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THE "RUSSIAN WORLD" CONCEPT IN THE UKRAINIAN MEDIA DISCOURSE: SOME OF THE KEY NARRATIVES

Abstract: The "Russian world" concept is constantly employed in political and media discourse. Despite its active use, no single comprehensive definition exists in scientific literature. In this study, a brief version of the "Russian world" term conceptualization was presented, including two categorical series of semantic formations (social groups and value systems) and three axiological conceptual functions of the "Russian world". In addition, newly formed narratives in connection with the Russian-Ukrainian war encountered only within the framework of Ukrainian discourse were identified. As research material, Russian and Ukrainian-language texts from the Ukrainian media reflecting the consequences of Russia's military actions on the territory of Ukraine through the prism of the "Russian world" concept were adopted. The work was conducted applying semantic analysis, contextual analysis, and the substitution method.

Keywords: The "Russian world" concept, Ukrainian media discourse, Russian-Ukrainian war, conceptualization, narratives

Introduction

Currently, due to the aggravation of the Russian-Ukrainian military conflict in the Donbas and the annexation of Crimea in 2014, as well as since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the "Russian world" (*Русский мир* – in Russian) concept has increasingly appeared in political and media discourse. However, there is still no clear definition of this cognitive unit as a notion, even though it is used in both Russian and non-Russian discourse. Thus, within the framework of the article, a brief historical background and conceptualization of the "Russian world" notion will be presented. They will be relied on in the study of crucial narratives that have emerged and still function in the Ukrainian media discourse arising against the backdrop of an armed conflict.

As far as research material is concerned, texts of Ukrainian media that mention the "Russian world" concept will be analyzed. Thus, the choice of the country is justified by the most active intervention of Russia in Ukraine, unlike other countries of the post-Soviet space. So is the attempt to apply the "Russian world"

ideology at the initial stages, such as the annexation of Crimea, the war in Donbas and, accordingly, the further transformation of the concept in the Ukrainian media field. Based on popularity and ranking five media prepared on the eve of 2022 by specialists from the PRNEWS.IO4 content marketing platform (TSN.ua, Novoye Vremya, Ukrayinska Pravda, 24, Obozrevatel) were singled out. It is essential to note that these are bilingual news resources; therefore, both Russian-language and Ukrainian-language texts were considered. The problem of media discourse as such is unexplored in the article, the main interest being in exemplifying cultural and civilizational manifestations of the "Russian world" concept, in particular media sources derived from high readership.

Hence, publications of February 1, 2014 until December 31, 2022 were chosen. This time span is primary since, at the time of writing the article, a full-scale armed conflict was still in progress. It means that it is impossible to analyze its dynamics, however, the study facilitates the determination of the already existing contexts and narratives for the use of the "Russian world" concept. The selection was made according to the hashtags #р у с с к и й   м и р (Russian world in Russian) and #р у с к і й   м і р (Russian world in Ukrainian) by relevance to the above-mentioned time frames. The examination of all the textual statements was performed via semantic analysis, contextual analysis as well as the substitution method; instead of the "Russian world" concept, key conceptual markers were employed, such as Russian mentality, Russianness, Russian people and citizens of Russia, Russian culture, Russian intelligentsia, the ideology of Russian power, as well as the military actions of the Russian authorities.

1. Genesis of the "Russian world" concept

Despite the fact that this study does not imply a detailed presentation of the historical aspect of the "Russian world" concept, it should be noted that it has a long history. Nevertheless, its contemporary formation and structure as a theoretical doctrine were presented by P. Shchedrovitsky, S. Gradirovsky, and E. Ostrovsky in the 1990s. The main idea was to maintain contacts between independent countries formed after the collapse of the USSR and Russian emigrants through the Russian language, combining a "network structure of large and small communities that think and speak Russian" (Shchedrovitsky 2000). Regardless, in the early 2000s, the concept developed into an ideologeme, and, for the first time, it was submitted in socio-political discourse in 2007 by V. Putin during his annual Address to the Federal Assembly. In it he emphasized "cultural, linguistic, and civilizational unity of compatriots with Russia" (Putin 2007).

Since 2010, the "Russian world" has shifted from doctrine and ideology to a political course. It played a significant role in Putin's election campaign in 2011,

raising his status in the country and across the diaspora as a guarantor of Russia's political strength and the diaspora's right to use the Russian language. Subsequently, the attention of the authorities and state media in Russia was focused on the "Russian diaspora and Russian-speaking groups", falling under the definition of the "Russian world" (Volkhonsky | Mukhanov 2019; Suslov 2017). Later, the "Russian world" ideologeme became the rationale and, in fact, "the justification for the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas in 2014", explaining this by protecting the Russian and Russian-speaking population and returning their historical territories (Delong 2020, 51). Thus, the events of the 2010s compelled the "Russian world" concept beyond its intended use, as the policy implied and represented as a "soft power" developed into a military-political conflict (Laruelle 2015; Łoś 2017).

Substantially, it is essential to specify the conceptual core of the "Russian world" concept. Nowadays, most researchers, such as O. Batanova (2008), V. Krivopuskov (2016), and N. Kozlovtseva (2017) assume that the "Russian world" should be comprehended as a particular group of people with certain similar features. These include the Russian language, culture, common historical heritage (Tishkov 2007), traditions and values (Curanović 2015) as well as commitment to Russia (Nikonov 2014), while frequently, the "motherland" concept and the "current authorities" concept become identical. Repeatedly, in research literature, chiefly Russian, the "Russian world" concept denotes "Russia's political interests in the CIS region", which is of the most significant interest in connection with the geopolitical conflict in Ukraine, the traditional zone of Russia's influence, and the presence of the "Russian world" (Narochnitskaya 2015; Götz 2022).

Although the "Russian world" is presented as a multinational and poly-confessional community, it is inconceivable to neglect the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) on the formation of the "Russian world" concept, which is "the idea of unity between the peoples of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, namely the H o l y R u s", forming the so-called t r i u n e R u s s i a n n a t i o n (Suslov 2014). Subsequently, this ideology was introduced in Putin's rhetoric "pertaining to fraternal peoples" in his article on the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians (Putin 2021).

Thus, based on the above definitions, not only a lack of clarity and specificity is revealed but also apparent contradictions as entirely different categories of people are brought under the "Russian world" term, from Orthodox persons and citizens of the Russian Federation to all ethnic Russians and even native speakers of the Russian language. In addition, confusion occurs at the level of identification of Russian mentality, Russian culture, ideology, and politics of the Russian authorities, and if so, then a sole "Russian world" concept cannot be considered since in itself it can be a combination of several related notions.

The "Russian world" as a single notion is a rather complex formation that combines "two categorical series of concepts (social groups and value systems)

as well as three pragmatic conceptual functions (mythologeme, cultureme, and ideologeme)" (Starodubtseva 2022). Each of them as a system of values can become an organizing principle for a particular social group. As a result, three fundamentally different socio-cultural communities can be discussed:

> "Russian world I" – Russian society as a synergistic transnational socio-cultural space based on the linguistic, social, and personal interactions of its subjects, united by the mentality and system of cultural and civilizational values (i.e., the mythologeme "Russian world").
> "Russian world II" – the Russian (Russian-speaking) intelligentsia as a cybernetic multinational socio-cultural space based on the linguistic, social, and personal interactions of its subjects, united by a system of spiritual values (i.e., the cultureme "Russian world").
> "Russian world III" – the Russian authorities (political and administrative elite) as a political class based on formal and informal hierarchical ties, united by the state ideology (i.e., the ideologeme "Russian world") (ibidem).

Each of the above mentioned communities is distinguished by its own system of values, although it may overlap to a greater or lesser extent, which allows all of them to be united by the term R u s s i a n   s o c i o - c u l t u r a l   s p a c e. In this sense, the "Russian world" concept covers all of this space as a whole.

Thus, from the terminological point of view, it is necessary to suggest separating three social groups within the cultural and civilizational space of the "Russian world" (I, II, and III) and, accordingly, three axiological conceptual functions of the "Russian world". The recommended structure of the "Russian world" concept assumes only the formal contours of this cognitive unit.

2. The "Russian world" concept in the Ukrainian discourse

This section analyzes the functioning and some of the key narratives of the "Russian world" concept in Ukrainian media discourse.

A selection of material from 2014 until December 2022 demonstrated that out of 5 media, namely TSN.ua, Novoye Vremya, Ukrayinska Pravda, 24, and Obozrevatel, the "Russian world" concept occurs 145 times, with the most significant number, namely 100, already in 2022, which indicates that the previously studied concept was not as popular as during Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. It is significant to note that when analyzing its functioning in the headlines, it manifests itself much more frequently than in the news articles' texts, namely 87 times. It can be assumed that this is the purpose of forming the image of the event already at the stage of reading the title. The headings are landmarks that display the

most crucial textual information, in particular, the reflection of the consequences of the armed invasion through the prism of the "Russian world" concept.

The disclosed titles and text fragments (usually containing one sentence) can be divided into several categories regarding the narratives verbalizing the concept in question; however, since it is unattainable to include all the examples in this article, the most representative ones were introduced.

2.1. Zealots of the "Russian world"

One of the most substantial components of the semantics of the "Russian world" concept are carriers of the Russian mentality, who are obedient and loyal and ideologically motivated by the Russian authorities and not necessarily citizens of Russia. This category also includes adherents of the "Russian world" ideology living abroad, along with collaborators. Such narratives have appeared since 2014, describing the inhabitants of Donbas who supported Russia and its secession from Ukraine, together with those who joined the armies of the unrecognized republics of the LDNR. After 2022, the phenomenon manifested itself not only in the temporarily occupied territories but also in the regions of Ukraine unaffected by the war, in addition to countries with a sizeable Russian diaspora whose representatives organized so-called marches of compatriots collecting humanitarian aid for the Russian army and strongly supporting Russian ideologues' rhetoric. Generally, the narrative is used in combination with such clearly negatively marked lexical units as *прихильники* 'adherents', and *фанаты* 'fans' of the "Russian world", emphasizing the loyalty towards Russia and the desire to change the regime in the country, to support the Russian army, etc. through treacherous actions:

(1) В Івано-Франківську арештували прихильника "руского міра": закликав "звільнити" Україну від нацизму (Kurpita 2022d).

(2) На Черкащині суд виніс вирок місцевій прихильниці "русского міра": вихваляла окупантів у соцмережі (Kulinich 2022).

(3) В Италии нашли фаната "русского мира", вывесившего на балконе флаг РФ: с ним, разобрались украинцы (Kravchuk 2022).

Thus, this very group is one of the most common. It began to function as one of the first ones within the framework of the Ukrainian discourse. However, the frequent appearance of the narrative after the commencement of full-scale military operations and the temporary occupation of large Ukrainian cities, such as Mariupol, Kherson, and Odesa, and the emergence of collaborators amidst the local population became another impetus for identifying the "Russian world" with supporters among Ukrainians. An additional critical point is the absence of ethnicity in media texts since there is no emphasis on ethnic and linguistic affiliation. They are characterized by the use of verb nominations, for instance

агітувала 'agitated', *носила "георгіївську" стрічку* 'wore a "Georgian" ribbon', *підтримував* 'supported', *прославляв* 'glorified', *мечтала о победе РФ* 'dreamed of the victory of the Russian Federation', *начала продвигать идеи "русского мира"* 'began to promote the "Russian world" ideas':

(4) Агітувала за "рускій мір" та носила "георгіївську" стрічку: на Дніпропетровщині затримали зрадницю (Hmelnicka 2022b).

(5) Працівник оборонного заводу Києва підтримував "рускій мір" і прославляв окупантів (Hmelnicka 2022c).

(6) Поддерживала оккупантов и мечтала о победе РФ: сторонницу "русского мира" задержали во время бегства в Польшу (Raguckaya 2022a).

(7) На днях в Киевской электричке женщина начала продвигать идеи "русского мира", заявляя, что страна-агрессор "пришла защищать" (Timchenko 2022a).

It must be understood that the phenomenon of collaborationism and sympathy for the "Russian world" ideas had been observed in Ukraine long before the full-scale war of 2022. Regardless, they were non-homogeneous, and despite the confusion in their awareness of the 3 conceptual functions of the "Russian world", not everyone accepted or associated themselves with all the three components. For some, the "Russian world" was exclusively synonymous with the Russian language and culture, which they considered necessary to preserve and promote in Ukrainian society. Other carriers of the Russian mentality identified themselves with the Russian people, and for them, the idea of the "Russian world" signifies o n e   n a t i o n   that must reunite. Cases of support for the "Russian world" ideologeme personifying Russian power, cannot be excluded. There were also citizens of Ukraine who were tolerant of the "Russian world" and knew about the existence of the concept, yet did not think about its meaning or what was hidden behind it. Hence, it leads to the appearance of such a context with a verbal nomination like *хотела учить детей "русскому миру"* 'wanted to teach the "Russian world" to children':

(8) СБУ сообщила о подозрении директору лицея из Харьковщины, которая хотела учить детей "русскому миру" (Raguckaya 2022b).

From this context it can be assumed that it is impossible to state unequivocally whether the headmaster of the secondary school wishes to teach the Russian mentality to schoolchildren or to introduce the ideology of the Russian authorities into their minds since any attempt to conduct all subjects in Russian is automatically understood as ideologization; therefore, it ought to be specified, otherwise the context will be irrelevant or syncretic, i.e., there is no way to categorize it.

Until the full-scale war of 2022, the "Russian world" in the Ukrainian media discourse was associated with t h e   c i t i z e n s   o f   R u s s i a   and   R u s s i a   a s

a c o u n t r y with which, despite the armed conflict, cultural ties were maintained to a certain degree and joint cultural projects and artistic tours took place:

(9) Знамениті українці кликали "рускій мір", а він їм "віддячив" пошкодженими будинками і вбивствами (Berezhanskij 2022b).

(10) Кликали "русскій мір" до України, а потім порозбігалися: куди поділася "п'ята колона"? (Kurpita 2022c).

Frequently, the "Russian world" in media texts is understood as citizens of Russia who supported the war in Ukraine and justified the actions of the regime on the part of the authorities. It is also related to the comments left by Russian citizens under the publication of news about Ukraine on social networks of Ukrainian media personalities, in particular by artists, musicians, and athletes:

(11) Альона Вінницька переконана, що українцям варто убезпечитися від "русского міра", оскільки доносити правду про війну в Україні до росіян немає сенсу (Karpenko 2022).

(12) Діти з Росії писали "Щоб ти здохла": "русскій мір" прокляв Різатдінову (Inshakov 2022).

In addition, besides Russians, the "Russian world" in Ukrainian media discourse is also construed as t h e R u s s i a n d i a s p o r a a b r o a d , some of whose representatives supported the war in Ukraine and took an active part in rallies in support of Putin, the Russian army, and calls to stop Russophobia:

(13) У Латвії росіяни влаштували "шабаш русского міра" та підтримали війну (Panchenko 2022a).

(14) Збирають гроші для Л/ДНР по церквах! У Німеччині помітили сліди "русского міра" (Lisnichuk 2022).

Hence, the examples considered in this section, including such narratives as Ukraine in the Russian world, the entry of Ukraine into the Russian world, and the accession of the Russian world to Ukraine, imply nothing more than the spread of the Russian mentality in Ukraine, and lexical markers such as support, agitation and dissemination of the "Russian world" ideas relate to the ideologeme and directly to the authorities.

2.2. The "Russian world" as destruction, violence, death, and genocide

The most numerous category encompasses headlines and fragments of texts linking the "Russian world" with lexical markers as *руйнування* 'destruction', *разруха* 'devastation', *разрушенные дома* 'destroyed houses', etc. The "Russian world"

is presented as a force that wipes cities off the face of the earth and destroys the usual way of life. Such narratives are widely presented in headlines and directly in media texts and, characteristically, they first appeared back in 2014 in contexts describing the state of the cities of Donbas, affected by the military conflict. In this instance, the concept of the "Russian world" in the overwhelming majority of cases meant d e v a s t a t i o n as a result of the war:

(15) […] після того, як на Схід України прийшов "русский мир", по цьому регіону вдарили занепад міської інфраструктури, масове безробіття, військове управління та тотальна пропаганда (Bekalo 2019).

(16) "Русский мир" несет разруху: появилось жуткое фото последствий обстрела в Авдеевке (Dovgan 2019).

(17) Разрушенные дома и кучи мусора в комнатах: последствия "русского мира" в Великой Дымерке (Timchenko 2022c).

Regardless, the emergence of this connotation in Ukrainian discourse became intensified after a full-scale war and the destruction of cities during the temporary occupation. For instance:

(18) "Справжнє обличчя русского міра": у мережі показали, що окупанти зробили з "Азовсталлю" (Zakrevska 2022).

(19) […] вирви на дорозі, ворожі снаряди: журналісти показали, який вигляд має траса біля демидова після "руского міра" (Berezhanskij 2022a).

(20) Ось такий у нас "рускій мір": Арестович показав руйнування в Чернігові та пояснив, як два міста врятували Київ (Kurpita 2022a).

These examples of the "Russian world" usage reflect the consequences of the armed invasion of the Russian army, artillery, and rocket attacks. It acts as a d i s r u p t i v e p o w e r, leaving demolished bridges, craters on roads, and houses destroyed.

Another specification of the "Russian world" as g e n o c i d e is less typical in Ukrainian media texts, mainly contexts with the "genocide" concept referring directly to the Putin regime, which violates countless international conventions making it possible to characterize its actions as genocide:

(21) Це не просто війна, це геноцид: Шевченко категорично висловився про "русскій мір" (Chekanov, 2022).

The next category that is important for defining negative narratives exemplifies the "Russian world" with the following negative lexical markers: *смерть маленьких діточок* 'the death of small children', *сокира для знищення* 'an ax to destroy', verbal nominations like *грабують* 'rob', *ґвалтують* 'rape', *вбивають* 'kill', as well as attributive nominations, for instance, *жорстокий* 'cruel', *нещадний* 'merciless',

кровожерливий 'bloodthirsty'. If the last category under consideration has been functioning since 2014, then the one which identifies the "Russian world" concept with d e a t h , b u l l y i n g a n d r a p e , manifested itself after February 2022 when the facts of massacres of civilians in Bucha as well as of rape, cruel bullying and torture of captured military personnel of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and civilians of the temporarily occupied cities became known. Examples include the following:

(22) Сьогодні вкотре світ дізнається, що так званий "руський мир" – це смерть маленьких діточок (Hmelnicka 2022a).

(23) Грабують, гвалтують, вбивають: охоронець Захарченка розповів СБУ про будні "русского міра" (Timchenko 2022b).

(24) І зараз Харків для себе відкриває "рускій мір" наново, точніше, він відкриває його таким, яким він є насправді – жорстокий, нещадний, кровожерливий (Kurpita 2022b).

Another substantial issue is the spelling of the "Russian world" concept in media texts. According to the Ukrainian orthographic norm, it should be written as р о с і й с ь к и й с в і т (rosijskij svit). Regardless, this is hardly encountered in any of the analyzed media. The most commonly used is р у с ь к и й м и р , р у с с ь к и й м и р , р у с ь к и й м і р (rus'kyj myr, russ'kyj myr, rus'kyj mir). It is due to the desire to establish alienation, the unwillingness to include this concept in the Ukrainian language, to reflect the complete rejection of the phenomenon and its use in a pejorative form.

Attention ought to be also drawn to the following examples, in which the spelling of the "Russian world" incorporates the Latin letter Z that has become a symbol of the so-called special military operation conducted by the Russian Federation. Furthermore, if this very symbol is used in the Russian media space in the context of supporting the actions of the Russian authorities and the army, then it is equated with Nazi symbol in Ukrainian discourse. It sometimes contains the Latin SS, implying a resemblance to Adolf Hitler's paramilitary organization:

(25) Російська мова як сокира для знищення усіх, хто не сприймає "руSSкий мір" (Levchenko 2022).

(26) "РуSSкий мір" знову показав свій агресивний характер, неможливість сприйняття інших способів мислення, ніж спосіб злості (ibid.).

(27) "Пока не поздно": мир обязан предотвратить руzzкий геноцид украинцев (Kudrin 2022).

However, it is essential to bear in mind that the use of this spelling of the "Russian world" concept is more typical of news portals in Telegram channels where there is no strict editing of texts and also the possibility of commenting on news posts, thereby expanding the contexts for employing the "Russian world" concept.

Therefore, the analysis shows that the previously presented conceptualization of the "Russian world" is broader than the six constituents. To be more precise, the Ukrainian media discourse representing the war periods since 2014, both Ukrainian-language and Russian- language, introduces a new component into the "Russian world" concept, which is characteristic only of Ukrainian discourse.

Conclusion

Therefore, summarizing the above, the goal of analyzing the most common narratives that verbalize the "Russian world" concept was pursued. The study made it possible to identify additional semantic nuances excluded from the existing definitions, nevertheless manifested in specific contexts of Ukrainian discourse. It is noteworthy both in the Ukrainian and Russian languages while absent in Russian discourse, namely, for implying military actions of the Russian authorities under the "Russian world". Despite the small amount of the collected material of this type of contexts representing the "Russian world" concept, markers of negative appraisal characteric of these narratives have been identified, such as *прихильники* 'adherents', and *фанаты* 'fans', as well as the frequent reference to verbal nominations like *агітувати* 'agitate', *прославляти* 'glorify', *підтримувати* 'support', especially in contexts avoiding the specification of ethnic and linguistic affiliation. There are also examples of attributive nominations such as *жорстокий* 'cruel', *нещадний* 'merciless', *кровожерливий* 'bloodthirsty', etc. Thus, it can be argued that these lexical markers are features attributed by Ukrainian journalists to the "Russian world" concept.

In the present study, headlines and news texts were undifferentiated. However, it can be inferred from the available examples that the "Russian world" concept usually appeared in the headlines; therefore, they have a high degree of information content, update the concept and fill it with a new negative-evaluative semantic component of military actions on the part of the Russian authorities, which in the addressee's consciousness is associated with great danger. Also, the fact that the concept is only used directly in headlines and to a lesser degree in the media a given text may show that its primary purpose is to draw the reader's attention to the problem and provide new, easy-to-guess meanings.

Thus, the small researched sample illustrates that the already existing definitions of the "Russian world" in Ukrainian discourse were adjusted but with negative connotations. Namely, the Russian mentality was presented as a set of negative traits imposed on Ukrainians not only by the Russian authorities but also by collaborators, inherent in sympathizing with the "Russian world" ideology. Therefore, supporting the war and the Russian government personifies an aggressive and terrorist regime. Hence, against the backdrop of the armed Ukrainian-Russian conflict of 2014-2022,

there is a tendency in modern Ukrainian media discourse to employ the concept precisely in the sense of negative connotations and narratives. Moreover, it can be concluded that this trend will continue to develop.

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