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Critical Discourse Analysis of Memocratic Ideology in Putin's Interviews about Russian Aggression in Georgia and Ukraine

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This study's **objective** is to examine how Vladimir Putin utilizes collective memory in his communication to transform Russia into a memocracy – a regime where history is instrumentalized to serve autocratic leadership – and justifies Russia's aggressive military actions toward neighboring states through manipulative narratives constructed around the Russian imperial and Soviet past. This article illustrates how memocratic ideology – a system of beliefs centered around memory as a foundation of national identity – is weaponized against Georgia and Ukraine to return them into Russia's "historical" sphere of influence. **Method.** Critical discourse analysis (CDA) and discourse-historical analysis (DHA) of Vladimir Putin's 2008 interview with CNN host Matthew Chance and 2024 interview with Tucker Carlson reveal patterns of this ideology. This ideological framework bridges the past and present through specific historical myths – such as the "Russian World" (Russkiy Mir), the "brotherhood of nations," and the West/NATO as a threat to Russia – which are used to legitimize violence against Georgian and Ukrainian statehood. **Results.** The analysis demonstrates how Putin constructs argumentation around topoi of historical unity, historical pride, liberation and protection, security and self-defense, and international law and power. The application of CDA and DHA approaches demonstrates how Putin discursively constructs an "Us vs. Them" opposition, portraying Russia as a peaceful and just state provoked into responding to "external threats" from the Ukrainian and Georgian governments and their Western allies. Through the discourse analysis of linguistic choices, syntactic structures, and rhetorical devices, this article provides evidence of the reinforcement of memocratic ideology intertwined within the Kremlin's manipulative narratives targeted at international audiences.

Keywords: memocratic ideology, critical discourse analysis, Russian aggression, Putin's broadcast interviews, manipulative narratives

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Критичний дискурс-аналіз мемократичної ідеології в інтерв'ю Путіна щодо російської агресії в Грузії та Україні

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Метою дослідження є аналіз того, як Володимир Путін у своїй комунікації використовує колективну пам'ять задля перетворення Росії на «мемократію» – режим, в якому історія використовується як інструмент автократії – та виправдовує російську військову агресію проти сусідніх держав за допомогою маніпулятивних наративів, сконструйованих навколо імперського та радянського минулого Росії. Ця стаття ілюструє, як мемократична ідеологія – система переконань, що базується на пам'яті як основі національної ідентичності – використовується як зброя проти Грузії та України з метою повернути їх у «історичну» сферу впливу Росії. **Метод.** Критичний дискурс-аналіз (КДА) та дискурсивно-історичний аналіз (ДІА) інтерв'ю Володимира Путіна 2008 року з ведучим CNN Метью Ченсом та 2024 року з Такером Карлсоном виявляють закономірності цієї ідеології. Ця ідеологічна парадигма поєднує минуле й сьогодення через конкретні історичні міфи, такі як «Русській мир», «братерство народів» та Захід/НАТО як загроза Росії, які використовуються для легітимізації насильства проти грузинської та української державності. **Результат.** Аналіз демонструє, як Путін вибудовує аргументацію навколо тем історичної єдності, історичної гордості, визволення та захисту, безпеки та самооборони, а також міжнародного права та влади. Застосування підходів КДА і ДІА демонструє, як Путін дискурсивно конструює опозицію «свої проти чужих», зображуючи Росію як мирну та справедливую державу, яку змушують реагувати на «зовнішні загрози» з боку урядів України та Грузії та їхніх західних союзників. Завдяки дискурс-аналізу лінгвістичних інструментів, синтаксичних та риторичних структур ця стаття наводить докази застосування мемократичної ідеології вплетеної у кремлівські маніпулятивні наративи, націлені на міжнародні аудиторії.

Ключові слова: мемократична ідеологія, критичний дискурс-аналіз, російська агресія, телевізійні інтерв'ю Путіна, маніпулятивні наративи

Memory has become a bedrock for building national identity in regimes across different political spectrums. Some use it to boost patriotism and domestic morale as a foundation for democratic development, while others manipulate memory to turn societies into “memocracies” – “rules based on memory” (Belavusau et al., 2024, p. v) where historical narratives are constructed to shift from democracy toward autocracy. This research is focused on the case of Russia and its leadership's communication, in particular the interviews to the international audiences given by Vladimir Putin, who has been in power for over twenty-six years. This study examines how Putin, as an autocrat, utilizes collective memory as a tool to maintain his power. He repeatedly communicates that the dissolution of the Soviet Union (USSR) turned out to be a “major geopolitical disaster of the century” and a “genuine drama” for the Russian nation (President of Russia, 2005), and refers to a shared history when justifying his country's actions against former Soviet states.

In Russia, the political discourse of hostility against the “collective West” – namely Euro-Atlantic partnership and NATO countries – alongside memory politics has become a pillar of an ideology and state propaganda that are memocratic at its core. In this research, the *memocratic ideology* is defined as a system of beliefs centered around memory as a foundation of national identity. In Russia's case, this ideology bridges past and present through specific historical myths (e.g., Slavic brotherhood; the “Russian World” (*Russkiy Mir*) grounded in Russian culture,

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language and the Orthodox Christianity) used to legitimize violence against Georgian and Ukrainian statehood.

In this article, we critically discursively analyze the 2008 and 2024 broadcast interviews about the wars in Georgia and Ukraine that Vladimir Putin gave to American media hosts. The study's objective is to examine how Putin exploits the collective memory of the Russian imperial and Soviet past to justify aggressive military actions in neighboring states seen as Russia's "historical" sphere of influence.

Background and Literature Review

Framing of Russia's Military Aggressions in Public and Media Discourses

Since gaining its independence in 1991 Russia has waged a number of armed conflicts that the Kremlin has consistently framed as defensive, protective, preventive, anti-terrorist, liberating or a combination of thereof. Among the most brutal wars that marked the mid-1990s and early 2000s were the two Chechen wars, which the Russian leadership portrayed as an "anti-terrorist operation" and a "war on terror." These were aimed at fighting the Chechen people, who sought to secede from the Russian Federation after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and proclaim Chechnya an independent state. After the defeat in the First Chechen War in 1996, and following Putin's appointment as acting president in 1999 and his formal election to office, the start of the Second Chechen War marked Putin's presidency as a return to authoritarianism. He deliberately built his image as a "strong man" (see Frye, 2024; Politkovskaya, 2006) who aimed to restore order and Russia's status as a great world power by fighting "bandits" and "terrorists" within Russia while addressing alleged external threats from the so-called "collective West."

Communication literature extensively analyzes the construction of the Kremlin's anti-West and anti-NATO state propaganda rhetoric, along with history-centered strategic narratives about the "historic" brotherhood of Slavic nations, "Russkiy Mir", and imperial pride (see Oates & Ramsay, 2024; Hellman, 2024; Hutchings et al., 2024; Fedchenko, 2016). In this article, we trace how Putin, as the leader of the Kremlin, frames manipulative narratives in his communication with English-speaking audiences in order to justify Russia's invasions of Georgia and Ukraine.

The two military aggressions Russia imposed on the former Soviet states of Georgia and Ukraine are associated with their aspirations to join NATO and deepen multisector cooperation with the European Union. In April 2008, at the NATO Summit in Bucharest, Putin strongly opposed the potential membership of Ukraine and Georgia and characterized the Alliance's eastward expansion as a direct threat to Russia. His anti-Western rhetoric was revealed vividly during and after the five-day war (August 7–12, 2008) that centered on the Georgian provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The separatist governments of these provinces were supported by Russia but, to date, have not been recognized by most countries. While Western media covered the conflict as the "Russo-Georgian War," "Georgia-Russia conflict," Russia's "invasion," "illegal occupation," or "hybrid aggression" against Georgia (see Dickinson, 2021; CNN Editorial Research, 2023), the Kremlin portrayed it as a "peacekeeping operation." Putin blamed the U.S. for provoking the conflict and supporting the Georgian government. He also suggested that U.S. authorities initiated the war to earn political dividends in the upcoming elections.

In April 2014, in the aftermath of the Euromaidan Revolution in Ukraine that resulted in the overturn of pro-Russian elites and a return to a political path towards European integration, Russia illegally annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula and supported the separatist paramilitary groups in Eastern Ukraine's provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk (collectively called "Donbas"). The Kremlin framed the annexation of Crimea as "unification" and a "return" of "historically Russian" territory, labeled the Euromaidan Revolution as a "coup-d'état" supported by the West, and blamed Ukraine for starting the war in Donbas. In February 2022, the conflict expanded. Russia incited a full-scale aggression that is internationally recognized as an "unprovoked," "unjustified" invasion,



while the Kremlin frames it as a “special military operation” for the “demilitarization” and “de-Nazification” of Ukraine, liberating Russian-speakers and protecting Russian national interests from the NATO threat (see Popova & Shevel, 2024).

Shared memory of the Russian imperial and Soviet past is the common foundation that Putin deliberately uses to justify Russia’s aggressive actions in both Georgia and Ukraine in his interviews, speeches and addresses. This discourse legitimizes Putin’s authoritarian power and elevates his revisionist view on history to the status of a memocratic ideology.

Memocratic Ideology and Maintaining Power

In this study, the term “ideology” is operationalized based on the critical approaches proposed by T. van Dijk (2003) and M. Reisigl and R. Wodak (2009). According to van Dijk (2003), a broad view on ideologies suggests they are “the fundamental beliefs of a group and its members,” while a narrowly defined ideology is “a system of false, misguided or misleading beliefs” (p. 7). The scholar recognizes that the negative notion of ideology contains a presupposition for the polarization of “Us vs Them” between a dominant group (*ingroup* – “us”) and all other groups (*outgroup* – “them”). Reisigl and Wodak (2009) propose a similar approach to defining ideology as a “one-sided perspective or world view composed of related mental representations, convictions, opinions, attitudes and evaluations, which is shared by members of a specific social group” (p. 88). We argue that in cases of memocratic ideology in authoritarian regimes, historical revisionism becomes the foundation for false and misleading beliefs manifested in opinions and attitudes. Paraphrasing van Dijk’s (2003) idea, it leads to such a kind of politization as “*We* know true history; *they* do not know and/or respect it.”

A state’s goal to dominate the historical narrative results in what Mälksoo (2021) calls “militant memocracy” – “the mobilization of state power” to control and sanction everything that challenges the “preferred self-identity” (p. 491). Such an understanding of *power* as the *control* of one group over the others corresponds with van Dijk’s (2003) explanation of the term “power” and his vision that ideology becomes the “mental dimension” (p. 35) of this control. Reisigl and Wodak (2009) also regard power in terms of control, submission to authority, and “asymmetric relationships” in society (pp. 88-89). In this research, we build on the scholars’ arguments that through ideologies social actors configure power relations and that power is legitimized in discourses. In other words, discourses become sites of ideological battles for sociopolitical control.

We see Putin’s communication about Russia’s aggressive actions towards neighboring states as a means to establish and maintain a memocratic ideology – a set of beliefs centered around historical myths, i.e., Russian exceptionalism and so-called “Russian World”), and Russia as a superpower and inheritor of the legacy of the Russian Empire and the USSR.

Research Questions and Methodology

RQ1: How does Putin use history to discursively construct his arguments to justify Russia’s involvement in armed conflicts in Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014-2022-present)?

RQ2: How do linguistic practices mediate and reproduce memocratic ideology in Putin’s broadcast interviews that target international audiences, in particular Americans?

Method

Since the aim of this study is to critically analyze how Putin uses history as a tool to construct his argumentation, we draw from the methodology of discourse-historical analysis of Reisigl and Wodak (2009) and critical discourse analysis of van Dijk (2003), who conceptualize the discursive strategy of argumentation using the term “*topoi*” (argumentation schemes) that can be either “reasonable or fallacious” (p. 102). The scholars define *topoi* as “ready-made” argumentations (van



Dijk, 2003, p. 53) or “content-related warrants or ‘conclusion rules’ which connect the argument(s) with the conclusion, the claim” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, p. 102). Topoi are used for either the justification or questioning of truth claims. In this article, we employ a two-step critical discourse analysis of texts. First, we identify the themes at the macro level of narratives that are predefined and discussed in previous research on the Kremlin’s disinformation and propaganda (e.g., Oates & Ramsay, 2024; Hellman, 2024). Second, we inductively isolate the argumentation schemes (topoi) that are embedded within these broader themes.

We also ground our analysis in the methodology of broadcast interview studies. In particular, we are interested in the role that interviewers play in shaping the audience’s perception of public figures (see Ekström & Lundell, 2011; Patrona, 2009). It is argued that journalists serve as a “vehicle for evaluation” to “voice concrete views” (Patrona, 2009, p. 173). We build on this and suggest that interaction with an interviewer shapes the way an interviewee formulates an argument – by either aligning with or challenging an interviewer’s framing, thereby constructing either a supporting narrative or a counternarrative.

Data Selection

In this study, we critically analyze the transcripts of two interviews Vladimir Putin gave to the American media: in 2008, to the global news network *CNN* about the war in Georgia, and in 2024, to the political commentator Tucker Carlson’s streaming platform the *Tucker Carlson Network (TCN)*, about the war in Ukraine (Interview transcripts are available in the “Supplements” section – <https://cimc.knu.ua/en/supplements#sd-en>). Following the outbreak of the respective conflicts, both interviews were the first public commentaries Vladimir Putin provided to the Western press as a top Russian official – as Prime Minister in 2008 and as President in 2024. The interview he gave to *CNN* host Matthew Chance on August 29, 2008 (transcript: 5122 words, 326 lines; no video is publicly available in online archives) was aired two weeks after the end of the armed conflict in Georgia. The interview with Tucker Carlson (transcript: 17212 words, 1164 lines), streamed on X and YouTube on February 8, 2024, was the first interview Putin had granted to any representative of the Western media since the start of the full-scale war in Ukraine. Our research corpus is necessarily limited to these two interviews, as they were the only communications about Russia’s wars in Georgia and Ukraine that Putin conducted directly with Western media hosts.

The two hosts have quite different backgrounds and reputations. Matthew Chance is *CNN*’s senior international correspondent with experience in war reporting, including the wars in Chechnya and Georgia. Tucker Carlson is a right-wing political media figure with a controversial and polarizing reputation, and is a former journalist at the conservative TV channel *Fox News*. While in 2008 *CNN* was not the only Western media outlet to interview the Russian leadership about the war in Georgia, in 2024 Tucker Carlson was the first and to date the only Western media persona selected by the Kremlin to interview Putin about the war in Ukraine. Given these fundamental differences in the hosts’ political and professional positions, this research compares and contrasts their approaches to formulating questions and shaping Putin’s responses.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis of democratic narratives was conducted through a procedure focusing on nomination and argumentation. To examine nomination, we identified prevalent lexical representations of key elements of the discourse related to memory, i.e., “history”, “Russian Empire”, “Soviet Union” etc. In this work, we adopt Rheindorf’s (2026) procedure of argumentation analysis to identify recurring argumentative schemes in Putin’s interviews. This analysis shows how linguistic means are used in the construction of arguments. It comprises the following steps. First, preparing the interview transcripts – numbering lines and selecting parts with mentions of historical events, figures and their interpretations. Second, analyzing the hosts’ questions in terms of their evaluative, prompting or neutral tone, as well as Putin’s immediate reactions and responses, and his



strategies of interaction with the interviewers. Third, analyzing the discursive construction of opposition the “*Us vs. Them*” in Putin’s answers on the *syntactic level* (sentences types: affirmative or negative; declarative, interrogative or imperative); as well as the *lexical* and *rhetoric levels* (usage of pronouns such as *I, we, us, you, they, and them*, and metaphors). Fourth, analyzing themes: (a) identifying themes involving historical events, (b) for each theme, reconstructing the reasoning by identifying related arguments: detecting *linguistic cues* (conjunctions: e.g., yet, but, therefore, thus, because, since; modal verbs: e.g., must, should, etc.) signaling concluding/causal relations. Fifth, identifying recurring argumentative patterns (*topoi*).

Results and Discussion

Interaction with the Interview Hosts and Construction of an Argument

Forms and types of interviews presuppose certain strategies of interaction between an interviewee and an interviewer. Since in both analyzed cases the interviewee is Vladimir Putin, it was expected to trace similarities in his approaches to answering questions and developing his arguments. Indeed, the analysis revealed similar patterns and strategies in his communication with the hosts. However, the distinctions between the interviews demonstrate how media personas shape discourse differently and impact how Putin frames his arguments. Both interviews can be categorized as live studio interviews, recorded and broadcast for international English-speaking audiences. Ekström and Lundell (2011) qualify such newscasts as “politician or elite” and “confrontation or accountability” interviews (p. 5) where journalists confront politicians with questions to hold them accountable for their decisions and actions. However, it is questionable whether *CNN*’s Matthew Chance and Tucker Carlson set the same goals of challenging Putin with critical questions. They both recorded interviews on Putin’s “territory” in the Kremlin, not in neutral studios, which in itself manifests a power dynamic regarding who is a “host” and who is a “guest”: in fact, the media hosts are guests invited to interview Putin. In the Tucker Carlson case, this is literally the situation, because he was exclusively selected for what Putin’s press secretary Dmitry Peskov called his “pro-American” position and “alternative views” (i.e., critique of the Biden’s administration’s support for Ukraine) distinct from the mainstream media of the “collective West” (Al Jazeera, 2024). However, an important difference is that Chance represents *CNN*, a long-established news organization, whereas Carlson is a media influencer not affiliated with any institution. Therefore, Carlson is presumably autonomous in his ethical choices and has no official responsibility to align with such journalistic standards as balance and accountability.

Table 1. Comparison of the styles of Matthew Chance and Tucker Carlson’s questions to Putin

Host	Quote from the interview
Matthew Chance	- <i>Can you guarantee to us</i> that Russia will never again use its militarily forces against a neighboring state?
	- And if you are suggesting that [U.S. involvement], <i>what evidence do you have?</i>
	- <i>It sounds a little farfetched</i> , but I am interested <i>because I was in Georgia...</i>
	- Would Russia ever use the supply of energy to western Europe as a <i>leverage to apply pressure</i> should the diplomatic tensions be ratcheted up?
Tucker Carlson	- Well, it <i>doesn’t sound like you’re inventing</i> it [historical facts].
	- It’s <i>not boring</i> . I just don’t know how it’s relevant...
	- You <i>obviously have encyclopedic knowledge</i> of this region...
	- Were you <i>sincere</i> ? Would you have joined NATO? - <i>Pardon my ignorance</i> . What is de-Nazification?



Despite the similar settings of the interviews and the key subjects of the conversations – Russia-West relations and the wars in Georgia and Ukraine respectively – Chance and Carlson employ different tactics when questioning their interviewee (see Table 1; emphasis added). Although both start with provocative questions about Russia’s responsibility for initiating the wars, throughout the conversation their styles of interviewing differ: Chance confronts Putin with uncomfortable evidence-based questions, while Carlson often interjects emotional and evaluative remarks, compliments Putin or succumbs to his initiatives in turning the conversation flow from one topic to another.

Despite the differences in interviewing approaches, one can trace similar patterns and strategies in Putin’s interaction with the hosts that help him assert his arguments based on historical manipulations and the construction of oppositions. In the following section we discuss the themes, topoi and his discursive strategies of argumentation.

Themes, Topoi and Strategies of Argumentation

The inductive analysis of both interviews revealed the recurring argumentative schemes (topoi) that refer to two major themes: (a) the unity and “brotherhood” of “historically” Russian lands and peoples; and (b) the West/NATO as a threat to the Russian Federation (see Table 2).

Within these themes and topoi, it is possible to categorize five discursive strategies of argumentation. *The strategy of denial and objection* involves either Putin’s direct objection to a host’s inquiries and suggestions, or the covert/overt denial of facts. Such denials Putin presents as an alternative “Russian” view. This opposition is constructed on different discursive levels, including structure and meaning. On the syntactic level (see Excerpt 1), six out of thirteen answers in the CNN interview start with overt objections.

Excerpt 1 (<https://cimc.knu.ua/en/supplements#sd-en>)

Line 7: “Of course, that’s **not** the case” (to the question “Wasn’t you that ordered Russian forces into Georgia and you who should take responsibility for the consequences?”).

Line 22: “Of course **not**” (to the question “Wasn’t this conflict a way of demonstrating that in this region, it’s Russia that’s the power, not NATO and certainly not the U.S.?”).

Line 70: “I **strongly object** to the way this question is formulated” (to the question “Can you guarantee to us that Russia will never again use its militarily forces against a neighboring state?”). (CNN, 2008; emphasis added)

Table 2. Themes and topoi in Putin’s interviews to CNN (2008) and TCN (2024)

Theme	Topoi	Argument
The unity and “brotherhood” of “historically” Russian lands and peoples	<i>topos of historical unity</i>	Neighboring states were parts of Russia at certain times in history; therefore, they are considered “historically” Russian.
	<i>topos of historical pride</i>	Neighboring states were parts of Russia at certain times in history; therefore, Russia can assert a claim of pride over their shared memory.
	<i>topos of liberation / protection</i>	Neighboring states were parts of Russia at certain times in history, therefore, Russia has the right to liberate/protect populations from those who oppose its legacy.



The West /NATO as a threat to Russia	<i>topos of security / self-defense</i>	The NATO / West pursue aggressive policies; therefore, Russia is forced to defend itself against them.
	<i>topos of international law</i>	The NATO / West are the ones who break international law and lie; therefore, Russia is presented as lawful and rightful.
	<i>topos of power</i>	The NATO / West do not account for Russia’s needs and demands; therefore, Russia is compelled to show its power.

The strategies of objection and denial are also observed on the level of meaning. Putin substantiates his argumentation by objecting to Western views of the wars in Georgia and Ukraine, where Russia is characterized as an aggressor. He provides a “broader” position supported by “the history of relations between the peoples and ethnic groups in these regions” (CNN, 2008) and presents Russia as the offended party. For example, he describes the war in Georgia as “a special tragedy” for Russia. His argumentation follows this logic: Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia belonged to the Russian Empire in the past, therefore contemporary Russia can still claim them as parts of Russian culture and assert its right to be involved in their affairs (topos of unity).

In the *TCN* interview, while declining to reply to Carlson’s question, Putin additionally applies a manipulative *strategy of projection or mirroring* by blaming the West for what Russia does itself. He constantly uses the collective pronoun “we”. Although his argumentation centers around the opposition of a synecdoche “we/us” (Russia) vs. “you/them” (the U.S., NATO/West, and Ukraine/Georgia as their allies), he also projects Russia’s past and present actions onto those of his opponents, thus creates false equivalences where “us” simultaneously manifests both “Russia and the West” and “Russia vs. the West” (see Excerpt 2):

Excerpt 2 (<https://cimc.knu.ua/en/supplements#sd-en>)

Lines 253-260: “**Let’s not** talk about who is afraid of whom. **Let’s not** reason in such terms, and **let’s** get into the fact that after 1991, when Russia expected that it would be welcomed into the brotherly family of civilized nations, nothing like this happened. **You tricked us**. I don’t mean you personally when I say you, of course. I’m talking about the United States. The promise was that NATO would not expand eastward, but it happened five times. There were five waves of expansion. **We** tolerated all **that**. **We** were trying to persuade **them**. **We were saying, please don’t, we are as bourgeois now as you are. We are a market economy**, and there’s no Communist party power. **Let’s** negotiate. (Rev, 2024; emphasis added)

Putin employs the identical logic regarding Russia’s right to be involved in Georgian and Ukrainian affairs when replying to a question about the U.S. role as a military ally to Georgia and Ukraine. He refers to historical precedent while describing the period of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the U.S.: “we always avoided any direct clash between *our* civilians and, most certainly, between *our* military” (CNN, 2008; emphasis added). The collective pronoun “we” suggests that Putin still perceives Georgia and Ukraine as battlefields for confrontation between Russia, as the successor to the Soviet Union, and the U.S. – rather than as sovereign states with their own right to independent decisions and actions (topos of unity).

Russia’s President also embeds references to history into arguments about the statehood of Georgia and Ukraine as being “historically” tied to Russia. He applies a strategy of denial similar to the one which van Dijk (1992) identifies in racist discourse: “I have nothing against blacks, but ...” (p. 87). The following excerpt illustrates how Putin uses this strategy when discussing Georgia’s sovereignty (see Excerpt 3):



Excerpt 3 (<https://cimc.knu.ua/en/supplements#sd-en>)

Lines 55-57: “**We have never infringed** on the sovereignty of Georgia and have no intention of doing so in the future. **And yet**, considering the fact that almost a million, even more than a million Georgians have moved here, **we have special spiritual links** with that country and its people”. (CNN, 2025; emphasis added)

Van Dijk (1992) explains the discursive strategy of denial as a “transfer move” that leads to a *strategy of defense* “presupposing explicit or implicit accusations” (p. 91). One can trace the application of these strategies in the memocratic discourse of Putin’s interviews. The Russian President applies a combination of the strategies of projection or mirroring and defense while accusing the U.S. of breaking international law. He portrays Russia as a lawful and peace-loving state that restores justice and maintains international order. In both interviews (see Excerpts 4 and 5), Putin refers to the case of the Yugoslav wars, in particular, to the U.S. and NATO roles in them and the recognition of the independence of Kosovo, which he compares to the cases of Georgia and Ukraine. The following examples also illustrate his usage of such figures of speech as rhetorical questions and metaphors to further emphasize his point (e.g., “Pandora’s box,” “genie out of the bottle,” etc.).

Excerpt 4 (<https://cimc.knu.ua/en/supplements#sd-en>)

Lines 264-269: “What shall we say to the small nations of the Caucasus as to why independence can be gained in Kosovo but not here? **You are putting us in a ridiculous position**. At that time, **no one was talking about international law; we alone did**. **Now, they have all remembered it**. Now, **for some reason**, everyone is talking about international law. But who opened **Pandora’s box**? **Did we do it? No, we didn’t do it...**” (CNN, 2008; emphasis added)

Excerpt 5 (<https://cimc.knu.ua/en/supplements#sd-en>)

Lines 270-275: “What **did the United States** do? **In violation of an international law** and the UN Charter, it started bombing Belgrade. It was the United States that **let the genie out of the bottle**. Moreover, when **Russia protested and expressed its resentment**, what was said? The UN Charter and **international law have become obsolete**. **Now, everyone invokes** international law, but at that time they started saying that everything was outdated”. (Rev, 2024; emphasis added)

Although some of the hosts’ questions directly mention historical events and figures (for example, the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, former American presidents, etc.), Putin himself often initiates the turns in the interviews to impose conversation about historical events on the hosts and center his argumentation around them. This *strategy of “enlightenment”* is combined with the *strategies of attacking and counterattacking* the hosts through the use of these linguistic means:

- *imperative sentences*: “**We must take a broader view** of this conflict. I think both you and **your – our** – viewers today **will be interested to learn** a little more about the **history** (...) If you think that this is unimportant, **you may cut** it from the program. **Don’t hesitate**. I wouldn’t mind”. (CNN, 2008; emphasis added)
- *rhetorical questions*: “Are we having a **talk show** or a **serious conversation**?” (Rev, 2024; emphasis added).
- *exaggerated politeness*: “I **apologize for the long monologue**; I felt it would be of interest” (CNN, 2008); “This briefing is coming to an end. **It might be boring**, but it explains many things. [Tucker Carlson: “It’s not boring”.] Good, good. **I’m so gratified that**
- **you appreciate** that. **Thank you**.” (Rev, 2024; emphasis added).



The provided examples demonstrate how Putin manipulates historical interpretations and communicates specific narratives to tell his version of collective history. Oates and Ramsay (2024) aptly explain that strategic narratives, as mental structures, are used by countries for propaganda. Putin's interviews illustrate the scholars' point that "a narrative often transcends language or logic" and that "in authoritarian regimes with controlled media systems, the narratives are constructed much more purposefully and disseminated from the top down" (Oates & Ramsay, 2024, pp. 56-57). Regarding manipulative narratives, we share the researchers' sound observation about the importance of being able to recognize them in order to anticipate the steps of authoritarian regimes. In Putin's interviews, one can trace the "linguistic signaling" of Russia's aggressive actions.

The discussed discursive strategies of denial and objection, defense, projection or mirroring, "enlightenment," and attack and counterattack allow Putin to construct arguments that justify Russia's invasions of both Georgia and Ukraine. History becomes the key component of his argumentative schemes, which reinforce a memocratic ideology conceived as a set of ideas and beliefs grounded in manipulative, revisionist narratives and historical myths that weaponize memory for the political purpose of restoring Russia's domination as a regional and world power.

Conclusion

In this paper, we critically analyzed how, in broadcast interviews about the wars in Georgia and Ukraine, Vladimir Putin, as an autocrat, employs a memocratic ideology – a system of beliefs centered around historical revisionism and manipulation. The focus of our attention is on how he uses memory to discursively construct his arguments to justify Russia's involvement in armed conflicts in Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014-2022-ongoing). This research revealed that the Russian President follows argumentative schemes that can be categorized as topoi of historical unity, historical pride, liberation/protection, security/self-defense, international law and power. These topoi refer to two broader themes derived from the history of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union: Russia's vision of neighboring states as "brotherly" and "historically" Russian; and perception of the West/NATO as a threat to Russia.

The critical discourse analysis of Putin's interviews demonstrates that he interacts with American hosts while applying various discursive argumentative strategies. These strategies of denial, objection, projection or mirroring, defense, "enlightenment," and attack and counterattack often involve the manipulation of historical events and the creation of false equivalences that follow fallacious a logic: i.e., equating the annexation of Crimea with the Kosovo's case, accusing the U.S. of provoking wars, etc. Putin utilizes a variety of linguistic means to develop and deepen his arguments: lexical, syntactic and rhetorical figures (metaphors, imperatives, rhetorical questions, etc.). He discursively constructs an "Us vs. Them" opposition, purposefully portraying Russia ("Us") as a peaceful, just state forced to respond to external threats from enemies ("Them") – specifically, the Ukrainian and Georgian governments and their Western allies.

Study limitations and perspectives of further research. Due to the limited corpus of interviews available for analysis and the qualitative nature of this research, this study does not aim to either generalize or comprehensively scrutinize the Kremlin's memocratic propaganda narratives. This article rather provides evidence of the construction of a memocratic ideology by the Kremlin leader in his communication with the American media. Potential follow-up research on this topic might include a critical analysis of other types of discourses where Russia's memocratic ideology is maintained and reinforced. In particular, the focus could be on comparative studies of Russian media and policy discourses (e.g., state media, memory laws, and official statements by political figures other than Putin) that target domestic and international – both Western and non-Western – audiences. A systematic understanding of the communicative logic that supports "Putin's wars" is ultimately helpful for developing effective solutions to counter aggression that political regimes with memocratic ambitions around the globe might be tempted to replicate, following Russia's alluring example.



Data Availability Statement. The data is available in the "[Supplements](https://cimc.knu.ua/en/supplements#sd-en)" (<https://cimc.knu.ua/en/supplements#sd-en>) section.

Ethics Approval. Ethical approval was not required for this study.

Informed Consent. Not covered by the study.

Consent for Publication. Not covered by the study.

Declaration of generative artificial intelligence and technologies using artificial intelligence in the writing process. Author confirms that no artificial intelligence tools were used to create, write, or edit the text during the preparation of this manuscript. All results are original and obtained without the help of AI. Artificial intelligence was not used for the development of the research hypothesis, the construction of the theoretical model, the collection, selection, or analysis of empirical material, the interpretation of research findings, or the formulation of scientific conclusions. All conceptual provisions, analytical categories, frames, conclusions, and scholarly interpretations are the result of the author's independent academic work and are grounded in the author's professional expertise, theoretical analysis, and inductive research approach. The author assumes full responsibility for the content of the article and for adherence to the principles of academic integrity.

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