The President as a Perception-setting agent:

Presidential Rhetoric, the Russian State and Identity, and the Search for Political Legitimacy in Post-Soviet Russia.

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Dedication:

I would like to dedicate this work to my Grandi, Joyce Kathleen Prendergast, whose love, support and life has served as a model for me throughout my twenty-one years. And without whom, I would not be the person I am today.

I thank, love and miss you.
I declare,

This work is substantially my own, and where any part of this work is not my own, I have indicated this by acknowledging the source of that part or those parts of the work.

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Abstract:

Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 the state that has emerged, the Russian Federation, has been engulfed in a search for a legitimate and valuable identity and role for the state. This search was given new life in 2000, with the ascendency of Vladimir Putin to the Presidency, and a new Russia attempted to rise from the decay and instability of the 1990's. The Presidential perceptions of the Russian state and identity, under Putin and his successor Dmitri Medvedev, have represented a concerted and largely continuous attempt at crafting a Russian idea that both projects an image of the Russian state and identity, and simultaneously confers legitimacy to state structure.

Through a discourse analysis of the President's *Annual Address to the Federal Assembly*, from 2000 to 2011, this perception of state and identity can be illuminated. The use of narratives, symbols, myths and cultural memory to create this continuous image of Russia and craft Presidential legitimacy from this narrative, constitutes the main concern of this thesis. The research aims to analyse the Presidential perceptions of state and identity, asking two core questions: how has the Presidency attempted to shape the Russian state and identity through their rhetoric? and Why? Analysing the specific narratives used, the attempts at narrating an idea of Russia that provides continuity with periods of past state legitimacy and the attempt at legitimating both Presidential power and the new state (the Russian Federation), this article provides an invaluable understanding of the President's attempts at shaping and legitimising the new Russia.
INTRODUCTION:

PRESIDENTIAL LEGITIMACY, through perceptions of STATE and IDENTITY.

Post-Soviet Russia has faced the existential challenge of creating not only a country from the ashes of empire, but finding a role for the state and an identity that bridges past, present and future. From the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation (RF) was created, and was plagued by the existential questions of who, where and what constituted the RF, questions that became an area of contestation and a search for legitimacy. This challenge occurred because the:

'excessive centralisation and enforced certainties of the Soviet system gave way to the fragmentation and uncertainties of a porous Russian Federation... uncertainty in a time of drastic change has produced a kind of cultural–psychological nervous breakdown' (Billington, 2004: xi).

The Russian psyche, following the shocks of the nineties, thus became the battleground for the creation of a legitimate idea of the Russian state and identity.

Within this context, the post-2000 period has borne witness to attempts by the Presidency to become the core actor and represent the most legitimate idea of Russia; attempting to legitimate the Russian state through their projection of a Russian
narrative. Thus the President as a perception-setting agent, and arguably the core political actor in the Russian system, has emerged as instrumental in shaping the way the Russian state and identity is understood. The discourse, themes and symbols used by the Presidents to narrate their perceptions of the Russian state and identity to illustrate their vision of Russia and to confer legitimacy on the nascent Russian political system form the core this research. As such the Presidential choice of language, both new and old, attempts to shape the state’s image along three core narratives: a strong state, a unified state and the democratic state. The Presidential perception of Russian identity as a multiethnic nation with a rich historical experience as an empire, follows the core debates of Russian identity that have developed over several centuries. As such, the President as a perception-setting agent draws heavily on history and cultural memory of Russia to craft and project a narrative of Russian identity. From this analysis, it can be understood how the narratives chosen also reveal the core purpose of Presidential rhetoric and visions of Russia: to legitimise the current regime and the state itself.

Aim, Approach and Significance

The following research essentially asks two interrelated questions: how the Presidents shape perceptions of the Russian state and identity? and why they shape perceptions? In answering these questions, it is important to distinguish the Russian state and
identity as separate entities from the perceptions of these entities. Thus the object of analysis shall be the Presidential conception of the Russian state and identity, the manifestations of these perceptions in Presidential rhetoric and how these manifestations help legitimise the state and regime; the object of analysis is not these two entities as they exist outside the perceptions of the Presidency. Through analysis of Presidential rhetoric over the course of the last two Presidents, 2000 to 2011, these perceptions of the Russian state and Russian identity can begin to be unearthed and their purpose understood.

Focusing analysis on the *Annual Address to the Federal Assembly* from 2000 to 2012 (hereafter the Address/es), the change and continuity of the state and identity of Russia in the Presidential imagination can be observed and the ways each has developed in the post-USSR period can be unravelled. Using discourse analysis of these twelve texts, this thesis will explore the narratives, themes and discourses used to craft perceptions of both the state and Russian identity. Therefore the aim of this research is to uncover and understand both the content of the Presidential perceptions of state and identity, and to clarify the relationship between these perceptions and the Presidential attempts to legitimate the current political system.
Legitimacy of the state, the regime, the political structure, the idea of Russia and the President as an individual or institution are used interchangeably throughout this thesis, as each component is conflated within the Presidential rhetoric and imagination of the state and identity. Importantly, the object of analysis throughout this thesis is not the legitimacy of the state or the success of Presidential attempts to legitimate the regime; the analysis centres on understanding how the President attempts to create legitimacy through his rhetoric and the perceptions of Russia he projects. Sil & Chen employ a definition that understands legitimacy as constituted through the attitude of the populace and the extent that the populace believes the regime is providing a satisfactory order:

'this is effectively a Weberian understanding of legitimacy in that its conceptualisation depends not so much on the behaviour of leaders or the design of institutions as on how these are judged by those whom the leaders and institutions claim to represent' (Sil & Chen, 2004: 347–8).

This understanding of legitimacy is accepted by this thesis, however it is the way the leaders seek to shape the attitudes and judgements of the population towards the state that constitutes the object of analysis. In other words it is not the legitimacy of the state that is relevant here, but the envisioning of the President as a active agent in the process of generating legitimacy. Understanding how the President as a perception-setting agent actively seeks to engender state legitimacy, through his
rhetoric and the narrative it projects, is the object of analysis and represents the fundamental response to – Why the President seeks to shape the perceptions of the Russian state and identity? The narrative and image of the Russian state and identity analysed within this thesis is therefore seen as an attempt at creating state legitimacy.

The significance of this research can be found in the way both the Presidency and state legitimacy has developed in post-Soviet Russia. In the Putin and Medvedev eras the weakness and chaos of the Yeltsin era, although not entirely gone, has been replaced by a narrative of renewed state strength, unity and the reclamation of a sense of identity. This narrative is important not only to establishing their popularity, but vitally the legitimacy of the Russian political order; 'one of the most important problems confronting a new regime is the generation of a sense of legitimacy' (Gill, 2005: 480). The significance can therefore be found in gaining an understanding of the nature and purpose of the Russian idea that the Presidency projects through its rhetoric. Essentially aiming to demystify the Presidential perception of the Russian state and identity, and how this perception is related to the legitimation of the state.

Answering the questions of how and why the President perceives of the Russian state and identity represents only the first phase in a fuller understanding of this
relationship between the projection of a Russian idea and the legitimation of the political order, and importantly the impact of this relationship on the development of post-Soviet Russia. However, this research attempts to answer these questions and illustrate the important relationship between rhetoric, perception and legitimacy – within the constraints of this project.
Chapter I:
LITERATURE REVIEW, the Academic CONTEXT and the ROLE of this RESEARCH

The theoretical backdrop to this thesis aids in explaining the origins of many ideas, assumptions and understandings referred to throughout the following research. Therefore it is important to explore the theoretical groundwork previously laid out in scholarly literature and understand the framework for the following work. This helps not only in comprehending this thesis, but the significance of the research and its place within this theoretical landscape. Therefore the following overview falls into two groups of literature: nations and nationalism and Russian identity. Each contributes differently to the research laid out in chapters two and three, with this thesis sitting at the intersection of the these ideas.

Nations and Nationalism

Any discussion of the 'nation' and national identity would be remiss if it did not understand the debates surrounding the very idea of what constitutes a 'nation'. One side of the debate is found in the work of authors such as Benedict Anderson, who argues that the 'nation' represents a construction – 'it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign' (2006: 5–6). By
imagined Anderson did not mean false or non-existent, rather he was arguing that the 'nation' needs to be understood as a construction of social and communal affinity between individuals who will never meet but are connected by a shared sense of belonging to the nation; 'the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship' (2006: 7). Thus the nation is a construction of social relationships that bond strangers through shared ideas, languages and culturally constructed patterns of community. This is representative of the theoretical approach taken by the modernists, who include the likes of Anderson, Ernst Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm, and represents one side of the debate surrounding the 'nation'.

Anderson describes the paradox and fundamental divide in the scholar's conceptualisation of the nation, 'theorists have often been perplexed .... [by] the objective modernity of nations to the historian's eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists' (2006: 5). In other words, the debate between theorists regarding the concept of the 'nation' is represented on one side by the ideas proposed by modernists, such as Gellner who argues 'nationalism is a theory of political legitimacy' (2006: 1), with the 'nation' emerging in the era of modernity. On the other side of the debate are those who believe the 'nation' is a fixed concept, that it is both ancient and naturally occurring. The essential principle of this view, or primordialism, is summarised by Anthony D. Smith as 'the nation, as both category and form of
community, was recurrent, transhistorical and cross-cultural' (2009: 8). Pierre Van Den Berghe, argues that 'a nation is a politically conscious ethny, that is, an ethny that claims the right to statehood by virtue of being an ethny' (1987: 61) – representing the primordialist view of the nation and the argument that the nation emerges naturally and is ancient, not new or constructed.

This 'classic debate' (Smith, 2008:320), or schism, between modernists (such as Anderson, Gellner and Hobsbawm) and primordialists (such as Van Den Berghe, Fichte and Herder) underpins the various ways of conceptualising the 'nation'. One key early primordialist theorists was Johann Gottlieb Fichte who in his 1808 *Addresses to the German Nation* stated:

> Those who speak the same language are joined to each other by a multitude of invisible bonds by *nature* herself, long before any human art begins... they belong together and are by *nature one and an inseparable whole* (1922: 223–4. Emphasis added)

Primordialist views are now highly debated and modernist interpretations dominate the academic debate. Interestingly, the predominance of modernist views, over that of primordialists, is most evident within Western academic debate, whereas there is stronger role for primordialism within Russian intellectual debates. Tolz points out that Valerii Tishkov:
'kept reminding his readers that nations were modern phenomena... This view was already widely accepted by Western scholars, but less so by their Soviet colleagues and non-Russian ethnic elites, who insisted on the primordial, organic qualities of nations' (2003: 207).

When understanding this debate in the Russian context, Gellner's proposition that nationalism is theory of political legitimacy resonates with the findings of the following thesis. Particularly when analysing the President's attempts to project a sense of identity, the attempt must be seen as a search for legitimacy. In this way nationalism needs to be stripped of its negative connotations and its exclusive tendencies, instead envisioning nationalism as no more than a search for an idea of nation that can legitimate the nation or state. To this end, the view that the nation is purely a modern construct misses the vital role pre-modern myths, symbols and historical experiences have in crafting the idea of a nation.

From this classic schism, a new understanding of the 'nation' can be found, that merges the interest in the role of pre-modern myths, symbols and memory with the understanding of how these components fit into the modern paradigm of the 'nation'. A central example of this scholarship is the ethno-symbolism of Anthony D. Smith whose work argues for 'an "ethno-symbolic" reading which links modern nations to premodern ethnies through myth, symbol, memory, value and tradition' (2010: 4).
Another interesting strand is that of medieval historians who argue that nations change but their roots are traceable to at least medieval times. For example, Adrian Hastings uses England as a prototype nation for this argument, 'an English nation–state survived 1066' C.E. (1997: 5). However, combining both the historical approach of the modernist with the belief that ancient myths and memories are at the core of a nation and its identity, Smith provides perhaps the best understanding of nations as both new and old, both constructed and rooted in history. This will be an approach underpinning the following research, providing an understanding of Russia as a new state attempting to frame a post-Soviet identity whilst simultaneously exhibiting a history and cultural legacy that goes back at least several centuries. Importantly, how this combination aids in legitimating the new political order and legitimates the Russian identity. Smith's view that nations are social constructions, which are nonetheless based around ideas of national histories, memories and myths is a helpful frame through which to comprehend the role both a civic and an ethnic idea of Russia plays in both the Presidential and the broader public imaginations.

A second prevalent component to understanding what constitutes the 'nation' is found in the literature relating to the civic–ethnic divide. The civic–ethnic distinction is prevalent in the literature however the relationship between these two concepts of a nation is debated; in Smith's view 'the nation has come to blend two sets of
dimensions, the one civic and territorial, the other ethnic and genealogical, in varying proportions' (1991: 15). This distinction between, and combination of, civic and ethnic nationalisms will be highly useful in the Russian context, where the debate continues over the parameters of the nation – whether the parameter is civic or ethnic? Should the nation be defined ethnically or territorially? And what determines the parameters of this territory? This civic–ethnic divide, as articulated by Hans Kohn (1944, 1982), and authors such as Gellner (2006), is artfully criticised by authors such as Kuzio (2002). The criticism centres on Kohn’s use of a civic (Western) – ethnic (Eastern) dichotomy that relies on idealised forms, poses civic nations as exclusively Western and precludes any historical or contextual understandings of the relationship between the two forms of the nation (Kuzio, 2002: 20). Drawing on the work of scholars such as Smith (1991, 2000, 2009) who argue that all nations are both civic and ethnic in varying degrees, Kuzio argues that ‘pure civic or ethnic states only exist in theory. All civic states, whether in the West or East, are based on ethno–cultural core(s)’ (2002: 20, emphasis in original). This criticism is useful in the assessment of Russian identity and the contending ideas of Russia because it disproves the myth of ideal civic or ethnic nations. This produces a more nuanced understanding of the possibilities for Russia and the ability of both civic and ethnic ideas to concomitantly exist in the Presidential rhetoric, without undermining the legitimacy of the Russian idea.
Russian Identity

Before looking at the ways various scholars have approached the idea of Russia and the Russian identity, the core ideas or conceptions of Russia at play in the current political arena and the parameters of the identity debate should be outlined. Five core alternative definitions of Russia that persist in scholarly debate include a civic nation within current Russian territory, a civic nation within the territory of the former USSR, a nation of ethnic Russians, an ethnic nation of Eastern Slavs or an ethnic nation of Russian speakers (Shevel, 2011: 180). Oxana Shevel highlights the various models for a Russian state (albeit in ideal forms) and recognises difficulty in adopting any model exclusively, as each would exclude segments of society or would be geopolitically dangerous – therefore undermining the legitimacy of adopting any model in a pure form (an important assumption used throughout the following research). Shevel highlights the simultaneous use of civic and ethnic nationalism in the official rhetoric as a pragmatic choice, over the more ideological adoption of one ideal form.

The literature charting the various conceptions of the Russian nation also includes the work of Vera Tolz, whose work *Inventing the Nation: Russia* (2003) charts the official and intellectual identity debates since Peter the Great until the time of publication. Tolz's work provides an invaluable overview of the key paradigms and frameworks through which Russia can be imagined, and is included here in its own right as many
of the ideas utilised in Chapter Three of this thesis draw directly from Tolz’s work. Particularly helpful is the exploration of the three key narratives of Russia identity: Russia compared with the West, as a unique multi-ethnic community and as a community of Eastern Slavs (2003: 1). Tolz also puts considerable energy into discussion of two key questions of the post-Soviet period: who are the Russians and where is Russia (i.e. what are the correct borders) (2003). Through framing these core narratives and questions in historical perspective, Tolz’s work outlines the core fulcrums that Russian identity pivots around, providing a framework for understanding today’s identity debates and is essential to this thesis.

In addition, Tolz highlights the role of historical legacies; arguing the imperial legacy and the socialist concept of the Russian nation continue to impact nation-building today, ‘the Russian Federation itself is a legacy of the imperial past and of the absence of a genuine Russian nation–state’ (Tolz, 2003: 271). Indeed, the integration of both Tsarist and Soviet experience into contemporary identity is a continuous theme throughout the literature and is a foundational component to the Presidential vision of Russia. The debate surrounding the role of empire in Russian identity is an important sphere of literature for this thesis, as whether a nation has ever existed in Russia or if there has only been an empire is debated. For example, Geoffrey Hosking highlights the distinction between the elite and the masses, the state and the local community,
Rossiiskii and Russkii, to argue that 'neither in the civic nor in the ethnic sense, then, was Russia a nation by 1917' (1998: 451). Hosking continues that whilst the Soviet Union helped create a uniform identity through language and education, 'they may have promoted ethnic uniformity, but .... discouraged the creation of any civic sense of nationhood' (1998: 455). This development of cultural identity separate to the civic, or the 'nation', means that according to Hosking post-Soviet Russia has a 'more or less unified culture' (Hosking, 1998: 455). Therefore the nation, but not the state, is seen as existing prior to the RF, according to Hosking. The use of history and the national idea to legitimate the state structure is a continual refrain throughout this thesis.

Continuing the theme empire v. nation, the importance of empire in the Russian self-conception is another core theme in the literature. Richard Sakwa, for example, claims 'much of the post-Cold War malaise is derived from identity factors, in particular Russia's civilisational self-identification as a great power' (2011: 957). Discussing the double tradition of Soviet and Tsarist empires, Sakwa argues 'the present is viewed through the prism of historical concerns and achievements' (2011: 958). This is a singularly important assumption for understanding this thesis and the way that

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1 However, the claim that the USSR promoted ethnic uniformity is highly debatable, with many scholars arguing the very structure of the USSR meant nationalism was promoted. Slezkine argues 'uncompromisingly hostile to individual rights, they eagerly, deliberately and quite consistently promoted group rights that did not always coincide with those of the proletariat' (1994: 415) and that 'in a country free from social conflict, ethnicity was the only meaningful identity' (1994: 449). Eric Hobsbawm also argues that 'it was the Communist regime which deliberately set out to create ethno-linguistic territorial "nation administrative units"... where none has previously existed' (1992: 166).
Presidency uses the past to legitimate the present state. Also articulated by Tolz, a core idea was that the entire multi-ethnic tsarist empire was the Russian nation-state' (2003: 16). Thus importance of imperial legacies and the role of history in the literature is mirrored in the importance for framing the Presidential rhetoric regarding identity and the state. The past is an ever-present theme in the following research, as the Russian past is ever-present in the President's perception of Russia.

This is further developed by the idea of the past and present as interrelated and co-dependent in the search for a Russian identity. James H. Billington argues that 'past history was seen as defining future destiny, and questions about both past and future soon merged into the single issue of determining Russia's distinctive national identity' (2004: 12). This highlights a continual finding within the following research, the importance of the past in perceiving of the present, an idea that is fundamental to the following analysis of Presidential rhetoric – which heavily relies on the myths, symbols and memories of the past to demonstrate an idea of the present.

One field of literature on post-Soviet identity concerns 'the nature of contemporary Russian nationalism and the relationships among historical memory, national identity, and monuments' (Forest & Johnson, 2002: 524). The literature on monuments,
place/street names, architecture, landscapes and sites of historic and cultural significance and the interaction between the past and present that is represented at these sites, provides a rich field of research which aids in understanding the significance of symbolism and historical memory to this thesis. This literature highlights the 'politics of memory' (Forest & Juliet, 2002: 524), the notions of symbolic capital embodied in these sites, the contest between elites for the power to shape the narrative of the sites, and the importance in the post-Soviet period where 'a fundamental reworking of the symbolic universe of the society following the collapse of communism' occurred (Gill, 2008: 176). The significance of this body of literature can be seen in the Presidential employment of symbolism and historical memory throughout the speeches and the fundamental role it plays in the Presidential crafting of the state image and Russian identity; as Pal Kolsto argues, 'symbol politics is more about politics than about symbols' (2006: 697). Claiming that symbols, themselves, are arbitrary Kolsto highlights that 'the divisiveness vs. unifying potential of new state symbols is first and foremost a function of what and whom they are being associated with and how they are being exploited politically' (2006: 696). From this argument, the focus on symbols and how they are being used in Presidential rhetoric can be understood as a function of political exploitation of symbolic and cultural capital to associate the regime with legitimate symbols and narratives.
Particularly important is the understanding of historical symbols being co-opted, contested or disavowed in the post-Soviet period (Forest & Juliet, 2002: 525). The significance of symbols, and symbolism, in the legitimation of a new state can help explain the role of rhetorical symbolism in the Presidential speeches. Following an understanding of symbolism as a political tool, the introduction of legitimacy into the discussion is useful. Gill's discussion of Moscow place names demonstrates symbolism's ability to

'represent complex ideas and events and embed them within the popular consciousness and culture, symbols can facilitate an acceptance of the new regime and what it stands for... can legitimate action and belief... help to identify the bounds of the society and the principles by which it is governed' (2005: 480).

Useful for the following thesis is the development of the relationship between symbolism, legitimacy and a nascent political system. This relationship is developed in this thesis through employing the above assumptions regarding symbolism's ability to facilitate acceptance of a new regime. In this way, the use of rhetorical symbolism can be seen as an articulation of the state and national identity through a reliance on the meanings attached to pre-existing symbols and the legitimacy attached to those ideas; 'political symbolism legitimates the regime's power structure' (Gill, 2005: 480).
Connected to the discussion of symbols, and used somewhat interchangeably in the following thesis, is the significance of myths. Sherlock argues, 'in both the Russian and Soviet contexts, myths have served as powerful normative and symbolic frameworks for both elites and mass publics' (2007: 149), and the continuing power as a framework constitutes the content of this work. Focusing on the role of the Soviet in the post-Soviet era, Sherlock traces the early inability to deal with the past, 'most surprising was the inability of Yeltsin and his supporters to cultivate a foundation myth that would define in normative terms the political identity of the new regime' (2007: 160). However, Putin's state-building efforts found symbolism and myths of the Soviet past essential, Sherlock states:

'Putin believed that the restoration of a positive narrative of the past would help reverse widespread demoralisation and generate an essential store of symbolic capital for the task of rebuilding the Russian state and modernising the economy' (2007: 162).

The ability to create a master narrative of the Russian state and identity is at the heart of the President's rhetoric, and this thesis works from the understanding that the ability to craft such a narrative directly affects the generation of state legitimacy.
Beyond understanding the components of identity and the diverse approaches to Russian state legitimacy in the literature, it is important to see these debates as realms of contestation with different parties vying for political power. Written in 1998 Urban's "Remythologising the Russian State" analyses the discourses of political actors and groups within Russian domestic politics, concluding that 'given the constellation of forces in domestic politics, there appears to be no end in sight to the struggle waged over national identity' (1998: 986). Whilst other authors (see Tolz) attempt to show that the debates and discourses involved in the issues of identity are conflictual, Urban goes further and artfully demonstrates how the discourses reveal the underlying power battles surrounding identity. Each side assumes that Russia has lost its way and 'the blame for this debilitating condition belongs to nefarious opponents' (1998: 969). As each position encounters opposition, national identity (it can be extended from Urban's thesis to argue) becomes a site of contestation between different parties seeking power. Therefore the ability to craft a narrative and idea of Russia that resonates with the Russian people is an important part of this political contestation, as well the ability to legitimise the political system itself.

The Role of this RESEARCH
The research that will constitute chapters two and three of this work seeks to position itself within the intersection of this literature. Taking from the nationalism literature the understanding of nations as dependent on premodern myths and symbols, and simultaneously as modern constructs whose aim is the legitimation of the national idea and political system. Working specifically on Russia, the research below addresses the way these conceptions of the nation translate to the post-Soviet imagination of self. Particularly attempting to draw together a narrative of identity, understandings of Tsarist and Soviet symbols and legacies, the continuing debates over territory and ethnicity, and the roles these play in the presidential attempts to legitimate the new political order. The emphasis on legitimacy, being seen as vital for a new state, allows the research to answer both how the Presidents depict the Russian state and identity using myths, symbols and narratives and why the Presidents are attempting to craft a national narrative.

The following research therefore combines and borrows from the above works, seeking to synthesise in a new way the emphasis of each and demonstrate the interplay of these assumptions regarding symbols, myths, historical experience and the idea of a nation. Using the example of Presidential rhetoric to demonstrate how each of these categories feeds into the attempt by this political actor to craft the idea of Russia and from this legitimate the power structure of the new state, the Russian Federation.
Chapter II:
The STATE in the PRESIDENTIAL Imagination.

Introduction: A Russian State

Perceptions of the Russian state constitute the first of two key areas where the Presidency has sought to project its vision of Russia. In shaping perceptions of the Russian state, both Putin and Medvedev have anchored their rhetoric in three key themes: Russia as a strong state, a unified state and a democratic state. Analysing each in turn clarifies the character of Russia's state, through the eyes of the key political actor, the President, and reveals how the President wants the state to be perceived and understood. It is imperative to recognise that the context of the Yeltsin era is central to comprehending the vision of Russia which Putin, particularly, attempts to project. This vision stands as a comparison with:

'\textit{the myth of the "chaotic nineties", [which] indeed, became the master-narrative of the Putin years, a theme taken up by Medvedev..."Putinism" as an ideology is based on negation of the 1990s while continuing its fundamental projects: marketisation, democratisation and international integration}' (Sakwa, 2011: 961).
Both Putin and Medvedev rhetorically construct the Russian state of the nineties as an 'Other', or more correctly 'another Russia', which needs to be guarded against. Thus the 1990's serve as the rationale, within the Presidential rhetoric (post-2000), for the construction of a renewed perception of the state – employing three key faces, or narratives, of the state: the strong state, the unified state and the democratic state. Importantly, it is this context that enhances the need to build state legitimacy, and the legitimacy of the state system that imbues the Presidency with power\(^2\).

In comparison with the nineties, Presidential attempts at the rejuvenation and legitimation of the state's image has entailed a restoration of the Tsarist and Soviet era images of the state, particularly under Putin. Not to be misinterpreted as an attempt to return to the Tsarist or Soviet past, rather to recreate the sense of state strength, unity and trust in the effectiveness of the state machinery, in other words – the iconic features of the state in past eras. In this sense Putin and Medvedev are projecting the state, under their stewardship, as representing continuity with Russian history and development, continuity with times of Russian greatness, whereas the Yeltsin era is a departure from this path of Russian history. The themes of state strength and state unity in particular represent efforts to conjure the state of the past, where the perception of state strengthen and unity existed concomitantly with periods of Russian

\(^2\) "Available evidence points to a steady decline state legitimacy dating back to the mid-1990s .... [despite] the sustained popularity of the Putin administration" (Sil &Chen, 2004: 349).
greatness and periods of greater state legitimacy. The third theme, Russia as a democratic state, is a departure from the typical Russian state of the past and is representative more of the modern international landscape and Presidential visions of the modern state, particularly for Medvedev, however this theme equally important to the Presidential attempts at legitimation of the Russian power structure. The recreation of perceptions of Russian greatness, with allusions to the state of the past and the incorporation of the contemporary ideas of strength and unity, constitute the perception of the Russian state the both Putin and Medvedev attempt to project through their rhetoric.

The STRONG STATE: The First Face

When projecting an image of the Russian state, Putin invariably conjures the image of a strong state, or in the context of Russian history a re-strengthened state. Putin's continual emphasis on the need for a strong state can be interpreted as a rebuttal to the Yeltsin years, which saw the Soviet Union give way to a markedly smaller state, both territorially and in power, with weak governance and a reduced international standing. Therefore when giving his first Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation in 2000, Putin's allusions to building a strong Russian state resonated with an audience emerging from the instability and disintegration of the
1990's. Asserting that 'The only real choice for Russia is the choice of a strong country. A country that is strong and sure of itself' (Putin, 2000), Putin is beginning his administration with a firm choice about Russia's future. Following the collapse of the USSR, economic catastrophe of the early 1990's and the 1997/98 financial crisis, the period following 2000 has been an era of renewal and stabilisation. This renewal of the state's image represents the twofold purpose of Putin's rhetoric – firstly the restoration of the state and secondly (and connected) is the renewal of legitimacy of the state and concomitantly his position within the state structure. Therefore the strong state as a narrative of continuity with the Russian past represents the most obvious attempt by Putin to establish a link between the legitimacy of past states and the present state, casting himself as the redeemer of Russian past and the representative of a legitimate state structure.

Throughout each speech Putin returns consistently to the need for a strong state, a policy he continually justifies by attaching this goal to other vital outcomes. For example, 'But our position is very clear: only a strong, or ... an effective state and a democratic state is capable of protecting civil, political and economic freedoms, capable of creating conditions for people to lead happy lives and for our country to flourish' (Putin, 2000). Again in his 2001 Address Putin returns to this theme, 'to strengthen the state in the form of its institutions and all the levels of power. It was
clear that without resolving this key issue we would not achieve success either in the economy or in the social sphere' (Putin, 2001). The distinction must be made once more between the state as a separate entity and the perceptions of the state, which somewhat overlap here. Putin is conflating state strength and the perception of a strong state in his rhetoric, conveying the idea that the ability to project a strong state contributes to the strengthening of the state as a separate entity; to Putin rhetoric can shape not only the perception of strength but also the strength of the state itself.

Key to comprehending Putin's rhetoric, and the perception of Russia he seeks to project, is to understand what he envisions as a strong state; to Putin a strong state is essentially unified, effective and centralised. Again linking the strengthening of the Russian state to the realisation of important political and social goals, Putin warns against the perils of weakness. For example:

'the authorities' indecision and the weakness of the state will bring economic and other reforms to nothing... We have created separate “islands” of power, but have not built reliable bridges between them. We have yet to build effective cooperation between different levels of power... The centre and the territories, regional and local authorities are still competing among each other, competing for power' (Putin, 2000).
Inherent here is the view that a strong state is more than isolated, or vertical power, but bridges the different realms and levels of power within the entire political landscape of the Russian Federation – demonstrating the need for unity and centralisation rather than various loci of power. In addition, this example demonstrates one of the key planks of Putin’s reasoning for building a strong state: a weak state equals indecision and inaction which Putin conflates with the Yeltsin era. The notion of a strong central state is an attempt at legitimating the state through reference to historical memory – in this case invoking the memory of the strength of the central state in the USSR and dismissing the state weakness of the nineties.

Putin’s impetus to perceive of Russia as a strong state is fundamentally a defensive position, not merely a tool or rationale for policy realisation. Putin argues that Russia:

’need[s] to build our home and make it strong and well protected. We see, after all, what is going on in the world. The wolf knows who to eat, as the saying goes. It knows who to eat and is not about to listen to anyone, it seems’ (Putin, 2006).

Regardless of who the ‘wolf’ is, it is clear that Putin is responding to the perceived and actual weakness of Russia following the collapse of the USSR and the negative impacts on state strength, sovereignty and legitimacy. Putin came to office amid a diminished
state – territorially, financially and in ability to defend itself from international interference in the form of loans and debt from international financial institutions and Western economic policies ill-suited to the post-Communist Russian state of the 1990's. Within this backdrop Putin is emphasising a reclaiming of Russian independence, strength and state sovereignty and is therefore using the strengthening of the state's image as a core component in the defence of Russia from external and internal forces of decay. Defence against this state decay and the rhetorical emphasis on sovereignty, as components of the strong state, is attempting to legitimate the state's image through the regime's ability defend borders, sovereignty and the nation from threat.

The understanding of a strong state, for Putin particularly, involves the recollection of cultural memory from Tsarist and Soviet eras; 'Putin's government now began to construct a forceful narrative whose central theme was the organic connection among the tsarist, communist, and post communist periods, with the Russian state as the unifying element' (Sherlock, 2007: 161). The relationship between Russian identity and the Russian state is complex, however the ability of the state to provide a source of identity that provides continuity with previous eras of history is an important component of Putin's rhetoric and his attempt to conflate the legitimacy of past regimes and the present regime. Beyond the physical and material references to past
eras found in the response to various sites and symbols, whether 'co-opted/gl glorified, disavowed or contested' (Forest & Johnson, 2002:525) by the new regime, the rhetoric reveals much about the relationship between the state and the past. Putin's admiration for past eras is evident:

'Despite the problems we all know, the level of morality in tsarist Russia and during the Soviet years was always a very meaningful scale and criteria for people’s reputation, at work, in society and in private life' (Putin, 2005).

However, the role of the past in the perception of the contemporary state should not be seen as a one-dimensional attempt by Putin to bring back the past era or recreate an authoritarian state. Putin is using the memory of state strength and unity found in these eras, and the contrast it provides to the corruption and inefficiency of the Yeltsin eras, as a method of political legitimation. Indeed the creation of a strong state, which is effective, unified and provides the assurances to the populace that they remember from the pre-1991 era, represents the core of Putin's attempt at narrating the legitimacy of the state. By 'forging a symbolic connection between tsarist, Soviet and post-Soviet Russian states, Putin has sought to frame the "master fiction" that Geertz argued was necessary for political power' (Sherlock, 2007: 162). A narrative that is not necessarily dependent on the co-option of the Soviet anthem (Daughtry, 2003) or the reworking and renovation of places names (Gill, 2005). Rather Putin crafts a narrative that relies on the memory of the state's functioning and role in the lives of citizens in
past eras to imbue the state with the legitimacy found in the memory of these eras. In other words, rekindling the efficiency, reliability and strength of the state which is ingrained in the memory of citizens and which therefore evokes the sense of legitimacy the citizenry associated with the pre-1991 regime. In this way Putin uses the theme of the strong state, and the cultural memories it invokes, to craft a narrative of state legitimation that resonates with the Russian people and which casts Putin in the role of a redeemer of the Russian state.

The perception of a strong state and cultural memory and symbolism are necessary tools to the crafting of legitimacy, after all 'symbol politics is more about politics than about symbols' (Kolsto, 2006: 697). The impetus to project the perception of a strong state is fundamentally an attempt to craft state legitimacy through the crafting of this narrative; for legitimacy can be understood as stemming from the ability to project a vision of the state that is amenable to the people the state seeks to govern. The importance of cultural memory in the making of such a state, and vitally in its legitimation, therefore explains the role a narrative of state continuity plays within Putin's articulation of the Russian state and identity, as 'political symbolism [can] legitimates the regime's power structure' (Gill, 2005: 480). Therefore the rationale for Putin's narrative, which Medvedev continues, is fundamentally a search for legitimacy and a function of the perceived lack of legitimacy that came with the weakened state of
the nineties. Putin seeks this legitimacy through both the projection of a strong, effective state and the invocation of state continuity with past eras of perceived legitimate rule.

Medvedev and the perception of a strong state is quite different to the rhetoric of Putin. Firstly, the difference in the rhetoric can be partially accounted for by the changing political context. Medvedev's first Address was on the 5th November 2008, in August of that year the Russian–Georgian War took place and over that summer the global financial crisis began. In addition to these semi-external changes, Medvedev inherited a state that had undergone eight years of Putin's emphasis on re-strengthening the state and therefore was a vastly different state than the one Putin had inherited in 2000 from Yeltsin. All these contextual factors help account for Medvedev's ability to move beyond mere strengthening of the state and move beyond the need Putin felt to stress strength, stability and consolidation. Indeed, the idea of what constitutes strength begins to be redefined under Medvedev; for Putin strength is equated with unity and efficiency, for Medvedev strength is seen more in the power of democracy within Russia and the countering of a culture of 'legal nihilism' (Medvedev, 2008). For Medvedev strength comes from the state's accountability to the people and adherence to a legal and democratic framework – the narrative of democratic Russia
overlaps with the narrative of a strong state in the perception of Russia Medvedev seeks to project.

The first area of rhetorical difference between the two Presidents can be seen in the discussion of the international, specifically the Georgian War in Medvedev's first speech. From Putin's early emphasis on the need to be able to defend Russian territory, borders and Russians living in the former Soviet Republics, Medvedev can declare that:

>'In practice a qualitatively new geopolitical situation has been created... We really proved – including to those who sponsored the current regime in Georgia – that we are able to protect our citizens. That we are able to effectively defend our national interests and effectively carry out our peacekeeping responsibilities' (Medvedev, 2008).

Thus contextually state strength is displayed as largely achieved rather than an aim – not that internal strengthening is complete but that Russia has re-established control over borders and state sovereignty. This war is also different to the Chechen conflict that marked the beginning of Putin's first term, because this was with another independent state not a region of Russia itself. This conflict is not one of retaining control of Russia's own territory but is beyond its borders, into neighbouring regions and within the Soviet space. Therefore Medvedev's emphasis is not reinforcing the state in the fundamental and existential ways Putin is interested in, particularly in his
first term, because the context has shifted. Instead this dimension of state strength is displayed as proven through the success of Russian actions in this conflict and the impetus to defend sovereignty thus lessened.

This shift allows Medvedev's focus to be more on consolidation and what a strengthened state means for Russian development. Medvedev's emphasis on the internal state development focuses on moving to a more individual-led rather than state-led political and social system. The state has been strengthened and consolidated, now Medvedev wants to focus on strengthening the role of the individual. For example:

'the cult of the state and the illusory wisdom of the administrative apparatus have prevailed in Russia over many centuries... I would like to quote Pyotr Stolypin, who said, “What we need to do first is create citizens, and once this has been achieved civic spirit will prevail of its own accord in Russia. First comes the citizen and then the civic spirit, but we have usually preached the other way round”' (Medvedev, 2008).

Evident is Medvedev's view that the citizen and the state are not opposites, individual freedoms are not a threat but a sign of state strength. This contrasts with Putin's characterisation of the theme of the individual as a limitation on state power. Indeed,
where Putin sees the limits of the state – the inability to determine citizens' beliefs and that the state shouldn't intervene in the moral realms of life – Medvedev envisions the:

'continued decentralisation and humanisation of the social organisation and political system. The freer and more diverse our public life, the more dynamic our economy and the more intense our political competition, the more solid and stable will be the fundamental institutions of our democracy, the pillars that hold up the whole edifice of the democratic state' (Medvedev, 2008).

Inherent in this fragment is Medvedev's conception of a strong state as a democratic state, that strength should come from the freedom and development of individual citizens (See below, "The DEMOCRATIC STATE: The Third Face").

Medvedev's shift in rhetoric also represents a shift in the means used to legitimate the regime. To Putin legitimacy is to be gained through the projection of a strong state and a narrative contingent on cultural memory, instead Medvedev's attempt to imbue the regime with legitimacy rests firstly on casting the state as an instrument for the protection of the law in society and secondly on the assumption that a strong state respects the rights of the individual. Medvedev is casting his role in the narrative, less as the Putinesque redeemer and more as the moderniser or liberator who plays on the Russian peoples' perceived desire for the freedoms and opportunities of a modern society. Thus the emphasis on the need to strengthen the state is still present, with the rhetorical shift in the way the state is perceived representing both the change in
context and the different focus of Medvedev – whose emphasis is on the state strengthening the role of law and the importance of the individual within society. However the goals of Medvedev – 'Instead of the Russia of the past we will build the Russia of the present – a modern and forward-looking young nation able to take a worthy place in the global economy' (Medvedev, 2009) – are reminiscent of the Putin era rhetoric that incorporates themes of previous and future Russian greatness to justify the current state image.

The UNIFIED STATE: The Second Face

The second component of the Presidential characterisation of the state is the emphasis on a unified state. Once again this theme can be seen within the context of the destabilisation, disunity and disintegration of the 1990's – 'the epidemic of disintegration infected Russia itself' (Putin, 2005), but it also overlaps with the concept of a strong state. Linked to the desire to strengthen the state through consolidation of state, territory and various regions, Putin argues 'If we are to have a genuinely strong state we need a solid federation. We can now say today that the period of erosion of the state is over' (Putin, 2001). The unity that is emphasised within the Presidential rhetoric has several continual manifestations: the physical unity of territory, the unity of Russia's cultural and social life and the symbolic unity of a Russian idea. Focusing on the notion of sovereignty and the physical unity of the Russian Federation, Putin
asserts that 'another important task in the sphere of state development is bolstering the Federation. ... to build an effective state system within the current national borders' (Putin, 2005). With the collapse of the USSR in 1991 'Russia's borders shrank almost to those of Muscovy at the end of the sixteenth century' (Tolz, 2003: 12), therefore the unity of the nation is central to the consolidation of the state within a newly defined territory and a new, reduced idea of what constitutes Russia. This physical unity is a continuous theme throughout the Presidential rhetoric, where it overlaps with the theme of sovereignty and identity questions, and stems from the experience of imperial collapse in 1991.

Putin's characterisation of the state places continual emphasis on unity. Unity in Putin's rhetoric has multiple and related meanings: shared political goals and thought, shared culture and morality, a unified and sovereign nation within stable borders. All these themes feed into Putin's idea of unity as a united people and state around core conceptions of Russian statehood and identity; 'I am certain that the development of society is unthinkable without agreement on common goals. And these goals are not just material ones. Spiritual and moral goals are no less important' (Putin, 2000). For example when discussing the importance of unity, Putin reflects that the Second World War/Great Patriotic War:

'was won also through the strong spirit of all the peoples who were united at that time within a single state. Their unity emerged victorious over inhumanity,
genocide and the ambitions of one nation to impose its will on others' (Putin, 2005).

Putin is utilising a high point in the history of the USSR (and the Russian people's cultural memory) and demonstrating the benefits that unity can have for a people unified within a 'single state', this conjures a stark contrast with the 'geopolitical disaster' (Putin, 2005) of the collapse of the USSR. Reference to Soviet unity demonstrates Putin's attempt to rekindle the legitimacy of the Soviet regime and conflate this legitimacy with the existence of unity in society – here he is using the myth of Soviet unity and the pride felt over WWII to project the need for the recreation of such unity between state and people, simultaneously attempting to recreate the legitimacy of the state. Thus Putin is able to demonstrate, through appealing to national memory, that a united nation with common goals and stable borders is superior to the dark period of instability and disunity that his audience experienced a decade earlier. The use of positive memory (Soviet era, WWII) and negative memory (collapse of USSR, Yeltsin era) is indicative of how Putin attempts to utilise cultural memory as a means of establishing legitimacy. The ills of the past are conflated with what Putin is fighting against – here the example is decay and disunity – and the glories of the past are conflated with Putin's goals and vision of the Russian state – here the unity, strength and pride found in the memory of WWII. Thus Putin attempts to generate increased state legitimacy through the co-option and glorification of some
memories and their inclusion in his perception of the state, and the disavowal or repudiation of other memories (Forest & Johnson, 2002).

Furthermore, Putin's continual reference to unity of political actors and ordinary Russians with his goals for Russian development paints a picture of agreement and acquiescence as constructive behaviour, 'I want to thank all citizens, everyone who supported us in these undertakings. And in the future, I count on the active participation of everyone in affairs of the Russian state' (Putin, 2000). Here the positive reinforcement of unity and support for his policies, and the expectation of future unity, creates an assumption about appropriate behaviour within the political and social arena. Through his speeches Putin outlines his policies and goals for the future of Russia, but the important component of his rhetoric is not the policies themselves rather the more significant component is his description of these policies as the acceptable path for Russia's future. For example:

'any radical re-examination of economic policy, any restrictions on the rights and freedoms of citizens, a cardinal change in foreign policy guidelines – any divergence from the historic path chosen by Russia, a path that I even would say has been gained by suffering – may lead to irreversible consequences. And they must be absolutely ruled out' (Putin, 2004).

Putin colours any divergence from this path unacceptable because the consequences would be unforeseeable and it would be an affront to the 'suffering' the Russian people
have endured. Thus Putin positions himself within the realm of the politically correct and acceptable behaviour and on the side of the Russian people, as opposed to those who would oppose his policies and could lead to unacceptable and unknown 'consequences'. The promotion of unity and agreement as a behavioural norm, therefore means that the unity must be seen not only as a goal in itself but as a component of Putin's attempt to shape social interaction and perceptions of the state. Whilst Putin does support unity for the purpose of a unified stable nation, Putin's emphasis is on generating unity around his perception of the Russian state, his narrative of the Russian future and establishing unity as a political norm. Thus projecting unity as a goal and characteristic of the state is both nation-serving and self-serving within Putin's narrative.

Putin's rhetoric blatantly links the notion of unity, political and social, around core cultural and moral principles that he portrays as intrinsically Russian principles:

'The unity of Russia is strengthened by the patriotism inherent in our people, by cultural traditions and common historic memory... we have had and continue to have common values. Values which join us and allow us to call ourselves a single people ' (Putin, 2000).

Putin is describing a national identity around common ideals and events that bind the multiple layers of Russian society into 'a single people'. Putin's rhetoric is attempting to project a cultural unity of Russia, which is neither antagonist nor blatantly self-serving,
instead he assembles a vision of Russia which is inclusive and broad, 'Russia, bound to
the former Soviet republics – now independent countries – through a common history,
and through the Russian language and the great culture that we share, cannot stay
away from the common desire for freedom' (Putin, 2005). Putin is interested in
emphasising that which the Russian people and their neighbours have in common, as a
foundation for national and regional unity that would stabilise both the national
political climate, the nation's boundaries and the region. Putin's vision of the Russian
state and Russia in the Soviet space does not account for difference, either ethnic or
civic, between the now independent states, instead Putin is harking back to the myth of
unity within the Soviet space to project the image of regional relations he wants to
create. Unity is a mantra which Putin imbues with multiple meanings and which he
utilises to describe his vision of the Russian state – a stable, politically and culturally
unified state around his version of appropriate policy and thought.

When comparing the theme of a unified state in the rhetoric of Medvedev to Putin,
there is a remarkable convergence of emphasis between the two Presidents. Medvedev
stresses the need to unify to achieve development goals and to avoid the social and
political fragmentation of the 1990s; 'we simply must consolidate around our national
priorities. The worst thing that could happen in the current situation is to descend into
settling scores and dishonest competition' (Medvedev, 2008). However, the focus on
unity as a necessity for state survival that Putin emphasises is not as prominent in the
rhetoric of Medvedev. Whilst the use of theme continues and the sentiments are similar, there are differences in emphasis that reveal new aspects of the Russian state in the eyes of the Presidency.

'We will not allow anyone to inflame social and interethnic strife, deceive people and draw them into illegal action. We will continue to maintain Constitutional order through all the legal means' (2008) – Medvedev's rhetoric consistently reminds the audience that order, unity and stability in society and the political arena are principles and laws grounded in the Constitution. To Medvedev unity, including order and stability, is found through adherence to common principles and laws; thus he emphasises 'the Constitution's importance in developing a new legal system and independent courts, and in combating corruption and legal nihilism' (Medvedev, 2008). Medvedev's unity thus takes the form of a unified and functioning legal system that can regulate the social and political realms and unify the nation under a shared set of rules. To Putin unity and agreement are themselves political norms that should guide social and state interaction, whereas Medvedev envisions the legal system as the foundation for a normative framework through which society can be governed. For example:

'the Constitution that upholds freedom and justice, human dignity and welfare, protection of family and Fatherland, and the unity of our multiethnic people – not just as common values but as legal concepts... The Constitution forms our
social institutions and the way of life of millions of people' (Medvedev, 2008, emphasis added).

This marks the fundamental difference between the two Presidents and the concept of the state they seek to project, to Putin unity is harmony between the state, the Russian people and his vision for Russia. To Medvedev unity is respect for legal and democratic institutions and ideas, and the accountability of the state to the people, not the other way around.

In addition, Medvedev acknowledges the differences within Russia:

'another factor that could greatly enhance our Federation is the support of ethnic traditions and cultures of the peoples of Russia. I think this is crucial not only for strengthening the federal framework but also for ensuring the harmonious functioning of our society and the unity of the Russian nation. It will help guarantee a stable, civilised development of the entire country' (Medvedev, 2008).

Here is a similar message to Putin's but with a different sentiment, where Putin highlights that *despite* differences there exists commonality Medvedev indicates that unity can come from embracing the differences in society. Medvedev suggests an embrace of the variety of ethnic traditions that exist within Russia could provide a base for national unity by developing harmonious relations between different
groups. However, in his 2009 Address Medvedev's rhetoric is almost identical to Putin's earlier recognition of commonality despite difference:

'those who share my views, and those who propose different solutions. We all have at least one thing in common: we know that change is essential and that what kind of country we will hand down to our children and grandchildren, and what place it will hold in tomorrow's world depend on us alone' (Medvedev, 2009).

Therefore the unified state theme carries through from Putin to Medvedev with little new content or policy implications, but Medvedev adds to Putin's rhetoric with notions of more inclusive unity.

In place of Putin's vision of unified state as a strong state, Medvedev perceives of a unified state as a plural, democratic state with social cohesion. Here the first face and the third face of the Russian state overlap within the President's rhetoric and the interconnection of these themes in the Presidential perception reveals the differences between Putin and Medvedev's conception of the state. The President as a perception-setting agent is attempting to craft the idea of the state around these key themes, because these discourses can confer on the state and the regime a sense of legitimacy. The origin of legitimacy in each President's rhetoric differs slightly and can be found in the different ways they relate the three themes together. To Putin legitimacy is perceived as stemming from the ability to draw the
connection between his state and the strong, unified state of the Soviet and Tsarist past, as it exists in the cultural memory of Russians. To Medvedev legitimacy has different loci, firstly it can be found through the continuation of Putin's themes on state strength, consolidation and unity and secondly through the emphasis on law as the guiding principle of Russian political life. To this end, Medvedev crafts the image of the Russian state as unified by legal and democratic norms which contain within them the legitimacy needed to secure the state's legitimacy. Each President thus uses the theme of unity in varying ways, but always as a narrative that confers legitimacy on the state and the regime.

The DEMOCRATIC STATE: The Third Face

The third theme used within Presidential rhetoric to characterise the Russian state – the democratic state – is the only one of the three where the bulk of rhetoric emanates from Medvedev rather than Putin. This third dimension also represents the first clear-cut break from Putin’s continual attempt to craft state continuity with the Soviet and Tsarist eras, allowing Medvedev to introduce the idea of modernisation to the narrative of the Russian state. Entering the Presidency in a time of international and domestic turmoil, Medvedev begins by affirming his commitment to democracy and freedom. Stating:
'sharp fluctuations in the political and economic situation, the turbulence in the world economy and even the rise in military and political tension will not serve as a pretext for dismantling democratic institutions... Citizens’ political freedom and private property are sacred... I want to stress that the state authorities will fulfil all their commitments to the public' (Medvedev, 2008).

Medvedev's development of the democratic state as a central component to the Russian state's character parallels his representation of a unified state, as he relies on two consistent refrains – the importance of the Constitution and the nature of democratic development. Medvedev also mirrors the theme of unity in regards to the relationship between the democratic state and legitimacy – for Medvedev state legitimacy is perceived through the adherence to the Constitution and the legal and democratic norms it demands.

In Medvedev's vision of Russia the Constitution is placed at the heart of the Russian state's democratic character, and is fundamental to the image of the state Medvedev projects. For example:

'the decisive role the Constitution has played in developing democracy in Russia.

As I said, the personal freedom and the maturity of the democratic institutions
and procedures that it guarantees are the source for our continued development...' (Medvedev, 2008).

Here Medvedev is attributing not only the development of democracy to the Constitution, but within Medvedev's perception – Russian development in general appears to stem from the principles that the Constitution enshrines and the ability of these principles to transform Russia. This emphasis on the centrality of the Constitution to the democratic life of Russia stems from Medvedev's understanding of democracy, which is developed through his emphasis on the legal framework of Russia and the importance of individual rights and responsibilities; 'the Constitution paves the way for Russia's renewal as a free nation and a society that holds law and the dignity of each individual as its highest values' (Medvedev, 2008). The Russian idea projected here is one that seeks to modernise politically and socially; Medvedev is envisioning the adoption of freedom and democracy as pillars of Russian state life and the foundation of a normative order in Russia that legitimises the state's ability to govern.

The concept of democracy within Medvedev's rhetoric is encapsulated in the following fragment:
'under the Constitution the sole source of power in our country is the people... It is the duty of the government, of any democratic government, to take into account the legitimate interests and opinions of all citizens of Russia, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, political or other beliefs' (Medvedev, 2009).

Within this fragment are all the core themes of a democratic state which Medvedev seeks to project: law and supremacy of the constitution, responsibility of government to the people and to govern according to their interests, and the equality of all citizens regardless of any discriminatory criteria. As such Medvedev declares that 'democracy is the way forward, and no one disputes this now. The question today is how Russia’s democracy should continue its development' (Medvedev, 2008). Using the idea of democracy as a foregone conclusion in the contest for Russia’s future, Medvedev is echoing the rhetoric of a unified state – a vision of a state united in common adherence to principles of freedom, equality and accountability. To that end, Medvedev's vision works hard to remove the blemish of the Yeltsin years from the paradigm of democracy and attempts to project the image of the Russian state and people as unified around the principles of democracy. The attempt to remove memory of the nineties from the concept of democracy, is an attempt to imbue his vision of the Russian state with legitimacy.
despite the connotations of instability and illegitimacy the core concept carries over from the chaotic Yeltsin era.

The use of the democratic state as a theme is not used in the same way or to the same extent within Putin's vision of the Russian state, as compared to Medvedev's rhetoric. There are, of course, similarities, for example Putin asserts that 'power above all means great responsibility' (Putin, 2004) – responsibility to Russia and its people. Despite this, Putin places a stronger emphasis on the interrelation of democracy and other key themes, such as state strength and stability; 'a stable economy is the main guarantor of a democratic society, and the very foundation of a strong nation that is respected in the world' (Putin, 2000). However, democracy is also envisioned as central to state strengthening and a state capable of serving the interests of the Russian people, 'a strong state is unthinkable without respect for people's rights and freedom. Only a democratic state can ensure a balance of interests of personality and society, and combine private initiative with national tasks' (Putin, 2000). Putin also adheres, though to a lesser extent, to the emphasis Medvedev places on the law, 'the creation of an effective legal and political system is an essential condition for developing democracy in our country' (Putin, 2005); Putin's legal focus is neither as extensive nor as Constitution focused a Medvedev. Thus the Putin and Medvedev conceptions of democracy are different, and therefore the Russian idea that the Presidency projects undergoes a shift in relation to this theme between 2000 and 2011.
Putin's conception of democracy involves an emphasis on principles, 'freedom of speech was and remains a firm value of Russian democracy' (Putin, 2000), comparable to Medvedev's emphasis on the principles of the Constitution being the bedrock of Russian democracy. However Putin also feels the need to rebut the notion of democracy being anti-Russian:

'The democratic organization of the country and the new Russia's openness to the world, do not contradict our uniqueness or patriotism, and do not hinder us from finding our own answers to issues of spirituality and morals' (Putin, 2000).

Within this attempt to defend the compatibility of democracy and Russia, Putin argues 'commitment to democratic values is dictated by the will of our people and by the strategic interests of Russia itself' (Putin, 2004). Putin's emphasis on sovereignty and Russia's independence is revisited throughout his description of a democratic state, where he exerts considerable time addressing the idea of democracy not as anti-Russian but as the will of the Russian people and the choice of an independent state. For example, 'the democratic road we have chosen is independent in nature, a road along which we move ahead, all the while taking into account our own specific internal circumstances' (Putin, 2005). Putin contextualises this continual justification and spends considerable energy not on democracy, but on understanding democracy as function of Russian sovereign and free will:
'Many thought or seemed to think at the time that our young democracy was not a continuation of Russian statehood, but its ultimate collapse, the prolonged agony of the Soviet system. But they were mistaken... We had to find our own path in order to build a democratic, free and just society and state' (Putin, 2005).

Here Putin is attempting to distinguish Russian democracy from the death pangs of the USSR and the disorder that followed, whilst simultaneously asserting the self-determination of Russia in choosing the democratic path. Putin is crafting a message synonymous to Medvedev's attempt to distinguish democracy from lawlessness and contrast the democracy of today with the birth pangs of the 1990's.

Following this understanding of the role democracy plays in Putin's rhetoric and his perception of the Russian state, the role it plays in the attempt to legitimate the Russian state and regime is important. As both Medvedev and Putin emphasise – democracy is the will of the people, who they declare have freely chosen democracy, 'the only source and bearer of power in the Russian Federation is its multiethnic people' (Putin, 2004). Important here, is not the truth of this statement, but how both Presidents (as perception-setting agents) use this in the narrative of Russia they project and the way this helps legitimate the state. By appealing to democratic ideas and proclaiming the will of the people as inherent in the narrative of the Russian state the Presidency is conferring the people's stamp of approval onto the political order and
the state. In this way the narrative of democracy relies on the notion of popular approval of the system in the same way the Putin emphasis on strength and unity relies on the cultural memory of the Soviet state to create the perception of legitimacy. Therefore the use of democracy to characterise the Russian state is a rhetorical attempt to link the legitimacy of the democratic idea and the legitimacy of the state, ignoring the connotations of the nineties and relying on the people's perceived desire to democratically choose their political leaders.

Putin's rhetoric establishes a commitment to developing Russia's future and the Russian state through democratic ideals – 'Russia must become and will become a country with a flourishing civil society and stable democracy, a country that fully guarantees human rights and civil and political freedoms' (Putin, 2003). Putin emphasises the need for internal development of democracy as a component of the rebuilding, re-strengthening and renewing of Russia and the Russian state. Putin clearly asserts, 'I consider the development of Russia as a free and democratic state to be our main political and ideological goal' (Putin, 2005). Thus in the rhetoric of both Presidents the democratic state plays a key role in how the state is perceived and projected. However the difference between the two Presidents is more acute within the theme of democracy than the other two themes; the fundamental difference is emphasis – Putin emphasises democracy as unity between people and state, Medvedev
emphasises democracy as a society structured around legal norms and government accountability. The role that each conceptualisation plays in the crafting of a state image and state legitimacy is contingent on the idea of democracy as the will of the people. Putin asserts this represents the independence and sovereignty of Russia and the legitimacy of the state structure rests on the fact that it is representative of the people's will and sovereignty. Medvedev emphasises that legitimacy is found in adherence, by both state and people, to the same set of legal norms and the state's legitimacy is established through the ability to create and ensure the application of the Constitutional order. In both perceptions of the democratic Russian state, the Presidency is actively attempting to increase the legitimacy of the state through the use of narratives that resonate and set a perception of the state that reinforces Russia's strong, unified and democratic character.

Conclusion

Through analysis of these three faces of the Russian state as projected through the rhetoric of the Presidency – the strong state, the unified state and the democratic state – the perception of the state that the Presidents want to create can begin to be seen. Under the assumption that the central figure and institution in Russian politics is the Presidency, the understanding of the state displayed in Presidential rhetoric demonstrates how they see the state, how they want others to see the state and how
they believe the state can be legitimated. Whilst Medvedev tends to approach each theme from a different angle than Putin or focus on a different aspect, the end result is usually an approach or goal that is fundamentally the same as Putin’s. In this way the Presidential perception of the Russian state from 2000–2011 has enjoyed considerable continuity, with the President as a perception-setting agent using a continuous narrative of the state.

State legitimacy must be seen as the rationale for the perception of the Russian state that the Presidency has sought to project. Whether the narrative used actually increased state legitimacy is not the object of analysis here, rather the issue is how the President has attempted to increase the legitimacy of the state and the regime. For Putin legitimacy is sought largely through the use of cultural memory, both positive and negative, to craft an image of the state under Putin. 'Putin's triangulation of a reinvigorated central state, assertiveness on the international stage and the revival of national traditions and memories' (Sil & Chen, 2004:361) casts the his state as continuous with the positive aspects of the Tsarist and Soviet past and as repudiating the negative memory of the chaotic nineties. Whereas Medvedev focusing on crafting the state's image as dependent on adherence to legal norms, democracy and modernisation – resting legitimacy on the ability of these concepts to resonate with the people's desire for freedom and political accountability. Despite this different
emphasis and narratives of legitimacy, both President centre their perception of the
Russian state on the themes of strength, unity and democracy.
Introduction: A Russian Idea

The perception of Russia's identity, what it is and what it stands for, constitutes the second pillar of the Presidential imagining of Russia. Seeking to shape how Russian identity is perceived and understood is at the heart of both Putin and Medvedev's vision of Russia. Exploration of the rhetoric, themes and discourses used in their *Addresses to the Federal Assembly* reveals much about their vision of Russia and their attempts to shape perceptions. Imagining Russia as a synthesis of the new and old, the use of age-old themes, questions of Russian identity and Russian history and symbolism to craft legitimating identity narrative, both Presidents demonstrate a remarkable continuity in their vision of Russian identity. As Sakwa argues 'identity is something permanently in flux, yet in Russia certain core elements... remain remarkably consistent over the ages... there is no ready alternative concept of national identity that can be used...' (Sakwa, 2011: 958–9). Thus the continuity between the manner both Putin and Medvedev have sought to shape perceptions of Russian identity, demonstrates a continuous narrative of identity centred on the use of pre-existing narratives, symbols, myths and a good dose of political pragmatism.
Russian national identity is a multilayered idea, it is therefore useful to focus on key narratives that have stood the test of time and continue to resonate today. Vera Tolz helpfully highlights:

'the three main ways in which Russia and the Russians have been defined by Russian nation-builders...: Russia vis-à-vis the West; Russians as creators and preservers of a unique multi-ethnic community, which many intellectuals and politicians have viewed as profoundly different from European and Eastern empires; and Russians as members of a community of Eastern Slavs...' (Tolz, 2003:1).

The first two narratives are prevalent in the Presidential rhetoric, and form a central component of the perception of Russian identity the Presidency is attempting to (re)create. Thus focusing on these two narratives of Russian identity, the continuity and change in Russian identity can be gleaned. Most importantly, an understanding of how the Presidency envisions and tries to shape Russian identity can be found and explored.

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3 The third narrative is not included in the following discussion as the idea of a community of Eastern Slavs does not feature prominently in the Presidential rhetoric analysed here. Such a conception of Russian identity occurs in Putin’s 2007 Address, with the mention of a Union state between Belarus and Russia. However, much of this discussion is placed in the context of integration within the CIS and can be seen through the idea of Russia as an former empire.
NARRATIVE I: Russia and the West.

Beginning with the first narrative, the President's employment of historical narratives and symbolism to project a Russian idea that helps legitimate the state is evident. For Russian identity, in and of itself, the continual comparison to the West is:

'arguably the most important ingredient of modern Russian identity.... Russia's relationship with the West... has had the most profound impact on how the Russians have viewed themselves and the outside world, how they have interpreted their own history and how they have defined possible paths for their country's development over the past three hundred years' (Tolz, 2003: 69)

The continuation of this theme into the post-Soviet era has had several incarnations and the perceptions of the Russia have shifted in Presidential rhetoric as the political context has shifted. In the eight years of the Putin Presidency this theme changed markedly; early in his Presidency Putin's rhetoric emphasised rebuilding Russia, catching up to Western economic and political development, integration into the Western dominated international order (particularly integration into Europe) and re-establishing Russian power whilst maintaining state sovereignty. For example, 'economic weakness... The growing gap between leading nations and Russia pushes us towards becoming a third world country' ( Putin, 2000). Thus the early phase of the Putin Presidency is characterised by the Russian tendency to perceive its own identity by comparing itself with the West – the need to emulate and catch-up to the West.
Putin however, maintains a stronger focus on this development taking place within an independent and sovereign Russian state and the importance of maintaining Russian culture whilst being a modern state. In this way Putin seeks to project an image of Russia that is sovereign and independent, but able to compete (or working towards the ability to compete) on the same level as other developed, Western nations.

The second half of the Putin Presidency carries on these themes, however there is a shift in emphasis from developing and renewing Russia to a focus on projecting Russia's international presence, uniqueness and ability to shape events and ideas on the international stage. The early emphasis is still present, for example 'Russia should continue its civilising mission on the Eurasian continent. This mission consists in ensuring that democratic values, combined with national interests, enrich and strengthen our historic community' (Putin, 2005). However, evident in this quote is the shift to envisioning Russia as a proactive actor in the international realm – the notion of Russia's civilising mission and ability to ensure the adherence of others to certain internationally valued principles. Thus Putin is seeking to shape a new perception of Russia, not merely competing with the West but casting Russia in the role of a proactive norm-enforcer within the international community(see Sakwa, 2011: 968).
This is the flipside of the Russian tendency to define itself in relation to the West, these two components are the 'tortuous contradiction' (Tolz, 2003: 70) of Russian identity that has never been fully resolved. Tolz articulates the two sides of this narrative as:

'One is of Russia as a European (imperial) power, about to catch-up with the model it is emulating, the more advanced countries of Western Europe. Another is of a Russia with an identity formed along the lines of those colonial and post-colonial societies in Asia and Africa, in which nationalism derives its power by distinguishing itself sharply from the West as an anti-model' (Tolz, 2003: 70).

Thus the rhetoric of Putin's second term is increasingly marked by a version of the second model, whereby the emphasis is on the West as the 'Other' and Russian identity can be perceived as equal but different to the West. Important here is the understanding that identity 'can only be established in relation to what it is not – to difference' (Weldes et al., 1999: 11), meaning the role the West plays in the formation of Russian identity is both as a threat and a constitutive element. Indeed Russian identity is 'performatively constituted' (Campbell, 1998: 9) through the contradictory idea of Russia as both a part of Europe and as an opposite to the West, and the manifestation of this notion in Russian rhetoric and policy. The representation of the West as an Other to be either emulated or feared/rebutted is a fundamental component of the Presidential projection of Russian identity, 'the constant articulation of danger through foreign policy is thus not a threat to a state's identity or existence:
it is its condition of possibility' (Campbell, 1998: 13). This historical narrative plays a vital role in the perception of Russia that both Putin and Medvedev seek to project, as they simultaneously cast the West as an 'Other', a model to be emulated, an anti-model, a threat, an ally and therefore a fundamental part of the Russian narrative.

This flipside of Russia’s identity in relation to the West – the West as an Other, or an anti-model – increasingly dominates the rhetoric of Putin later in his Presidency. The idea of defining Russia as different from the West highlights Putin's need to project a sense of Russian uniqueness when articulating Russian identity; 'the absence of cultural beacons of our own, and blindly copying foreign models, will inevitably lead to us losing our national identity. As Dmitry Likhachev wrote, “State sovereignty is also defined by cultural criteria” ' (Putin, 2007). However, also evident is Putin's focus on the imperative of development and the ability to compete with the West, whilst maintaining both the integration of Russia in Europe and its separateness. For example, 'having a unique cultural and spiritual identity has never stopped anyone from building a country open to the world. Russia has made a tremendous contribution to the formation of European and world culture' (Putin, 2007). Putin is focused on maintaining the perception of Russia as an independent nation whose developmental pathway is chosen by the Russian people and continually emphasises that Russia 'had to find our own path in order to build a democratic, free and just society and state'
Putin is essentially articulating the idea of Russia as equal to Western development but with its own identity, with the West as the Other whose existence provides a constant contrast. Creating and maintaining the perception of Russia as equal and unique provides both Presidents the scope to both compete and operate within the Western world and demonstrating their independence and national sovereignty.

The narrative also plays an important role in the President's attempts to craft a perception of Russian identity that legitimises the current regime. Much as the rhetoric of a strong and unified state relies on the memory of the Soviet past (See Chapter Two), the articulation of identity in relation to a Western 'Other' references the Soviet and Tsarist past. 'Ever since Peter the Great's reforms, the West has served as the main constituent other for Russians' (Tolz, 2003: 69), and in the twentieth century this rivalry manifested itself in the Cold War; the West as the 'Other' is therefore fundamental to the way Russia has perceived itself throughout history. The Presidential rhetoric crafts Russian identity as continuing this idea of Western 'Otherness', which resonates with the cultural memory and experience of Russians. Therefore this narrative plays an important role in the President's attempt to craft legitimacy through the idea of continuity with the past, demonstrating a continuous 'Other' or threat to bind together the various incarnations of the Russian state in the mind of Russians.
Russian identity, in relation to the narrative of the West as Russia's counterpoint or 'anti-model' (Tolz, 2003: 70), is therefore performatively constituted through the Presidency's discussion of international affairs and the structure of the international governance, where the President projects Russia's role as the counterpoint to Western policy. Arguing:

'It is far from everyone in the world that wants to have to deal with an independent, strong and self-reliant Russia. Political, economic and information pressure have become weapons in the global competitive battle today. Our efforts to strengthen our state are sometimes deliberately interpreted as authoritarianism' (Putin, 2004).

Here Putin is asserting the idea that the external criticism, particularly from the US, is part of a threat to Russian strength, identity and independence, thus the notion of the West as the Other and as a threat is developed. Through Putin's rhetorical response to this threat, he is able to performatively constitute Russia's identity as an independent and unique culture; Putin is projecting both a perception of identity and a policy discourse that seeks to establish Russia as independent from Western control and threat.
In analysing the role of the international in shaping perceptions of Russian identity, Sakwa argues that:

'Russia historically has had a problematic relationship with the hegemonic world system of particular eras, and this continues to this day... in part this is derived from structural factors, notably Russia's typically tangential position in the dominant system' (Sakwa, 2011: 957).

Despite Russia no longer seeking to offer a different model for the world system, Russia is still attempting to find its place in a world order that seems unable to 'find an appropriate relationship that could integrate not only geopolitical concerns but also representations of each other's identity' (Sakwa, 2011: 957). The President as a perception-setting agent, therefore attempts to shape the role and perception of Russia in relation to the international sphere in several important ways. For example, Putin is interested in the condemnation of those states, predominantly the US, who do not respect the international norm of state sovereignty. Important here is an understanding of the role Russia sees itself playing in the international realm. No longer the norm maker of the Soviet era, nor the norm taker of the nineties, 'Putin's leadership sought to negotiate a new balance.... between adaptation to existing international norms and affirmation of what were seen to be essential elements of national identity' (Sakwa, 2011: 962) and saw Russia by the late 2000's adopt the role of 'norm–enforcer' which did not challenge established norms but demanded their
universal observance (Sakwa, 2011: 968). Indeed Putin condemns 'attempts to infringe on the sovereign rights of nations in the guise of “humanitarian” operations' (Putin, 2000). Thus Putin is performing Russia's identity by reinforcing the idea of the West as an anti-model or an entity whose actions are opposed to the very international norms they espouse and use to undermine other nation's sovereignty. With the West as a threat to the fundamental sovereignty of the Russian nation, and other nations, Putin is attempting to craft the perception of Russia's role in the international sphere as a 'norm-enforcer' which is neither opposed nor beholden to the West. Rather the vision of Russia Putin wants to project is unique but equal to the West and simultaneously an objective judge whose role is to seek universal adherence to international norms.

In accordance with this component of Russian identity, this perception of Russia's international role is evident throughout Putin's rhetoric. For example, 'the UN system should be the regulator that enables us to work together to draw up a new code of behaviour in the international arena' (Putin, 2006). Putin emphasises the need to use the UN and the international architecture to regulate state behaviour and guard national sovereignty. Putin is asserting the need for,

'a culture of international relations based on international law – without attempts to impose development models or to force the natural pace of the historical process. This makes the democratisation of international life and a
new ethic in relations between states and peoples particularly important' (Putin, 2007).

The focus on the imposition of development models sums up the approach to international relations taken within Putin's rhetoric, he is not rejecting the West per se but he is rejecting their mode of operating which he sees as the imposition of their development models on sovereign nations. Putin, and Medvedev, are advocating the universal adherence to the principles of international law (such as sovereignty) that the West declares vital but Putin believes they constantly infringe. Thus their rhetoric is seeking to shape the perception of Russia's role in international affairs, by moving Russian identity away from the role of the norm challenger of Soviet times towards the role of norm-enforcer and an identity based on pursuing universal application of international norms. This is a role that provides the Presidents with legitimate complaint about the behaviour of Western states and therefore can cast the West as the 'Other' and perform the idea of Russian identity as a contrast to the West. As such this is a convenient narrative for the political purposes of both Putin and Medvedev as it incorporates adherence to and rejection of the Western model – conceiving of Russia as adhering to the development, economic competition and political ideas of the West, allowing the President align Russia with the West when politically expedient. Yet this also means that when Russia is opposed to the West the President can justify the position based on Russia's role as norm-enforcer and the supposed Western
infringement of norms such as national sovereignty. Thus the painting of Russia in this role, generates inbuilt justification for either acceptance or denunciation of the West. The Presidential perception of Russia as an international enforcer can also be framed as a legitimate component of national identity as it relies on the narrative of the Western 'Other' and the material needs of citizens that can accompany economic development, thus containing both cultural and material resonance.

Medvedev continues this characterisation with, 'we need to put in place mechanisms that can block the mistaken, selfish and at times simply dangerous decisions made by some members of the international community' (Medvedev, 2008). Medvedev also discusses the more specific cases where he asserts that the US and NATO are 'simply testing our strength' (Medvedev, 2008), such as missile defence in Europe, and represents the US involvement in the 2008 Georgian war as 'the conceit of an American administration that closed its ears to criticism and preferred the road of unilateral decisions' (Medvedev, 2008). In contrast, Medvedev advocates 'the creation of a polycentric international system.... a truly democratic model of international relations' (Medvedev, 2008). Thus central to Presidential rhetoric in defining Russian identity is the consistent representation of the West, particularly the US, as an 'Other' and therefore a threat to Russia, the international system and the principle of state sovereignty. Thus the role of the West in the formation of Russian national identity is a
central narrative in the vision of Russia both Putin and Medvedev seek to project. The West as both a model and an anti-model is a constitutive element of Russian identity throughout history and continues this role in the Presidential rhetoric. Legitimacy, from the use of this narrative, therefore stems from the President's attempts to craft their own role in this narrative as the defender of Russia against the perception of threat. Simultaneously, the adaption of a centuries old narrative to the contemporary context and the rhetorical manipulation of cultural memory to project the Russian state as the defender and preserver of Russian sovereignty therefore allows the President to cast the current state as the legitimate successor of Russian traditional identity and legitimacy.

NARRATIVE II: A Unique Multi-ethnic Community.

The use of the West as an anti-model overlaps with the second key narrative Tolz identified as central to Russian identity over the last three hundred years – the idea of Russia as 'unique multi-ethnic community' (Tolz, 2003: 1). Whereas the first narrative defines Russia either by what it is emulating or what it is not, this second narrative emphasises what Russia is. The idea of Russia as an unique identity, with unique historical experience and culture is used throughout the rhetoric of both Presidents, and plays an important role in the President's attempts to shape perceptions of
Russian identity. The rhetoric used by both Presidents is different and they each emphasise different themes, however the perception of Russia they seek to craft is essentially the same: Russia has a unique culture which forms part of its identity and strength, but that cannot be used to deter Russian development or integration into the international system.

Medvedev, in particular, engages with the narrative of uniqueness in his *Addresses*, and continually draws his rhetoric back to the idea of an unique culture and civilisation. For example,

'a people with more than a thousand years of history, a people that have developed and brought civilisation to a vast territory, created a unique culture and built up powerful economic and military potential' (Medvedev, 2008).

Here Medvedev is appealing to geography, people, history, culture, ideals and economic and military accomplishments to conjure the image of Russia as a culture separate from others and with much to celebrate – a politically pragmatic message and vision of Russia. Medvedev's emphasis on Russia's uniqueness highlights the multi-ethnicity of modern, and historic, Russia: 'interethnic peace is one of our key values. Historically we have enjoyed a unique and extraordinarily rich experience of tolerance and mutual respect' (Medvedev, 2008). Again Medvedev is using the notion of a democratic state, and extending the themes of inclusiveness, unity and strength
through difference, to craft an identity that legitimates the current state. For Medvedev this legitimacy is sought through the image of a state that includes all segments of society and a national identity that can resonate with all its citizens – thus attempting to generate state legitimacy through inclusiveness and celebration of past accomplishments.

Putin's first term characterises the uniqueness of Russian identity within the context of the 1990's and the undermining of independent state action after 1991, conflating the importance of cultural uniqueness and political independence:

'Can we hold out as a nation, as a civilization, if our prosperity continually depends on international loans and on the benevolence of leaders of the world economy?... For a long time we have been trying to make the choice: to rely on others' advice, aid and loans, or to develop relying on our own distinctive character, and own efforts' (Putin, 2000).

Thus Putin establishes the imperative of independence through exploiting the cultural memory of the 1990's and the perils of once again losing independence. Putin's continual refrain about national independence plays is his attempt to shape perceptions of Russia's unique identity and represents an attempt at positive affirmation of Russian identity and history, particularly through evoking notions of Russia as a nation and a civilisation. Re-affirmation of the uniqueness of Russia and
the need to maintain that independence, through a self-reliant approach to
development, is both a positive image and politically pragmatic message. Through
firstly evoking the trauma of the nineties, rebutting it and then reaffirming the
independence and pride of Russian identity, Putin is able to craft a perception of
Russia that advocates unity with pre-1991 Russian independence and dismisses the
nineties as a break from the trajectory of Russia. Perceptions of unity with previous
historical experience as a civilisation allows Putin to be cast as a redeemer of Russian
sovereignty and unique identity; legitimating both the state and the Presidency by
employing the narrative of Russia as a unique cultural with a proud history.

Following this understanding of Putin's self-perceived role as defender against the
Western other and the redeemer of Russian uniqueness, the influence of Eurasianism
should be noted. Whilst not advocating this view specifically, Putin's focus on Russian
independence against a Western influence is compatible with much of Eurasianism core
tenets. Billington provides an excellent outline of Eurasianism which in essence argues
that 'Russia was a unique bi-continental civilisation that needed to turn inward with
strong rule in order to protect itself from both Europe and Asia'(2004: 69), a
perception of Russia that is reminiscent of Putin's core conception of identity. Indeed
'Eurasianism was at heart a geographic conception of Russian identity' and its post-
Soviet revival 'results in large part from anger at the loss of empire and revulsion at the
perceived "Russophobia" of new Westward-looking liberal elites' (Billington, 2004: 70). Eurasianism here emphasises similar ideas to Putin – the role of geography in crafting Russian identity (as expanded in the next section), Putin's continual refrain that Russian identity requires protection from those who are anti-Russian, particularly the West, as well as the importance of the redemption theme – following the collapse of the USSR the sense that Russia needs redeeming proves a powerful idea. Therefore whilst not a proclaimed Eurasianist, Putin's perception of Russian uniqueness, sense of threat and need for independence from Western influences correlates with the Eurasianist tenets and worldview. Thus the ways that the Presidency conceives of Russian identity is both influenced by the outside intellectual debates and employs elements of these debates (albeit quietly) to enhance the appeal and legitimacy of their vision.

Whilst the role of the West in establishing an Other, against which Russia compares itself and which it can emulate, is central to the President's articulation of Russian identity, the idea of Russia as a unique culture is also essential but underdeveloped in the Presidential rhetoric. Neither President spends extensive time on detailing what that uniqueness entails, instead both Presidents conflate unique identity with ideas of independence and sovereignty, relying purely on the appeal of projecting a Russian identity separate from other nations, with state independence and national
sovereignty. Despite this the presence of both narratives, Russia vis-a-vis the West and Russia as unique, in tandem throughout the twelve years of Presidential rhetoric demonstrates both the longevity and the importance of these identity discourses to the perception of Russia that the President's seek to project. The perception projected by both Presidents draws from the intellectual and cultural context for material and discourses to frame the Russian identity that they want seen as legitimate. The existing purchase of these narratives within cultural memory and intellectual debate is utilised by both Putin and Medvedev to shape a perception of Russia which draws on past memory and ideas to legitimate the state.

**Questioning Who is and Where is Russia: The Third Theme**

In addition to these two narratives of Russian identity, there are two key questions that are continually debated: Where is Russia and Who is Russian? These two questions take on new importance in modern Russia, where the collapse of the USSR meant a redefinition of Russian borders and left individuals who previously identified as Russian or Soviet outside the new Russian state. The Presidential attempts, as explored in chapter two, to strengthen state sovereignty, Russia's post-USSR borders and a nascent political order stem from these identity questions as much as political imperatives. The collapse of the USSR was a 'powerful shock to the Russian psyche'
(Klein, 2007:221) that involved the collapse of the Soviet empire – the political system, the economic system and the territory of the USSR. Thus in the wake of this shock the centuries old debates about the geography and ethnography of Russia are re-visited and need to be understood within this new context.

Dealing first with the question of: Where is Russia? or more precisely where are the borders of the Russian state, Presidential rhetoric seeks to outline a notion of Russia that is both representative of cultural memory and past understandings of Russia as an empire and the current circumstances and parameters of the RF. Therefore the background to this question is centuries old and is connected to the Russian experience as an empire rather than a nation-state. The legacy of empire is central to contemporary identity debates;

'a number of scholars have observed that both the government's and the people's perception of the Russian state were affected by the timing of the creation, the patterns of expansion and the geography of the Russian empire' (Tolz, 2003: 156).

Tolz, drawing on the work of other scholars, argues that the creation of the Russian empire before the emergence of nationalism in Russia meant that unlike its European counter-parts there was no core state easily separated from the empire. The lack of
geographic or political separation of the centre from the periphery, which in contrast was geographically distinguishable in maritime empires such as Britain, blurred the borders between the Russian core and the broader empire. Therefore this historical experience meant that the collapse of the USSR, the disintegration of empire and the return to almost sixteenth century borders shattered an already fragile and precarious sense of Russian geographic space.

Within this context the rhetoric of both Presidents can be understood as attempting a two-fold, but interrelated task: the definition and defence of the new borders and the attempt to stem any further territorial decay or disintegration. Therefore the image of Russia that the Presidency is crafting is an attempt to simultaneously bolster a sense of self and physically bolster the state's borders. In his first Address, Putin sums up the task and the physical threat sensed within Russia: 'Russia has met with a systematic challenge to its state sovereignty and territorial integrity, and found itself face to face with forces that strive towards a geopolitical reorganization of the world' (Putin, 2000).

A key case study of Russia's attempt at maintaining territorial unity is Chechnya, a conflict which had re-ignited just before Putin was elected President:

'an extreme example of unsolved federal problems is Chechnya... And Chechnya in 1999 reminded us of mistakes made in the past. And only an anti-terrorist
operation could overcome the threat of the collapse of Russia, and professional military helped to maintain the state’s dignity and integrity’ (Putin, 2000).

Here the sense of threat posed by disintegration is clear. Chechen independence is not discussed as the will of the Chechen people, but as terrorism striking at the heart of Russia and threatening the very dignity of the Russia state. The collapse of the empire in 1991 and the concomitant shock to the Russian psyche, therefore (re)created the fear and questioning not only about Russian decline but the existential question of what is Russia? and where is Russia? Thus Putin is refocusing the continual question of where are the correct borders of the Russian state on the immediate threat to continual state disintegration. Putin is not so much answering the eternal question of geographic parameters, as declaring that the idea of Russia he will promote does not include the further shrinking of the Russian space. Affirming the importance of defending the fragile borders of the RF also includes the notion of state legitimacy, which Putin is attempting to project through defending the borders and security of Russia – relying on the assumption that sovereignty and security are integral to a state's legitimacy in the eyes of the governed.

Thus the poignancy and resonance of Russia’s territorial question, particularly within Putin’s first term, stemmed in part from the context and the perception of the threat posed by continual disintegration. However, by 2008 the strengthening of the state and
the reassertion of Russian independence meant that the territory question was approached differently under Medvedev. Without the impetus of an ever-present threat, or perception of threat, Medvedev is able to avoid direct discussion of Russia's territorial identity. Instead this theme is discernible largely through Medvedev's focus on the need for international recognition and respect for a state's integrity. Emphasising the role of international law and its importance to international affairs, Medvedev consistently argues:

'Universally recognised norms and principles of international law should determine the rules of the game in international affairs...... Otherwise we will face international chaos and the practical impossibility of maintaining the pre-eminence of international law' (Medvedev, 2008).

Less obvious than Putin, but Medvedev is stressing the importance international norms such as sovereignty and grounding international interaction in the observance of these norms. This continues the earlier concept found in Putin's rhetoric of challenging the dominance of the West, particularly the US who is seen as constantly infringing on state sovereignty. Thus import of the West as an anti-model and the import of sovereign national borders in the perception of the Russian idea overlap and fulfil a three-fold role in the Presidential shaping of perceptions– both designating what Russia is not, what Russia stands for and where Russia is. Allowing the state's legitimacy to stem from the ability to guard against threat and redeem Russia's historic identity within sovereign borders (but not imperial borders).
Furthermore, the existential fears surrounding the question of what is Russia stem from the historical tendency to view the Russian empire as the Russian state. This conflation of state and empire was further entrenched as, 'most Russian intellectuals and politicians up to 1990 thought the Russian empire was the only state in which Russians could exist productively as a distinct community' (Tolz, 2003: 17). Overlapping this concern over Russian borders, the second timeless question of Russian identity appears – who are the Russians? important here are the notions of a multi-ethnic entity, Russians in the former Soviet republics after the Soviet disintegration and civic versus ethnic nationality. The problem, once again, has its roots in Russia’s imperial legacy. Without a clear separation of the core from the periphery, the designation of Russian and non-Russian, colonial ruler and colonial subject has been blurred. Tolz argues that the idea that 'the entire multi-ethnic tsarist empire was the Russian nation-state' (Tolz, 2003: 16), an attempt by Russian intellectuals to apply European ideas of nationalism to the pre-existing Russian situation, was and is a dysfunctional concept. Indeed the equation of a multi-ethnic empire with a nation state has a continuing impact, which can be seen in the Presidential rhetoric, where the term nation is rarely used alone and instead both Presidents refer to a culture, a civilisation, a single people, a society, a community or a state. For example: 'the only source and bearer of power in the Russian Federation is
its *multiethnic people* (Putin, 2004, emphasis added). This emphasis on the multiethnic character of Russia is, in part, a function of the fact that Russia is a multiethnic nation; the avoidance of ethnically specific ideas of nationalism in Presidential rhetoric demonstrates that any such language would exclude sections of the Russian citizenry and is therefore not politically pragmatic for the Presidency to project an ethnically exclusive idea of Russia. Again the projection of an inclusive national identity is an attempt to both create an idea of Russia and to legitimise the state's conception of this identity, basing legitimacy on the rhetorical acknowledgement of all Russian citizens.

However, the focus on the multi-ethnicity of Russia is also a function of Russia's imperial legacy and the lack of vocabulary or historical experience outside this reality. Ethnic relations may not always be peaceful in Russia, but multi-ethnicity is at the core of Russian identity;

>'harmonising interethnic relations within our country remains an absolute priority. Russia is inhabited by representatives of more than 180 peoples that speak 239 languages and dialects. This multicultural world is also Russia's unique advantage, a world in which representatives of different nationalities and faiths have lived together for more than a thousand years' (Medvedev, 2011).
This sentiment is shared by Putin, who also emphasises the multiethnic and diverse culture of Russia; 'our country has historically developed as a union of many peoples and cultures and the idea of a common community' (Putin, 2007). Thus the multiethnic character, and its celebration as Russia's 'advantage', is the key paradigm through which either President assesses the ethnic component of Russia identity. Both Presidents choose civic over ethnic identity, and a multi-ethnic identity over and exclusive ethnicity for Russia. This is a perception of Russia that draws on and celebrates the historical and cultural experience of Russia as a multi-ethnic empire, and does not limit the possibilities or ideas of who is Russian? Rather the Presidency adopts a relatively inclusive perception of Russian identity, as it allows them to embrace the historical experience of Russia as an empire as a component of identity. Again it is this use of rhetoric that draws on historical memory and cultural experience that the Presidency uses to legitimate the current state. Here the Presidency is legitimating the current state by casting it as the successor state of the past multi-ethnic empire and conferring the legitimacy found in this past era, and the legitimacy to be gained in the modern era through an ethnically inclusive approach, onto the contemporary state and regime. Once again the President as a perception-setting agent employs a narrative depend on historical memory to conflate the current and past states and thus conflate the legitimacy of the past with the present.
Furthermore, this question of who are the Russians links in with the debate between a civic or ethnic national identity – is the nation a civic entity or an *ethnie* (as proposed by Anthony Smith). In understanding the Presidential rhetoric, or lack thereof, in defining who is Russian, it is important to again highlight that political pragmatism is the guiding force and intellectual engagement with the historical debates is not. Thus the Presidential rhetoric answering this identity question takes two forms: firstly, in their *Addresses to the Federal Assembly* they do not set out parameters of an ethnic identity or conjure an exclusive notion of national identity, and second, any mention of membership to the Russian nation centres on notion of civic identity and citizenship. Therefore, Medvedev's rhetoric continually refers not to Russians but to citizens, for example 'take into account the legitimate interests and opinions of all citizens of Russia, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, political or other beliefs' (Medvedev, 2009). This functions as a politically pragmatic and inclusive allusion to the multi-ethnicity of Russia and by default indicates that the perception of Russia the President wishes to project is more a civic identity than an identity based solely on an exclusive ethnic identity.

The question of ethnicity involves not only those within the borders but also those outside the borders of the new nation–state. With the collapse of the USSR 'over 25 million Russians found themselves living outside the borders of the new Russian state'
(Tolz, 2003: 12). This further complicates the question of who are the Russians in the contemporary era and highlights a physical manifestation of the continuing imperial legacy, issues which need to be dealt with in the Presidential projection of a Russian identity. Putin highlights this issue in 2005:

>'the collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster of the century. As for the Russian nation, it became a genuine drama. Tens of millions of our co–citizens and compatriots found themselves outside Russian territory. Moreover, the epidemic of disintegration infected Russia itself' (Putin, 2005).

Here linking the territorial disintegration with the loss of Russians, therefore representing threats to two core questions of identity. Although the issue of who is Russian is not explicitly dealt with here, the implication is that these citizens outside the state borders are still to be considered Russian. Once again in dealing with these two existential questions and creating a perception of Russian identity that legitimates the state, Putin is casting himself as a redeemer who understands the sense of loss the 'geopolitical disaster' created within the Russian sense of self and who can redeem Russia, territorially and demographically. Being cast in the role of the redeemer of Russian sovereignty, territorial integrity, Russian people, past pride and Russian identity, the Presidency creates a narrative of redemption that attempts to legitimate both Presidential power and the nascent political order. The narrative of redemption is
seen as legitimating the state because it appeals to the beliefs of those that the state governs, or the beliefs the Presidency understands them to possess.

Conclusion: The Legitimising Role of the Russian Idea

The identity debates in Russia are centuries old, and the themes present in contemporary Presidential rhetoric can be traced back at least three centuries (see Tolz, 2003). However their continued use in Presidential rhetoric to both craft a perception of Russian identity and to legitimate the current state, demonstrates their continued applicability to modern Russia and the continuity of identity questions within Russia. Understandings of what and who is Russia? and the relationship of Russia to the world and to itself are fundamental to understanding the political landscape of any nation, however given the context and recent shocks to Russian identity, the ability to shape a perception of identity seen as legitimate takes on even greater importance and recourse to historic memory represents a core tool in the legitimation of a new regime.

The President's attempts to project a vision of Russian identity must be seen as a politically pragmatic attempt at creating a national idea or narrative that is both legitimate and legitimising. Being the advocate for a legitimate version of national
identity allows for the conflation of the Presidency and the narrative in the minds of Russians, thus aiding in the legitimation of their political power and the political structure. Putin and Medvedev utilise the centuries old questions and narratives of Russian identity, adapting to contemporary contexts, and craft a Russian idea that both embraces the good and rebuts the bad of the past and synthesises these various components into a narrative of identity. The ability to create and project such a narrative of national identity is fundamental to the President's attempt to legitimate the nascent political order, as the ability to generate a national narrative that resonates is vital to crafting an idea of nation that people can belief in and which is legitimate.
CONCLUSION:
WHAT is the SIGNIFICANCE of this?

The perceptions of the Russian state and identity in the post-Soviet era may be a contested space, however the post-1999 Presidents have displayed a remarkably continuous narrative of the Russian state and identity. As the, arguably, most important political actor, the Presidency has attempted to imbue the current regime with a sense of legitimacy through crafting a perception of Russia that relies largely on historical narratives, cultural memory and ideas of sovereignty and independence. The survey of Presidential rhetoric above demonstrates the ability of a Presidential perception to incorporate the new and the old into a national narrative that conflates the Russian idea projected by the President with the state's legitimacy, or rather the President's attempt at legitimacy.

This research essentially asked two questions of Presidential rhetoric from 2000 to 2011, how have perceptions of the Russian state and identity been shaped by the language found in the Presidential Addresses to the Federal Assembly? And why? Evans argues 'Putin's thinking constitutes a distinctive choice of an identity for contemporary Russia' (Evans, 2008: 901). This is not to argue that the President determines the future of Russia, rather that the President is a perception-setting agent – seeking to
use these perceptions to imbue the nascent political order with legitimacy generated through a coherent national narrative. The analysis of Presidential conceptions of the Russian state and identity reveals that the 2000–2011 Presidency has relied on several continuous, core themes to craft a coherent national narrative that relies heavily on past experience to influence current state legitimacy.

In perceiving of the state, both Putin and Medvedev continually use the paradigms of a strong state, a unified state and a democratic state. The continual refrain of the Russian state as strong, unified and democratic seeks to project a national image, gives a sense of continuity to the President's message and continuity with the best of both the past (strength and unity) and the best of the future (democracy). Appealing to the myths and memory of Soviet and Tsarist state legitimacy, the Presidential rhetoric represents an attempt to conflate the past state with the present state – conferring legitimacy by framing the RF as the successor state of the USSR.

Similarly the Presidential perception of Russian identity revolves around three key themes or questions: Russia vis-a-vis the West, Russia as unique and the questions who and where is Russia? Emphasis on these themes represents yet another attempt to frame the Russian identity as continuous with the past, perceiving of the RF as consistent with the idea of Russian identity found in the Soviet and Tsarist empires–
even if in new borders and democratic. This appeal to cultural memory, if not nostalgia, constitutes a core component of the Presidential vision of Russian identity and the Presidential attempts to generate state legitimacy. The crafting of identity reliant on previous experiences of legitimacy allows, once again, the conflation of the past era’s legitimacy and the legitimacy of the current regime – through representation of identity narratives as continuous. Thus the Presidential rhetoric reveals, not necessarily the state and identity themselves or the real level of state legitimacy, but the perception of them through the eyes of the most important actor in Russian politics. Through envisioning the Presidency as a proactive agent focused on perception–setting and legitimacy seeking this thesis attempts to explore the nature of Presidential perceptions and agency.
Bibliography


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