has been called by e.g the UN an "*ethnocide*" or a "*cultural genocide*". Even though attacking cultural heritage is not legally seen as a part of genocide it is clear there is a relation between them (McWilliams 2022, pp. 21-22). The attack on cultural heritage in relation to cultural cleansing is usually used by a dominant group towards a minority group and studies have shown that destroying a groups cultural heritage has almost always been a part of genocide at some point, either as a side effect of it or as a qualification for it. Because of this the attack on cultural heritage should be seen as a warning sign.

(4) **Theft and illegal trade** relates to the fact that many cultural artefacts hold economic value. Its value can be used to fund war, terrorism and conflicts and can therefore be targeted, especially when there exists political and economic tension and instability between different ethnic groups (McWilliams 2022, p. 24). During war and conflict the possibility to protect cultural heritage worsens and make them an easier target,

especially close to borders or other places that are hard to surveil (McWilliams, 2022, p. 24).

- (5) **Protection of soldiers and military use** means using cultural heritage to shield military material or soldiers from armed conflict. It can be difficult to confirm that cultural heritage has been used for this specific reasoning since it's often word against word between the different parties in war. An example of when cultural heritage has been used as protection is when American snipers used the minaret by the Samarra Mosque in Iraq 2005 to gain military advantage (McWilliams 2022, p. 25).

- (6) **Preservation and conservation** discusses the different perspectives of the attacker and the defender, but also other actors like international organisations. This category is a conflicted one since the opinions are divided. In the west the conservation and protection of what may be or has been destroyed in war seems obvious, but some people mean cultural heritage is a process and that this so-called conservation is hindering the cultural process (McWilliams 2022, p. 26). Furthermore it is suggested that cultural heritage can be used as warmaking just by conserving it. An example made by Dan Hicks cited in (McWilliams 2022, p. 26) is the thousands of objects looted by the British army in their attack on the kingdom of Benin in 1897 which are now scattered around more than 150 museums and other galleries. According to Hicks this has been used to separate the civilised from the uncivilised and as a weapon for colonisation, something that continues when they are portrayed in museums. From this perspective it is possible to view the conservation as a continuum of what on the surface can look like a finished conflict (McWilliams, 2022, p. 26).

- (7) **Cultural Heritage after war** is divided into three categories; cultural heritage to unite and remember, forensics and cultural heritage for peace. They all relate to the processes and values cultural heritage can play after a conflict and how they are important in different ways. Analysing and understanding cultural heritage and the role it played after a war is crucial in order to be able to protect it. It is however important to understand there are always different opinions and agendas and there is always a risk that even peace encouraging operations can be used to promote certain actors interests (McWilliams 2022, pp. 27-29)

5. Methodology

This section presents the methodological framework - Critical discourse analysis, leading us on to the operationalisation. Further the material will be presented along with the limitations and case selection of this study.

5.1 Critical discourse analysis

In this study where statements made by Putin will be analysed, a critical discourse analysis will be applied. A critical discourse analysis is a part of the broader field of discourse analysis, and focuses on power, identity and how text constructs social structures. It also empirically studies the relations between discursive practices and social and cultural development (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000, p. 66). Since this study aims to study the use of language in relation to hierarchical and social structures especially in combination with a critical theory - the critical discourse analysis is well suited for the purpose. Furthermore Winther Jørgensen & Phillips (2000, p. 67) informs us that subjects popularly used in critical discourse analyses are those regarding mass communication and racism, nationalism and identity, which is strongly linked to the subject of this study. There is therefore support for using this method in the study of Putin's mass communication in relation to nationality and identity.

5.1.1 Fairclough's CDA

In this study specifically Fairclough's three dimensional model will be applied. The model is divided into three different analytical parts, one called *text*, one called *discourse practice* and the last one called *social practice* (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000, p. 74).

The first dimension of Fairclough's three dimensional model is reserved to the analysis of *text*. This part is used to analyse how texts describe a phenomenon and if the texts contain words loaded with meaning. It can also portray whether the conveyor of the message has a certain attitude toward the phenomenon portrayed (Fairclough 1995, pp. 4-5). Fairclough also points out that it isn't only what is *in* the text that is worth analysing, but also what is left out. Therefore it is important that the way the text is analysed is connected to social processes, since words don't exist in a vacuum (Fairclough 1995, pp. 4-5).

The second dimension is called the discourse practice and this part of the analysis shows how those who produce texts, draw upon social variables which relate to constituted discourses.

Discourses and discursive events can both restructure discourses but also be dependent upon and conformed by them (Fairclough 1995, p. 10). The goal is to identify linguistically which discourses the texts draw upon and reproduce (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000, p. 85).

The dimension of social practice brings the textual information and the discourse practice together and into a broader context called the social, or sociocultural practice (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000, p. 90). For example the researcher may discuss if the discourse practice reproduces the order of discourse and therefore maintains status quo within the social practice or if it transforms the web of discourses and creates social change (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000, p. 90).

5.2 Operationalisation

The operationalisation will combine the theoretical framework by McWilliams (2022) and elements from Fairclough's CDA. The analysis will be structured by following those of McWilliams (2022) categories that were most frequently found in Putin's speeches, followed by an analysis based on Fairclough's textual dimension. In order to place Putin's statements into McWilliams seven categories a qualitative analysis of the statements is performed. This means an interpretation - through a postcolonial approach - of what Putin says is done, further assuming this can be said to represent his motives. Following this the analysis discusses these motives in regards to postcolonial theory and colonial and imperial discourses. The analysis is strengthened by infusing elements from Fairclough's CDA. In the textual dimension one finds the characteristics of the text and in what ways a discourse is produced textually - as stated by Fairclough - no texts exist in a vacuum. In the second (discursive) dimension an analysis on how the statements (texts) draw from and relate to colonial - and imperialist - discourses is conducted. The third dimension will try to answer the question: What can be the effects and consequences in society of possible reproduction of these discourses? Since the war in Ukraine is ongoing it is not possible to fully analyse any actual consequences of the reproduced discourse, however a speculative discussion can and will be had based on the information gained in this research.

Additionally, this study will follow an abductive research process which means an intercommunication between theory and the material (Esaiasson et. al 2012, p. 276). In this case it means the choice of using a postcolonial framework is related to the conclusions drawn from analysing the material through McWilliam's framework.

5.2 Material and limitations

The analysis will be done by examining statements made by Vladimir Putin, the Russian president on the Kremlin's official website. The material used will span between the beginning of the invasion of Ukraine until now. The material for this paper has been chosen strategically which could be seen as weakening the validity of this paper, but the aim with this research is to analyse only specific parts of Putin's speeches. If a random selection would have been done, it would not be certain that the relevant material would have been chosen. Not analysing the most relevant material would also mean the validity of this paper would decrease. An option could have been to analyse all Putin's speeches since the start of the war, however the amount of material has been chosen to fit the scope of this research and its limits. For this reason only a specific set of statements made by Putin will be analysed. To come to the conclusion on which statements to use, the English statements since the start of the invasion will be read, and scanned with the searchwords "culture" or "cultural" to easier find relevant quotes. However, not only quotes based on the search words are picked, the search words are only used as a tool to more easily find relevant segments in the speeches. After this a decision is made on how many and which statements are to be analysed, based on their relevance to what is to be studied. 10 different statements are used as foundation for the analysis, however only 6 quotes are illustrated empirically, derived from 4 different statements.

The reason for choosing the Kremlin's website as a source is because the statements posted are a first hand source of Putin's words, which makes the statements more credible and relevant to use. Secondly this is a Russian source where the news are widely spread across Russia and its population. However these statements are published in English, which may affect the bias of the information since they may be angled to fit the English speaking audience. A possible solution to using Putin's statements in Russian would have been to use

some sort of translating device, however there would be no way to check if the translation was correct, and therefore using such methods could lower the reliability of this research. Furthermore, studying Putin's motives in not only a Russian context but also an international context is interesting, especially in relation to the fact that attacks on cultural heritage can be seen as a way to affect international politics. Therefore the statements published in English will be analysed with a notation of the possible angle of the message.

A further challenge with this research is using a method which relies on the interpretation of the researcher. However, being conscious of one's own biases beforehand can lower the risk of interpreting based on personal thoughts and approaches to the information being studied. In order to avoid such biases I will be aware of any possible personal presumptions and stay true to facts and theoretical frameworks, and as far as possible interpret information based on knowledge and theory, in order to be as objective as possible. Furthermore this research will strive to be as transparent as possible with the process.

5.3 Case Selection

The reasoning behind choosing attacks on Ukrainian heritage in the Russian-Ukrainian war and not another conflict is its relevance in being an ongoing conflict, and one which has affected the western world on a larger scale than many other conflicts. The western world has not experienced war in decades, which makes the conflict highly relevant since it has gained widely spread recognition. Russia is also seen as one of the major actors in geopolitics which mean they have the possibility to affect discourses through their statements and actions.

6. Analysis

In this section an analysis based on McWilliams framework for motives is presented. 10 speeches are used as foundation for the claims, however only quotes from 4 statements are illustrated empirically. Only the categories in which the statements fit are presented here, along with quotes from Putin's speeches. Since some of the quotes fit several categories, they occasionally reappear, however the highlighted words are used as a guide as to which parts of the quotes are relevant for the said motive. The analysis will also apply a postcolonial lens in

a textual, discursive and social context to tie McWilliams framework to CDA and the theoretical context. Since the quotes can be linked to several of the motives, and the motives sometimes overlap, the postcolonial analysis will tie the different motives together with the imperial and colonial discourse in running text, shifting between motives in text.

6.1 Category (1) - A misuse of history

Throughout the 10 analysed speeches Putin portrays his motives through a misuse of history which is illustrated by the following quotes.

*“I want to emphasise again that **all responsibility** for the **possible bloodshed will lie fully and wholly with the ruling Ukrainian regime.**” (Kremlin, 2022 a)*

By portraying the Ukrainian regime as the ones to blame for the war and for the consequences of it, Putin misuses history to his own advantage, since the invasion was initiated by Russia, and the attacks on people and culture are a result of Russia’s attacks.

*“This is the **great liberating mission of our nation.***

*We will definitely **rebuild** the destroyed cities and towns, the (...), theatres and museums. We will **restore and develop** (...) education systems.*

*We will certainly work to improve the level of security. Together we will make sure that citizens in the **new regions** can feel the **support of all the people of Russia**, of the entire nation, all the republics, territories and regions of our **vast Motherland.**” (Kremlin, 2022 b)*

*“They see our thought and our philosophy as a **direct threat**. That is why **they target** our philosophers for assassination. Our **culture and art present a danger to them**, so they are trying to **ban them.**” (Kremlin, 2022 b)*

*“The battlefield to which **destiny and history have called us** is a battlefield **for our people, for the great historical Russia.**(...) For the great historical Russia, for future generations, (...). We must **protect them against enslavement and monstrous experiments** (...)*

*Today, **we are fighting** so that it would never occur to anyone that Russia, our people, our language, or **our culture can be erased from history.** Today, we need a consolidated society, and this consolidation can only be based on sovereignty, freedom, creation, and justice. **Our values are humanity, mercy and compassion.**” (Kremlin, 2022 b)*

All three quotes in the second speech show strong signs of a misuse of history where Putin repeatedly talks about Russia's “endangered” history and culture, but also about the great motherland and strong Russia which he intends to rebuild. By portraying Russia as a victim throughout history and motivating his actions by arguing he is rebuilding culture in the - by Russia - attacked regions and their cultural sites, he is per definition trying to rewrite history to his own advantage (McWilliams, 2022).

*“Cultural development will be a priority of **rebuilding peaceful** life in Donbass and Novorossiya. We will have to **rebuild, repair** and provide equipment to hundreds of **cultural facilities** there (...) which help people feel the connection between the past and the present and create a link to the future, to feel their affiliation with the **common cultural, historical and educational space of the centuries-old great Russia.**” (Kremlin, 2023 a)*

As context for the reader Donbass is a region where Russia has destroyed several cultural sites such as churches, museums, theatres and monuments. Without addressing Russia’s own involvement in the destruction Putin proceeds to preach about repairing the cultural facilities in the region whilst talking about the common cultural, historical and educational space of ‘great Russia’. This neglects the independent Ukrainian history and culture, and is a way to rewrite history to fit the Russian narrative and is therefore a misuse of history (McWilliams, 2022)

*“(...) the legendary ancient Arch of Triumph in Palmyra, Syria, was destroyed by terrorists. (...) **Russia and our people have a deeply recognised responsibility for the preservation of world heritage and traditional values. It is in our national character (...) to care for the preservation of our common heritage – I am referring now to the Russian language.**”* (Kremlin, 2023 b)

Putin argues he is striving to preserve cultural heritage which *could* place his outspoken motives under category (6) - however he argues to do so by protecting specifically *Russian* culture and language. Putin is hence shifting the narrative of history to portray his motives in good light, which would also make this a misuse of history, since he does in fact destroy cultural heritage himself - but argues he does not (McWilliams, 2022). Putin furthermore portrays Russia as the victim and the attacks being acts of self-defence. By doing this he frees himself from the responsibility and shifts the blame. He is with his words shifting the narrative of the war, which is also a part of his misuse of history (McWilliams, 2022). This becomes exceptionally clear when he states the Ukrainian regime will be blamed for all possible bloodshed. In the same quote he says that those who try to stand in their way and try to create threats to Russia, must know Russia will respond immediately. By using words like *threats* when describing actions against Russia and *respond* when talking about Russian actions, he linguistically makes it seem like the others are the aggressors and Russia the defenders, once again misusing history. Putin moreover uses words such as *defend* and *liberating* when describing their own actions. He also talks about “them” seeing Russian culture, philosophy, art and thoughts as a threat, and how “they” are trying to ban Russian art and assassinate Russian philosophers.

6.2 Category (2) - Psychological influence

There is some evidence for Putin attacking cultural heritage with the motive of using psychological influence throughout the speeches, illustrated for example in the following quotes:

*“No matter who tries to stand in our way or all the more so create threats for our country and our people, they must know that **Russia will respond immediately, and the consequences will be such as you have never seen in your entire history.** No matter how the events unfold, **we are ready.** (...)*

Citizens of Russia,

*The **culture and values, experience and traditions of our ancestors** invariably provided a powerful underpinning for the wellbeing and the very existence of entire states and nations, their success and viability. Of course, this **directly depends** on the (...) **readiness** to consolidate and **summon all the available forces** in order to move forward.”*

(Kremlin, 2022 a)

This statement (Kremlin, 2022 a) was released on the day of the invasion. Within only a few days of the invasion the Ivankiv historical and local history museum was burned to the ground, including some of the works of Maria Prymachenko, as mentioned in the introduction of this paper.

Putin emphasises the willpower and strength of the Russian forces, and makes threats by saying *“The consequences will be such as you have never seen in your entire history”*. In relation to speaking about the Russian culture, traditions and values he says that this (the culture/traditions/values) wholly depends on the military advance of Russian forces. When making this connection to the events only days later one could thus argue the attacks on Ukrainian cultural heritage were meant to psychologically influence the Ukrainian culture and attack their identity, and through this claim power (McWilliams, 2022). In all of the segments from Putin's three speeches he proclaims the greatness of Russia such as:

*“The battlefield (...) is a battlefield **for our people, for the great historical Russia**”* (Kremlin, 2022 b)

saying this is a war fought for the greatness of Russia and does so in regards to Russian culture. He mentions how Russia will defend its culture militarily and will assemble its

forces, that Russia is ready to defend themselves no matter what and that Russia will respond immediately to threats. He also states

*“(...) citizens in the **new regions** can feel the support of all the people **of Russia (...) and regions of our vast Motherland.**”* (Kremlin, 2022 b)

and

*“feel the affiliation with the common cultural (...) space of the centuries-old **great Russia**”.* (Kremlin, 2023 a)

All of these are glances at the old imperial Russia, and using them in affiliation to culture signals political and cultural power. This can be seen as a way to use psychological influence by portraying Russia as great - in relation to him at the same time attacking cultural heritage - possibly hoping to undermine the will-to-defend among the Ukrainian people.

6.3 Category (3) - Ethnic and cultural cleansing

Furthermore Putin can be said to have ethnic and cultural cleansing as underlying motives for his attacks. In the following quotes such tendencies are portrayed:

*“... The **culture and values**, experience and traditions **of our ancestors** invariably provided a **powerful** underpinning for the **wellbeing** and the **very existence** of entire states and nations, their **success** and **viability**. Of course, this directly depends on the (...) readiness to consolidate and **summon all the available forces in order to move forward**”*

(Kremlin, 2022 a)

In this quote we can see the direct threats in Putin's message along with the glorification of the own country's values. He threatens to summon all available forces in order to uphold the culture of Russia (ancestors). With the context of him attacking Ukrainian cultural heritage while glorifying the Russian cultures, the implicit meaning of this statement can be seen as a beginning of ethnic and cultural cleansing.

*“We will definitely **rebuild** the **destroyed** cities and towns, the (...) , **theatres and museums**. We will restore and **develop** (...) education systems.*

*We will certainly work to **improve** the level of security. Together we will make sure that citizens in the **new regions** can feel the support of all the people **of Russia**, of the entire nation, all the republics, **territories and regions of our vast Motherland**.” (Kremlin, 2022 b)*

*“They see **our thought and our philosophy** as a direct **threat**. That is why they **target our philosophers** for assassination. **Our culture and art** present a danger to them, so they are trying to ban them. **Our development and prosperity** are also a threat to them because **competition is growing**. They do not want or need **Russia, but we do**.*

*I would like to remind you that in the past, ambitions of world domination have repeatedly shattered against the **courage and resilience of our people**. **Russia will always be Russia**. We will continue to defend our values and our **Motherland**.” (Kremlin, 2022 b)*

*“Today, we are **fighting** so that it would **never occur** to anyone that **Russia, our people, our language, or our culture can be erased from history**.” (Kremlin, 2022 b)*

Putin here portrays Russian culture as endangered, but also as superior. By doing this he motivates his attacks on Ukrainian cultural heritage. Furthermore the statements could be seen as evidence for ethnic and cultural cleansing. Putin explains how they are fighting so that Russian culture can not be erased from history and he repeatedly talks about the motherland Russia. The wording of Russia being the only legitimate culture can be seen as cultural cleansing of the Ukrainian peoples culture (McWilliams, 2022).

*“Cultural development will be a priority of **rebuilding** peaceful life in **Donbass** and **Novorossiya**. We will have to **rebuild, repair** and provide equipment to hundreds of **cultural** facilities there, including museum collections and buildings, which **help people feel the connection** between the past and the present and **create a link** to the future, to **feel their affiliation with the common cultural, historical and educational space of the centuries-old great Russia.**”*

It becomes even more clear that Putin wants to erase Ukrainian culture in this quote. These are regions which have suffered attacks on cultural heritage. He says he wants the people in the region to feel their past and future affiliation to ‘great Russia’ by rebuilding the culture, which neglects the existence of Ukrainian history and culture in the region and can therefore be seen as cultural cleansing (McWilliams, 2022).

“(...)Palmyra, Syria, was destroyed by terrorists. (...)

***Russia** and our people have a deeply recognised responsibility for the **preservation of world heritage** and traditional values. It is in our national character (...) to **care for the preservation of our common heritage – I am referring now to the Russian language.**”*

Putin also here enhances the supremacy of Russian culture. He attacks Ukrainian cultural heritage, while arguing he protects cultural heritage. He follows up by saying that the preservation of common heritage is a reference to the Russian language. Implicitly saying he preserves Russian heritage. What is also interesting is examining what is being *left out* of Putin’s speeches, something crucial in the textual analysis by Fairclough. There are several examples of Putin leaving out information in his speeches, like when he talks about rebuilding peaceful life in Donbass and Novorossiya through cultural development. Left out of the speech are the reasons for having to rebuild culture in these regions, which are as mentioned earlier the attacks performed by Russian troops on Ukrainian cultural heritage. Putin moreover says they will rebuild the destroyed cities and towns and their theatres, museums and education systems. Once again not mentioning Russia being the reason for the destruction. By doing this he sends a message on which culture is to be viewed as superior and which culture is inferior, which can be related to cultural cleansing.

6.4 Putin's motives in regards to postcolonial theory

By using adjectives like “Historical”, “Great”, “Centuries-old” and “Vast” Putin also stylistically enhances the power of Russia, also referencing the historically widespread Russian empire. Putin uses several linguistic stylistics such as using the terms “we/us” and “they/them” to differentiate between the Russian people and the enemy. The enemy being the west, which becomes clear when reading the complete speeches. By doing this he enhances the status of the “own” and degrades the “others”.

It has also become clear after analysing the speeches textually that Putin's speeches include elements from colonialism and imperialism. First of all he repeats the greatness of Russia and often draws a connection between its greatness and its history, which can be interpreted as a hint to the previously great imperial Russia. Cultural imperialism today can be seen as cultural dominance asserted through media, hegemony and power, which there are clear signs of in Putin's speeches and actions. Putin asserts their (Russia's) military and political power through attacking Ukrainian cultural heritage. Through the media this dominance is further asserted since he switches the narrative in favour of Russia by applying a misuse of history. Furthermore he enforces through his words in his speeches, a hegemony on which culture is supposed to be highest valued, by saying he will rebuild culture (Russian culture) in regions such as Donbass, regions in which he has already destroyed Ukrainian cultural sites. A part of cultural colonialism is portraying one culture as superior to others (cultural cleansing) which Putin manages to do several times in his speeches, although not always so direct it is possible to interpret the message without the context.

However, at times Putin's intentions are blatantly clear. For example Putin clearly states he through rebuilding cultural life will “...*help people feel the connection between the past and the present and create a link to the future, to feel their affiliation with the common cultural, historical and educational space of the centuries-old great Russia.*” (Kremlin, 2022 b)

By connecting the past, present and the future he wants people in the “new” regions to recognise their connection to the centuries-old great Russia's (former imperial rule), through its cultural, historical and educational space. This is a prime example of enforcing one's culture onto the non-dominant group or less powerful country. This is done by both military

force and later through education, something Putin clearly states. Putin's motives for attacking Ukrainian cultural heritage can therefore be argued to fit all the three above, and seen as textbook cultural imperialism.

Moreover, another sign of imperial tendencies in Putin's speeches is how he claims this is "*the great liberating mission of our nation.*" (Kremlin, 2022 a) when invading Ukraine and attacking its cultural heritage. As mentioned imperialism is often excused as the means of liberating peoples, and when putting Putin's speech into context it becomes clear he is justifying the invasion of Ukraine by arguing he is liberating Russian people. Imperialism is also often justified by promising blessings of a superior way of life, arguments which can be found in Putin's speeches. For example when stating: "*Together we will make sure that citizens in the new regions can feel the support of all the people of Russia, (...) of our vast Motherland.*" (Kremlin, 2022 b) This is said in a quote where he also talks about rebuilding and developing the culture and education in the regions. Putin promises the people of Ukraine a better life, which when reading further would mean a Russian life with Russian culture. The imperialistic and colonial discursive elements in Putin's speeches are indubitable.

What is interesting however, and possibly somewhat deviant from the colonial and imperial discourse is the way he portrays Russia as a victim of the west's imperialism and claims they pose a threat to Russia and its culture (Kremlin, 2022 b), at the same time he repeats the greatness of Russia. This could be interpreted as a way to shift the blame and "hide" Putin's own imperialistic tendencies behind arguments of protection and defence of his own population. The same goes for when he claims to protect cultural heritage (Kremlin, 2023 b). This is also where understanding the source of these texts. Since these are translated speeches into english, it is expected an english speaking audience will read the statements. This may very well mean Putin paints this narrative in order to blame the west for the events, and his arguments could be skewed to free himself of the blame. As mentioned previously Putin also leaves out any actual evidence in his speeches for his actual attacks on Ukrainian cultural heritage. He talks about defence, forces and the likes but never actual attacks performed by Russian forces. It is highly plausible this is due to the fact that the audience for these speeches is the west. It is therefore important to add context to his speeches, such as actual events to be able to dig deeper in his statements.

In spite of this, there is overwhelming evidence for the argument that Putin draws from imperial and colonial discourses in regards to the motives for his attacks on cultural heritage and culturally important sites in Ukraine.

Although many former empires have been dissolved, the traces of imperialist and colonial discourses are still very well present. Reproducing colonial and imperialist discourses pose a threat to peaceful life and to international laws and regulations, such as the 1954 Hague convention. Colonialism and imperialism is also inherently harmful for those who are exposed to it. Putin does through his way of speaking - such as misusing history - reinforce colonial and imperial discourses, and reinforcing such discourses may lead to further harm, and by justifying attacks on Ukrainian cultural heritage further damage risks being done. Reinforcing harmful language may also normalise its use and therefore desensitise people to it.

Media has also grown more prominent in shaping discourses, even in war, and since the Russian government owns the rights to media coverage in Russia it precipitates the Russian government to paint whatever narrative is most suitable for them, which in this case is filled with arguments of cultural superiority, misuse of history and imperial and colonial discourses. By using language which portrays the Russian people and Russian culture as superior, it can reinforce this hegemonic way of thinking amongst the Russian population. By upholding a colonial and imperial discourse among those who are exposed to his speeches, the violence toward Ukrainian cultural heritage may become more and more justified, especially within Russian held regions. As mentioned by Brosche (et. al 2017, p. 9.) competing identities have previously been known to cause conflict, and a belief of the right of a certain territory has been known to do the same, and with this use of colonial language Putin aims to gain psychological advantage by attacking the Ukrainian identity. Therefore, the arguing itself of Russians being superior and as having rightful claim to Ukrainian territory, may consequently lead to further damage done.

Furthermore cultural heritage has become a more prominent part of international conflict and security, and when cultural heritage is highly valued it becomes a more vulnerable target in conflicts (McWilliams 2022, p. 31). Therefore a reproduction of a discourse which may cause

heightened tensions between national identities and where culture and heritage is closely tied to conflict, this kind of targeting of cultural heritage in war and conflict may become a more frequently used weapon. A reproduction of the discourse hence sets a norm for behaviour in conflict, and with Putin reinforcing such a standard in warfare, it may cause other actors in war to target cultural heritage to a larger extent than before.

7. Discussion

After analysing the different elements of the speeches new insights have been gained. Even though it's almost impossible to claim to understand what Putin's true motives are -since they are only known to himself - we can argue based on his statements that his motives for attacking cultural heritage in Ukraine are based on gaining psychological advantage, misusing history and as a dawning of cultural cleansing. This is done by also drawing from a colonial and imperial discourse. Prominent elements have been the repetition of the greatness of Russia, the want to create Russian cultural sites in the vacuum of destroyed Ukrainian cities, and threats of further military use. Putin's behaviour has already crossed the boundaries for what is legal according to the 1954 Hague convention, and his speeches show no sign of intentions to cease neither the invasion nor the attacks on Ukrainian cultural heritage. The consequences of Putin's motives for his iconoclasm in Ukraine is yet to be known.

8. Conclusion

Throughout history cultural heritage has been a target in war and conflict. However the research on why it is being attacked is surprisingly hard to come by. The reason for this study was therefore to explore the existing gap in research on why cultural heritage is targeted.

This led to the following research question:

What are Putin's motives for attacking cultural heritage in Ukraine?

The question was answered through analysing statements from the Kremlin's website, made by Putin. This was done with a framework developed by Anna McWilliams on motives for attacking cultural heritage. The statements then underwent an analysis on a postcolonial theoretical framework, and by using elements from Fairclough's CDA. What this study has found is that Putin justifies his attacks on Ukrainian heritage by drawing from colonial and imperial discourses. It was also found that his motives for attacking cultural heritage are misusing history, using psychological influence and also, a form of ethnic and cultural cleansing. The conclusions drawn from this study are that in this case history, culture, identity and war are intertwined and the attacks on cultural heritage are neither random nor mistakes. There is strong support for the claim that Putin, through his attacks on Ukrainian culture, strives to be able to rebuild what he pictures as the Great Russia.

For future research one could broaden this study by examining Putin's speeches in Russian, to explore if there is any difference on how he portrays his attacks internally versus externally. One could also conduct a similar research on another conflict, to see if there are similarities or differences in motives between Putin and other actors. Despite the angle of incidence, the subject of cultural heritage in war is a topic worth studying further.

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