

ALTHUSSER IN THE KREMLIN: ON THE PRODUCTION OF IDEOLOGY IN PUTIN'S RUSSIA

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The article analyzes the ideology of the modern Russian Federation through the prism of Louis Althusser's concept and the phenomenon of the "Russian World". The full-scale military invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 is seen not only as a geopolitical move or "precedent", but also as a result of the formation of a specific ideological order that combines nationalism, imperialism, and Eurasianism. The author argues that the concept of the "Russian world" has transformed from a marginal intellectual discourse into a state ideology, institutionalized through the ideological apparatuses of the state (IAS). Using Althusserian categories of ideology, discourse, and social practices, the article proposes the author's model of the DNP-field, which demonstrates the interconnection between the discursive, narrative, and socio-practical dimensions of contemporary Russian ideology. The work analyzes the functioning of the discursive field of Ruscism, which is formed through the media, education, religion, and repressive mechanisms of the state. Particular attention is paid to the narratives through which the Russian political elite carries out the "privatization of the past", reinforces the image of the external enemy, and legitimizes the imperial order. Social practices are also considered: from military-patriotic education of schoolchildren to mass rituals (for example, parades on May 9 and the "Immortal Regiment"), which ensure the reproduction of ideology at the everyday level. It is shown that in conditions of authoritarianism, the ideology of Ruscism not only structures social reality, but also performs the function of supporting internal hegemony, where violence and consent are combined in specific proportions. Thus, the article demonstrates that the ideological factor is key to understanding contemporary Russian politics and its transformation into a modern imperial geopolitical project. Additionally, it is concluded that ideology acts as a kind of "catalyst" for political processes, as it allows the regime to mobilize public support even in crisis conditions. The proposed model can be used not only to analyze the Russian context, but also as a universal tool for studying the role of ideology in the functioning of authoritarian political systems.

Key words: Ruscism, "Russian World", ideology, Louis Althusser, discursive field, narrative, social practices, imperialism.

Introduction. Contemporary Russia consistently demonstrates an aggressive foreign policy aimed at realizing its own imperial ambitions. The full-scale military invasion of Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, should be viewed not only as an attempt to transform the existing geopolitical configuration in the world, but also as a tool for redistributing spheres of influence, primarily in the Eurasian region. At the same time, along with political [1], civilizational [2], and geopolitical explanations [3], the ideological factor takes on key importance. It is the ideological justification of Russian foreign policy that serves as an important normative and structural dimension, finding its expression in the concept of the "Russian World". The essence of this concept is to affirm the idea of civilizational and cultural unity of the Russian-speaking population not only within the borders of modern Russia, but also within the borders of the entire post-Soviet space.

The concept of the “Russian World”, which initially emerged as a marginal intellectual discourse, transformed into a state ideology at the beginning of the 21st century, actively supported by the Russian government and the Russian Orthodox Church [4]. Its institutionalization was completed in 2007, when President Putin issued a decree establishing a transnational foundation of the same name [5, p. 153]. A year later, during the Russian-Georgian war and the subsequent formation of the unrecognized republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the concept of the “Russian World” was put into practice as an ideological tool of foreign policy expansion. Thus, political legitimization by the Russian leadership brought it to a new transnational level, within which the “Russian World” functions as a set of geopolitical and civilizational narratives [6, p. 79].

Russia’s military invasion of Ukraine has triggered a series of bifurcation processes, the consequences of which will be long-term. Although Russia’s political system remains relatively manageable now, there is a high probability that it will face political collapse if the war fails – a scenario predicted two decades ago by American researchers [7]. The experience of comparable regimes shows that the key factor for stability is the presence of strong ideological power: it is this that allows mechanisms to be formed to counter revolutions and mass protests [8, p. 19]. Thus, powerful ideological consolidation ensured the stability of Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia during the Arab Spring, while its weakness accelerated the revolutionary processes in Syria, Libya, and Egypt. However, in the case of Russia, there is a fundamental difference: unlike the states, it has an imperial tradition spanning more than three centuries, which has ensured the institutionalization of specific mechanisms of power and their ideological formulation in the form of the concept of the “Russian World”.

It is appropriate to analyze the concept of the “Russian World” in the context of contemporary Russian imperialism [9]. It is precisely the imperial dimension that is the key to understanding the political realities in which Russia is forming a new configuration of internal and external power. The desire for Eurasian integration [10] and an aggressive foreign policy, perceived by the center as rational and justified [11, p. 79], reproduce the system of center and periphery. This system, which presupposes the dominance of the “center of the empire” and the subordination of the “periphery”, becomes a mechanism for institutionalizing imperial ideology. Its consolidation is facilitated, on the one hand, by Russia’s military and economic superiority over other post-Soviet states and, on the other hand, by its desire to position itself as a global actor capable of maintaining order and security in the region.

Thus, the “Russian World” should be viewed as a project of ideological construction of an alternative world order that claims universality and civilizational legitimacy. The article poses the research question: can the concept of the “Russian World” be considered an independent ideology of modern Russia, or is it merely a tool for legitimizing the Kremlin’s imperial ambitions? To answer this question, Althusser’s theory of ideology is used, which allows us to identify the mechanisms of power reproduction and reveal the specifics of the formation of the ideological order in Russia. The article consists of three parts: theoretical, which examines Louis Althusser’s approaches and their adaptation to the analysis of contemporary political regimes; empirical, devoted to the analysis of the concept of the “Russian World” and the ideology of Ruscism; analytical, where the author’s model of DNP-fields is applied to explain the mechanisms of reproduction of Russian ideology.

Theoretical framework. Louis Althusser’s concept of ideology remains both productive and controversial, especially when extrapolated to post-communist Russia. Althusser defines ideology as “representations of the imaginary relations of individuals to the real conditions of their existence” [12, p. 181]. In other works, he describes it as a system of images and structures that individuals recognize and experience independently of consciousness [13, p. 330], or as a form

of spiritual unity arising from class struggle [14, p. 25]. Thus, ideology is conceived not as a reflection of objective reality, but as an instrument for “rewriting” it in categories accessible to the individual. It does not explain the world so much as set the framework for its perception and action, creating the effect of naturalness and obviousness of social orders.

The key condition for the reproduction of ideology is the ideological apparatus of the state (IAS) – schools, universities, the media, the family, and other institutions operating primarily in the private sphere. Their task is to shape consensus and reinforce dominant ideas on a daily basis. They are opposed by the repressive state apparatuses (RAS) – the army, police, courts, and administration, which are based on violence. However, according to Althusser, there are no pure forms: RAS inevitably resort to ideological justification of repression, while IAS includes elements of coercion (censorship, selection, sanctions). This makes power flexible and “ubiquitous”, as it is not limited to the sphere of politics, but penetrates social practices, cultural codes, and forms of everyday life.

The interaction between the IAS and the RAS forms an infrastructure of power, where violence delineates the boundaries of possible behavior, and ideology ensures consensus and the reproduction of social relations. In this logic, the state acts not only as a political-administrative mechanism, but also as a field of symbolic struggle, in which competition for legitimacy takes place. Ideology becomes both a mechanism of control and a mechanism of integration, as well as a source of symbolic power that structures the social field and determines the horizons of social action [15]. This is the strength of Althusser’s concept: it explains how even authoritarian regimes can maintain stability by combining coercion and consent in constantly changing proportions.

Conceptualization of the author’s model. In the work, the term Ruscism is used not in a journalistic sense, but in an analytical sense. It refers to the ideology of the modern Russian regime, which combines discourses of imperial exclusivity, militarization of society, and institutionalization of practices of consent and violence. This understanding allows Ruscism to be interpreted as a systemic phenomenon that goes beyond the cultural concept of the “Russian world” and cannot be reduced to propaganda clichés. Ruscism manifests itself primarily in the imperial dimension. Every empire seeks to constitute its own world – *Pax* – which has three key characteristics.

First, it is universal in nature, as it claims to integrate and subjugate the entire social and geopolitical space. Second, it is transcendent, as it is based on belief in the empire’s higher mission and the sacralization of its ruler and ruling elite. Third, it is mythologized, as it unites history, religion, and science into a single symbolic order that legitimizes power and consolidates its exceptional status. Thus, *Pax imperialis* can be viewed not only as a set of political institutions or geopolitical practices, but above all as a form of ideology. It is this ideology that institutionalizes social practices, consolidates a particular perception of space and time, and transforms them into the basis of imperial identity [8, p. 15–17].

Returning to the interpretation of ideology, it is important to emphasize three principles of its production, identified by L. Althusser: (1) ideology is a unitary whole, (2) all its forms are united by common issues, and (3) it is formed in the relationship between the author and history [13, p. 62–64]. The last principle is key: ideology does not exist outside of historical context; it responds not only to questions posed by the subject, but also to the challenges of time, space, and events.

Ideology manifests itself through judgments and practices. Judgments form discourse – a set of figurative, and symbolic messages. Some of these judgments are formed into narratives – complex constructions that appeal to historical processes and perform not only an interpretive but also a dogmatic function. Practices, on the other hand, reinforce ideology at the everyday

level – through rituals, forms of behavior, and social interactions. Based on this, the author proposes the DNP-fields model (see Figure 1), which includes three interrelated fields: discursive (forms the language of power and symbolic codes of legitimization), narrative (structures historical and political narratives, setting the framework for interpreting the past and future), and practical (institutionalized rituals and everyday actions that reinforce the dominant order).

The interaction of these fields forms a coherent space of ideological hegemony. Following P. Bourdieu [16], it can be viewed as a space of symbolic struggle [17, p. 19] for the right to monopolize the definition of social reality. Within the discursive field, narrative and practical fields unfold, which ensure the process of subjectivation: discourse ceases to be an abstract set of ideas and becomes a recognized normative basis for action. This is precisely why any state seeks to institutionalize the discursive field, consolidating it through the IAS, as well as protecting it with the help of the RAS. This combination of consent and control reflects the functional logic of Althusser's understanding of ideology, but in the DNP-fields model it is refined through distribution across three fields, which allows for a more detailed tracing of the mechanisms of its reproduction.

The discursive field of ideology. The discursive field can be viewed through the prism of two interrelated categories: discourse itself and the structured discursive field. As Michel Foucault noted, discourse is a set of statements belonging to the same system of formations [18, p. 36], that is, to a field. In a broad sense, discourse is speech that can be expressed not only through language, but also through symbols, images, myths, practices, and rituals. Discourse reproduces social space, fills it with content and gives it form, as well as reflecting the mechanisms of power [19, p. 56–58]. It is never neutral: by appealing to emotions, discourse involves individuals in a symbolic struggle for the right to monopolize them.

Unlike individual discourses, the discursive field is autonomous and located at the intersection of social, cultural, and political structures. Maintaining it requires significant resources of power, as it has several characteristics: the formation of a categorical apparatus, the establishment of boundaries of understanding, the constitution of an ideological framework, the presence of a power dimension, a tendency toward institutionalization, and the formation of a discursive society. Within the field, there is a struggle between discourses and narratives, which leads to the

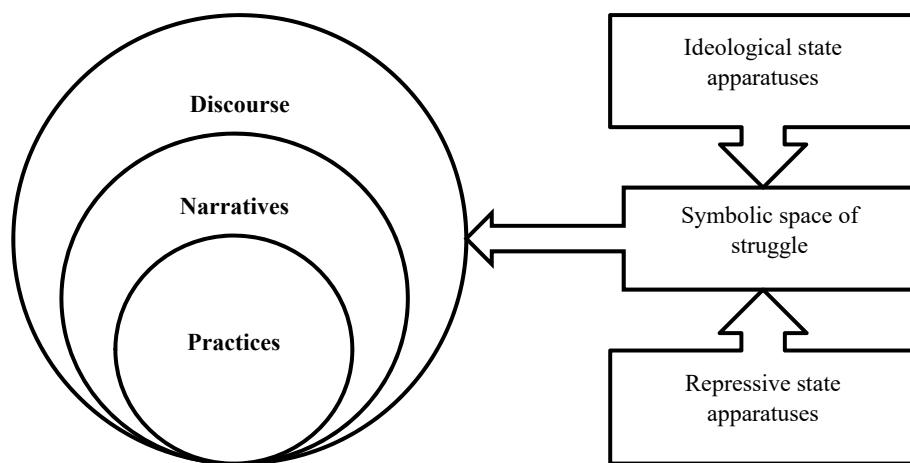


Fig. 1. DNP-fields model: interactions between discursive, narrative, and practical fields

institutionalization of historical plots, but the boundaries of the field itself remain unstable and difficult to define [20, p. 749]. In authoritarian regimes, this space is deliberately limited: in the USSR or North Korea, it was constructed and consolidated by state structures, which requires the constant mobilization of power resources.

Contemporary Russia demonstrates precisely this dynamic: the discursive field of Russism ideology is formed at the intersection of informational IAS (media, internet, cinema, social networks) and political IAS, but at the same time relies on repressive state mechanisms (RAS). While L. Althusser interpreted ideological apparatuses as structures of the “private sphere”, in the Russian context they are in fact integrated into the system of state power: key television channels (“Channel One”, “Russia 1”, “NTV” etc.) are owned by state corporations, the media space is subject to constant censorship, and dissenting voices are suppressed and repressed. Dissent is interpreted by the regime not as an alternative position, but as a form of betrayal. This was evident, for example, in the mass arrests of more than 4,300 protesters against the invasion of Ukraine in March 2022 [21].

Consent is manufactured through a monopolized media landscape, where the state uses television channels as a tool for the daily construction of ideological norms, and the internet is subject to strict control: blocking Facebook and Instagram as “extremist organizations”, restricting access to X (Twitter), and constantly filtering YouTube demonstrate a systematic policy of informational autarky. The closure of independent media outlets (“Novaya Gazeta”, “Echo of Moscow”, “Dozhd” etc.) and the expansion of the “register of foreign agents” (which in 2020–2022 included hundreds of NGOs, media outlets, and individual journalists) reinforce the closed and state-centric nature of the discursive field.

Of particular significance in this context is the sovereign internet project, enshrined in a 2019 law, which provides for the creation of a national infrastructure capable of isolating the Russian segment of the network from the global space. Formally, its rationale is based on arguments of cybersecurity and user protection, but the actual goal is to institutionalize complete state control over information flows and communications. At a time when the digital environment is becoming the main space for public debate, the state is seeking to turn it into a tool not for dialogue, but for the unilateral transmission of ideology. The creation of a sovereign internet can be seen as an attempt to form a closed information space – an analogue of a “digital iron curtain”. Its key function is to restrict access to alternative sources of information, block opposition voices, and form a single acceptable narrative. Combined with media censorship, criminal prosecution for “discrediting the army”, and the expansion of the “register of foreign agents”, this project becomes not just an element of control, but a systemic part of authoritarian politics.

The narrative field of ideology. Although at first glance a narrative may seem like a neutral account of events, it has a clear ideological dimension. As Frank Ankersmit notes, the power of historical narratives is based on metaphors [22, p. 60], which means that they become tools for interpreting and representing the past. At the same time, narrative is procedural in nature [23, p. 359–361], transforming under the influence of external circumstances and internal changes. It allows the political elite to construct social reality, legitimize order, and form universal responses to the challenges of the present. Political narrative serves as a tool for consolidating society and attributing collective responsibility for events.

National narratives can perform not only an explanatory function, but also a mobilizing one, becoming a resource for political competition and social consolidation. In this context, narrative acts as a special form of discourse and, at the same time, as an ideological construct that provides historical legitimacy to the existing order. Its effectiveness lies in the fact that it allows the past, present, and future to be linked into a single interpretive framework, where political actions receive symbolic and normative justification. The process of forming and consolidating

national narratives relies on the religious and cultural ISA. It is these apparatuses that create the basis to produce national myths, in which key events, figures, and values are sacralized, as well as for political interpretations that legitimize power and its strategy. Thus, narrative becomes an instrument for institutionalizing memory and, at the same time, a mechanism for mobilizing society around imperial and nationalist projects.

The modern Russian elite actively exploits narrative strategies to reproduce the concept of the “Russian World”, consolidate Russia’s role as the “center of the empire”, and implement the so-called “privatization of the past”. A telling example is the removal of the word “Kievan” from the term “Kievan Rus” in Russian school textbooks, which indicates a deliberate de-Ukrainization of historical memory. Such practices demonstrate that narrative is used not only as a tool of interpretation, but also as a means of transforming the collective perception of the past. The US State Department [24] identifies several key political narratives on which contemporary Russian discourse is based: “Russia is a victim of external aggression”, “The collapse of the West is inevitable”, “NATO poses a threat to security”, and “Russia is a great power”. These narratives are actively articulated by the political elite and transmitted through the state’s media ideological apparatus, including television, cinema, and internet platforms.

The Russian Orthodox Church occupies a special place in the system of producing and reproducing narratives, functioning as one of the key ideological apparatuses of the modern Russian regime. By appealing to national myths, such as the idea of “Moscow as the Third Rome” or the rhetoric of “defending traditional values” [25], the Russian Orthodox Church integrates religious images into political discourse, giving it additional sacred legitimacy. As a result, religious authority is used not only to strengthen the position of the Church itself, but also to institutionally consolidate the imperial and nationalist projects of the state. Thus, the interaction between political power, the media space, and religious structures forms a closed narrative field within which imperial identity is constructed. It is in this field that Russia’s foreign policy aspirations find symbolic and moral justification, becoming part of a “sacred mission” aimed at protecting “true values” and expanding the state’s influence.

The practical field of ideology. Louis Althusser’s innovation was his understanding of ideology through the prism of practices. It is precisely the social practices embedded in the activities of the state’s ideological apparatuses that allow ideology to be not only recognized but also legitimized [13]. Individuals implement them in everyday life – from religious rituals (participation in mass) to educational procedures (school uniforms, discipline). Thus, practices form a network through which a person either recognizes social reality or rejects it. As Pierre Bourdieu noted, they are not determined by individual personalities, but by positions and interests [26, p. 150]. At the same time, being a routine type of behavior [27, p. 250], practice symbolizes individual solidarity with ideology and consolidates it at the level of everyday life.

In modern Russia, the social practices of the “Russian World” are aimed at constructing historical and political narratives. Education plays a key role here: Althusser noted that it is the school that is the universal IAS [12]. Thus, the military-patriotic education of Russian schoolchildren emphasizes conscription into the army and the cultivation of memory of the “Great Patriotic War” [28]. After 2022, it took shape in “Generation Z” [29], where nationalism, traditionalism, and aggressive foreign policy are presented as normative values.

Ritualized practices are widespread in modern Russia, the most striking examples of which are participation in parades on May 9 and the Immortal Regiment campaign [30]. These mass events not only mythologize the past, creating an image of a “golden age” of Soviet victories, but also reproduce the idea of a permanent external threat, reinforcing the narrative of a “besieged fortress”. Such rituals construct collective identity through the symbolization of her-

oism, sacrifice, and military power. At the same time, Soviet-style practices are being revived: the spread of denunciations of teachers who criticize the government or the war, as well as the fetishization of war in the family environment, where children are dressed in military uniforms, supplied with toy military paraphernalia, and involved in patriotic rituals.

These everyday practices show that the population is not only subject to ideological influence, but also actively participates in its reproduction through the repetition and replication of symbolic forms embedded in culture. Thus, social practices in contemporary Russia reinforce the effect of historical continuity with the Soviet model, which is based on patriotic education, the cult of military victories, the privatization of history, and the institutionalized management of collective memory. As a result, a stable system of reproduction of ideological reproduction is formed, where the past is used as a resource to legitimize the present and mobilize society.

Conclusions. Vladimir Putin's rule marked a transition from the course of democratization in Russia at the end of the 20th century to the formation of an authoritarian order in the 21st century. The key factor here is not only political and administrative centralization, but also the ideological resource that ensures the legitimacy and stability of the regime. The concept of the "Russian World", which became institutionalized in the early 2000s, constructs narratives of civilizational exceptionalism and imperial continuity. However, its application is largely aimed at justifying Russian expansion in foreign policy, while Russia's internal space is more adequately described through the category of Ruscism.

Ruscism is a modern ideology of the Russian political system, combining foreign policy aggression with domestic political control and state domination over society. It is reproduced through a network of ideological and repressive state apparatuses, with the balance between them shifted toward the RAS, which determines the limits of what is permissible and subordinates the activities of the IAS to itself. This relationship forms a special regime of ideological hegemony, in which consent and violence are integrated into a single system of governance.

Within this logic, several key manifestations of Ruscism can be identified: first, the institutionalization of a discursive field where dissent is treated as treason and conformity is ensured through censorship, propaganda, and mass rituals; second, the mythologization of the present and the "privatization of the past", which allows for the construction of an image of an external enemy and justifies expansionist policies; third, the use of symbolic and material representations (St. George's ribbon, parades, mass commemorative events) that transform ideology into everyday practice. Thus, Ruscism materializes not only at the level of ideas, but also in the space of social practices that reinforce the regime's dominance.

The author's proposed model of DNP-fields (discourse – narrative – practices) allows us to explain the mechanisms of reproduction of Russian ideology and identify its structural features. Moreover, this model has heuristic potential for analyzing other authoritarian and post-imperial regimes where a similar combination of nationalist narratives, militarization of society, and ideological institutionalization can be observed. A promising direction for further research is a comparative study of Ruscism with the ideological practices of Turkey, China, and Iran, which will reveal universal patterns in the transformation of authoritarian ideologies and their adaptation to the challenges of the modern world.

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АЛЬЮССЕР У КРЕМЛІ: ПРО ВИРОБНИЦТВО ІДЕОЛОГІЙ В ПУТИНСЬКІЙ РОСІЇ

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Стаття присвячена аналізу ідеології сучасної Російської Федерації через призму концепції Луї Альтюссера та феномена «руського міра». Повномасштабне воєнне вторгнення в Україну у лютому 2022 року розглядається не тільки як геополітичний крок або «прецедент», але й як наслідок формування специфічного ідеологічного порядку, в якому поєднуються націоналізм, імперіалізм і євразійство. Автор стверджує, що концепція «руського міра» перетворилася з маргінального інтелектуального дискурсу на державну ідеологію, інституціоналізовану через ідеологічні апарати держави (ІАД). Використовуючи альтюссерівські категорії ідеології, дискурсу і соціальних практик, пропонуємо авторську модель DNP- поля, яка демонструє взаємозв’язок дискурсивного, наративного і соціально-практичного вимірів сучасної російської ідеології. У роботі аналізується функціонування дискурсивного поля рашизму, що формується через медіа, освіту, релігію та репресивні механізми держави. Особлива увага приділена наративам, за допомогою яких російська політична еліта здійснює «приватизацію минулого», закріплює образ зовнішнього ворога та легітимізує імперський порядок. Розглянуто також соціальні практики: від військово-патріотичного виховання школярів до масових ритуалів (наприклад, парадів 9 травня і «Безсмертного полку»), які забезпечують відтворення ідеології на рівні повсякденності. Показано, що в умовах авторитаризму ідеологія рашизму не тільки структурує соціальну реальність, але й виконує функцію підтримки внутрішньої гегемонії, де насильство і згода поєднуються в особливих пропорціях. Таким чином, стаття демонструє, що ідеологічний фактор є ключовим для розуміння сучасної російської політики та її трансформації в сучасний імперський геополітичний проект. Додатково сформовано висновок, що саме ідеологія виступає своєрідним «катализатором» політичних процесів, оскільки дає змогу режиму мобілізувати підтримку суспільства навіть у кризових умовах. Запропонована модель може бути використана не лише для аналізу російського контексту, але й як універсальний інструмент дослідження ролі ідеологій у функціонуванні авторитарних політичних систем.

Ключові слова: рашизм, «руський мір», ідеологія, Луї Альтюссер, дискурсивне поле, наратив, соціальні практики, імперіалізм.

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