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"Putin, You Suck": Affective Sticking Points in the Czech Narrative on "Russian Hybrid Warfare"

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Using the case of the Czech narrative on "Russian hybrid warfare" (RHW), this article contributes to the broader question of why narratives succeed. Building on Lacanian psychoanalysis, narrative scholarship, and affect/emotions research in International Relations, we suggest that narrative success is facilitated also by two interrelated factors: embedding in broader cultural contexts and the ability to incorporate and reproduce collectively circulating affects. We develop a methodological framework for encircling unobservable affects within discourse via "sticking points"—linguistic phenomena infused with affective investment. We outline three categories of sticking points—valued signifiers, fantasies, and biographical narratives. Utilizing the approach in our case study, we focus on a narrative based around the notion that Russia waged a "hybrid war" against "the West" and that this should be faced with quasi-military measures, which was successful in changing the language of Czech national security. We show that this narrative incorporated a range of sticking points, which contributed to its relative success. It utilized valued signifiers, such as "the West," "the Kremlin," "agents," and "occupation," weaved them together into a fantasy of a threat to the nation's "Western" identity, and intertwined this with the biographical narratives of history as a lens for world politics and East/West geopolitics.

KEY WORDS: Czech Republic, Russia, affect, emotions, hybrid warfare, narrative

Since the beginning of Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014, the Czech security debate witnessed a sudden rise of the notion of "hybrid warfare" to a key conceptualization of national security. The specter of "hybrid," defined variably as "warfare," "threats," or "campaigns" and more or less explicitly connected to Russia, started haunting the Czech security imaginary: from the update of the National Security Strategy that put "hybrid warfare" on the very top of the list of threats (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015), through the evaluation of the security system in the National Security Audit that used "hybrid threats" as an overarching narrative connecting the otherwise disparate concerns (Ministry of the Interior, 2016), to the establishment of the official Centre against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats (Bartoníček, 2017). As the Czech Prime Minister Sobotka put it, stressing the far-reaching implications of the issue, "hybrid threats" "can potentially threaten not only our security, but they can have a fatal impact also on democratic norms and institutions, which are . . . guardians of our personal freedom" (mld, 2017).

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This understanding emerged within a wider network of politicians, bureaucrats, journalists, academics, and NGOs (Daniel & Eberle, 2018), which produced a narrative that presented the post-2014 situation in dark and dramatic terms. "The West" was the target of "Russian hybrid war" (RHW), which played itself in the Czech context chiefly in the form of spying, corrupting politicians, and (pro-)Russian propaganda and disinformation campaigns. This posed a grave threat not only to the Czech security, but also to the country's "Western" identity. Therefore, "hybrid" was articulated as a war-like situation threatening the very existence of the Czech state and society as we know it. The implications were clear: The Czechs had to *fight* back. This was aptly summarized in a tweet by Jakub Janda, a key think-tanker active in the articulation of RHW: "Putin, you suck. With friends preping [sic!] to combat Kremlin infowar" (@_JakubJanda, December 18, 2015).[1]

The "hybrid warfare" narrative was not unique to the Czech Republic. In fact, it became the key conceptual lens to understand European security across both EU and NATO (Mälksoo, 2018). However, the Czech case opens intriguing questions, which relate both to pertinent political issues and to psychologically and sociologically inspired work in International Relations (IR). The notion of hybrid war has been often criticized as extremely vague, conceptually unsophisticated, and unhelpful in capturing the character of Russia's activities (Fridman, 2018, pp. 101–125; Mälksoo, 2018, pp. 376, 377). Despite these shortcomings, it was rather successful in transforming the language of Czech security. Why is it that *this particular* narrative was so effective in making sense of the novel situation? More generally, how can we explain the wider success and "sticking" (Ahmed, 2014) of certain narratives? We suggest that narrative success is, among other drivers, facilitated by two closely interrelated factors: embedding a narrative in broader cultural contexts (familiarity) and the ability of a narrative to tap into, incorporate, and reproduce the socially circulating affects (affective investment).

We relate our work to three important debates, all of them led in this journal. First, we build upon the scholarship on narratives in international politics (Andrews, Kinnvall, & Monroe, 2015; Kirkwood, 2019; Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, & Roselle, 2013; Spencer, 2016). Second, we locate our argument within Lacanian psychoanalytical approaches to politics and IR (Arfi, 2010; Hook, 2017; Rogers & Zevnik, 2017; Solomon, 2012). Third, we relate to the affects/emotions work on world politics (Bleiker & Hutchison, 2008; Hutchison & Bleiker, 2014; Koschut et al., 2017; Ilgit & Prakash, 2019; Pace & Bilgic, 2018). Our Lacanian framework adopts a middle position on the continuum between the cognitively and culturally oriented work on *emotions* and the focus on the nonrepresentational and the bodily that characterizes the *affect* scholarship. We take affect as our central concept, understanding it as "a wide range of non-reflective and subconscious bodily sensations, such as mood, intuition, temperament, attachment, disposition, and even memory" (Hutchison & Bleiker, 2014, p. 502). Affect is an excessive, disruptive, and multifaceted corporeal force that is beyond discourse, culture, and cognition and, as such, has a distinct ontological quality (see also Hall & Ross, 2019). However, edging closer towards discourse-centered emotions research, in the Lacanian perspective affects need to pass through discursive representation to gain social and political significance. Affect "is distinct from discourse yet is always shaped and circuited through discourse" (Solomon, 2012, p. 916). Therefore, our key interest lies in the interweaving of affect and discourse as two ontologically "distinct but interpenetrating fields" (Stavrakakis, 2007, p. 96).

The emphasis on affect leads us into an analytically challenging terrain. If, following Lacanian theory and much of the work on affects/emotions in IR, we understand affect as essentially unobservable and directly unapproachable, we must ground our analysis in discourse. Following the suggestion that affects should be studied from the effects they make on the level of signification and representation (Hutchison & Bleiker, 2014), we focus on the politics of *channelling* affects into discursive phenomena that function as "containers" for social circulation of affect (Ahmed, 2014,

[1]Texts and tweets cited in this article are mostly our translation from Czech, with occasional English tweets used as posted.

p. 227). Emotions such as "love" and "anger," understood as hooking of affects onto culturally recognizable signifiers (Solomon, 2012, p. 908; similarly Hall & Ross, 2019), are just one example of these "containers," together with other phenomena such as much more ambivalent desires and fantasies that are used in our case study. This is not to say that we wish to posit a clear ontological line between affect and emotion, but rather that we see the two as analytically separable aspects of the intertwining of the bodily and the discursive aspects of sociopolitical life—like the yolk and the white in an egg (Ahmed, 2014, p. 210). Consequently, we are less interested in identifying particular types of emotions, such as "trust" (Bilgic, Hoogensen, & Wilcock, 2019), even though we refer to them occasionally in our study. Our focus is more general, as we examine the ways in which affect intersects with and leaves its traces onto discourse in the form of what we call "sticking points" (Solomon, 2012), making narratives that incorporate these sticking points more likely to stick.

We make a twofold contribution. First, we offer one of the first psychological and sociological explorations of RHW debates. Despite the central role of this topic in European security, there is hardly any scholarship examining the issue from other than a policy or traditional strategic-studies angle (Mälksoo, 2018). Second, we develop an integrated methodological framework of analyzing affective investments into discourse around the notion of sticking points. This is done by synthesizing and further elaborating Lacanian theoretical arguments and translating them into practically applicable analytical tools. In the first two sections, we present the Lacanian theoretical position and develop it into an analytical framework. In the third section, we offer a case study of the Czech RHW narrative. The article concludes by a discussion of broader implications of our argument.

Narrative, Discourse, and Affect

Narratives play a key part in politics, and most IR scholarship rooted in psychology, sociology, or philosophy would agree that narratives help us make sense of the world and, subsequently, act upon it (Miskimmon et al., 2013). However, why is it that of all the narratives only some of them succeed and become used as ostensibly "common sense" descriptors of the world? The literature offers several explanations. The traditional perspective forefronts the narrator—their power, skills, and credibility. Recent studies question the straightforward link between the narrator's capability and narrative's success. Some emphasize mechanisms of contestation and concentrate on the ability of the narrators to navigate the given social context (Krebs, 2015; Miskimmon et al., 2013). Others highlight narratives' structural composition or their relationship with contesting stories (Oppermann & Spencer, 2018). Most approaches emphasize the social context, often understood in terms of "resonance" with audiences, stressing the importance of embedding the narrative in shared norms and cultural understandings (Andrews et al., 2015; Spencer, 2016).

However, while the sociologically oriented studies show the crucial role of previous cultural frames and understandings, they only rarely elaborate on how exactly this "resonance" functions. Some of the familiarity-focused narrative work in IR guesses the answer, for example, when Ringmar (2006) suggests that successful narratives are those that people "like to hear" (p. 411). Nevertheless, it is especially the psychoanalytically inspired scholarship that provides an explicit theorization by turning to affects and emotions, thereby complementing the existing accounts by providing additional factors contributing to narrative success. Martin (2016) suggests that "psychoanalytical theory can help us understand the emotional force of political rhetoric" by showing how persuasive speech "captures desire" (p. 143). We follow this tradition and base our research on the Lacanian argument that embedding in broader discursive frameworks and affective resonance are in fact two indivisible parts of the very same process of social (re)production of narratives. The efficacy of narratives stems both from their discursive *form* (how they achieve familiarity by relating to broader sedimented meanings), as well as their affective *force* (how they transmit and manipulate previous affective investments) (Laclau, 2004; Solomon, 2012; Stavrakakis, 2007). The notion that affects or "emotions

have a history" (Bleiker & Hutchison, 2008, p. 122) is indeed also not lost upon a number of authors in IR (Fattah & Fierke, 2009; Ross 2006). Building also upon these insights, we translate the existing Lacanian argument regarding the interlocking of discourse and affect into an analytical framework.

From a Lacanian angle, selection, appropriation, and (re)production of narratives is tied to the dynamics of identification, a process that is simultaneously both discursive and affective. For Lacan, the subject is structured around an ontological emptiness: a void (Stavrakakis, 1999; Žižek, 1997). This absence of a stable identity is traumatic, and, therefore, the subject attempts to fill the void via engaging in processes of identification, understood as a perpetual search for external resources that could ostensibly provide for their missing identity. While these anchors take the form of images, objects, or other people, it is language that plays the crucial part (Stavrakakis, 1999, p. 20). In trying to figure out who they are and gain a place within the discursive order, subjects identify with particular signifiers ("American," "feminist") and narratives that would develop them into a coherent story of the world and their role within it. Absent of foundations, both the subjects and the social world are constantly refashioned through narratives that impose temporary order on otherwise contingent social life. This imposition of meaning would not work without affective investment, understood as "the anchoring forces that bind subjects to their identities and particular kinds of discourses" (Solomon, 2014, p. 729). Since language is slippery, something needs to intervene into the ever-changing play of signification to stabilize meaning, however temporary this stabilization may be. This "something" is the affective investment, through which we fix the meaning of a particular term or a story (Laclau, 2005). Therefore, social meaning can arise only in the interplay of discourse and affect.

In remoulding signifiers and storylines into a new narrative, we also engage and reuse the previous affective investments laden in them. By deploying linguistic symbols, we do not link the present issue only to their discursive form, but also to the affective force associated with them. Put simply, culturally shared tropes are also "containers" (Ahmed, 2014) filled with affect that takes the form of previous emotions, feelings, and desires that are revived and further transmitted if these tropes are reused in new narratives. For instance, by invoking national traumas via references to "9/11" as a reasoning for a particular situation, we not only frame the new situation in terms of "catastrophic terrorism" at a discursive level, but we also make "younger generations *experience the pain* and sense of loss of their elders" (Murer, 2009, p. 124; emphasis added). The new situation then not only "looks," but also "feels" like 9/11. Consequently, narratives are more likely to stick if they incorporate a broad range of preexisting discursive templates and affective investments. A narrative that works well will offer the audiences both a way of how to recognize themselves in a new situation and how to *feel* about it. Familiarity and affectivity are thus two intertwined drivers of narrative success: Familiarity refers to entangling the new situation into a recognizable discursive form, while affectivity relates to the force that cements this one particular understanding by binding subjects to a familiar narrative.

Affective Sticking Points

In this section, we develop the Lacanian argument into an analytical framework. We follow Bleiker and Hutchison's (2008) advice to reach beyond social scientific techniques to study the unobservable phenomenon of affective investment. While, when conceptualized from a Lacanian perspective, affect cannot be studied directly, we build upon the work that develops tools for "encircling" it within discourse (Solomon, 2012; Stavrakakis, 2007). We do this by focusing on "sticking points" (Solomon, 2012)—that is, particular linguistic phenomena, which are theorized as infused with affective investment. Therefore, our approach relies on adopting a particular theorization of affect as defined in Lacanian psychoanalysis and translating it into the concept of affectively laden sticking points, which can then be traced in empirical texts. Our contribution thus lies in taking a

psychoanalytical argument regarding how affect operates within discourse and demonstrating how it can be utilized in practical research.

By defining and conceptualizing these sticking points, we develop a methodology, which overlaps with those provided in the literature on emotions in IR. Koschut's work (2018; Koschut et al., 2017) is particularly helpful in this respect, as he extends the discourse-analytical principle of intertextuality also to emotions, arguing that "[e]motions often relate to similar emotions expressed in other culture-specific and/or historical discourse and narratives" (Koschut et al., 2017, p. 485). Koschut further differentiates between the microfocus on interpreting emotions and the macroattitude of contextualizing them in broader discourses (Koschut, 2018; Koschut et al., 2017). While this is helpful heuristically, we see the two strategies as inseparable parts of any attempt to encircle affect within discourse. Therefore, our own method is best described as a circular movement between a psychoanalytical conceptualization of how affect leaves traces on discourse (as condensed in the concept of sticking points), concrete empirical texts, and emerging interpretations of the case at hand. We combine formal techniques for identifying linguistic structures (nodal points and fantasies) and intertextual links (e.g., between the RHW narrative and broader biographical narratives) with phenomenological interpretations of affective investments, which are necessarily based also on subjective criteria, especially our immersion within the context that enables us to claim that something is of an affective value. This approach takes us to the risky terrain of interpreting texts through references to unobservable phenomena. At the same time, it also enables us to say something novel about the presence of affect and its role in the sticking of narratives.

In our analysis, we use three different, yet closely interrelated and mutually reinforcing, categories of sticking points: valued signifiers, fantasies, and biographical narratives.

First, *valued signifiers* are words that function as condensations of an "entire set of collective meanings and feelings" (Solomon, 2012, p. 924). This is similar to the notion of "nodal points," understood as the "central concepts in the political debate" (Diez, 2001, p. 16) to which most arguments refer in order to be meaningful (such as "market" in neoliberal discourses). Words like "market" are indeed open to different meanings; they are "floating" or even "empty signifiers" (Laclau, 2005, pp. 129–138). While their meaning may be ambiguous, their very presence attracts affective responses. It is through affective investment into particular words that the play of signification is temporarily suspended, words acquire their meanings, and communication becomes possible (Laclau, 2005). Identifying a valued signifier and arguing that it is laden with affect is always an act of context-sensitive interpretation, but certain methodological rules can be posited. Valued signifiers are used relatively frequently. They are presented as the clear and undisputable common ground that does not require further explanation; they are "the self-referential linguistic walls past which further clarifications of policy and self cannot be articulated" (Solomon, 2013, p. 130).

Second, we identify affective investments by looking into whether narratives have the structure of a *fantasy*. A central concept of Lacanian psychoanalysis, fantasy, which has recently found its way also into IR (Arfi, 2010; Eberle, 2019; Zevnik, 2017), is a strongly affectively laden type of narrative that attracts desire by promising the achievement of a whole and stable identity. It is a type of "subject's story about the world" (Zevnik, 2017, p. 624), which binds subjects to a particular discourse by offering them ostensible solutions to their problems, as well as the affective satisfaction connected to this promise. More formally, fantasy is "a narrative structure involving some reference to an idealized scenario promising an imaginary fullness or wholeness (the beatific side of fantasy) and, by implication, a disaster scenario (the horrific side of fantasy)" (Glynos, 2008, p. 283). It has the structure of an ideal—a beatific future in which all desires are satisfied—and an obstacle, often in the form of a dirty and despicable other that is enjoying themselves at our expense (Hook, 2017, p. 612; Žižek, 1991, p. 165). In this way, fantasies invite affective investments both on the positive side of a desired ideal and on the negative side of the loathed and/or feared other. Fantasies are very often constructed around valued signifiers (Zevnik, 2017, p. 627), utilizing their affective force and

amplifying it further by inserting these signifiers into more complex storylines. In turn, valued signifiers themselves also gained their affective salience from their previous articulations in fantasies.

Third, *biographical narratives* are wider stories that make sense of the existence of a group—a society, a nation, or other. By ordering past experiences, they construct collective identities and provide us with lenses for interpreting the present. Different versions of discourse-based research have long been interested in these broader templates, labeling them varyingly as "biographical narratives" (Steele, 2008), "meta-narratives" (Diez, 2001) or "collective memory" (Wittlinger & Larose, 2007). In line with the affect/emotions literature in IR (e.g., Pace & Bilgic, 2018), we understand memory not only as a cultural/cognitive, but also as deeply affective phenomenon. Therefore, in our view, biographical narratives also present a reservoir of affective investments, in which they "soak" certain signifiers and narrative templates. Narratives that situate the construction of the current situation within the longer arc framework provided by biographical narratives, utilizing both the discursive simplification they provide and the affective investment residing within them, are then more likely to stick.

These three types of sticking points serve us as methodological tools that operationalize the Lacanian arguments concerning affect, providing us with concepts that capture the affective traces within discourse. Thereby, we show how a narrative becomes affect-laden via incorporation of tropes that are already invested with affect, reviving these investments, and passing them further on. This also means that our focus is more on the production side. In establishing success and sticking, we rely on our observation that the RHW narrative made an impact on national security and that the tropes utilized in its production came from a broader, culturally shared repertoire of discursive tropes and affective investments. The constraints of a journal article do not allow us to develop in more detail how these narratives were received by their different audiences. This could be done, for example, by running focus groups or conducting opinion polls. Consequently, we do not say that everyone exposed to those narratives shared the same affective response. Rather, we demonstrate how a narrative that succeeded enough to make an impact on national security relied on a range of sticking points. Using our theoretical apparatus, we argue that it was this incorporation of affects via sticking points that contributed to the success of the RHW narrative.

"First Russian Paratroopers Have Already Landed": Czech Narrative on RHW

The beginning of the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014 left Europe in a sense of shock. Russian actions were mostly unexpected in their extent, disregard for international norms, as well as their combination of force with propaganda and disinformation campaigns. This approach was labeled "hybrid warfare" and became the key embodiment of insecurity vis-à-vis the apparently omnipresent nature of the Russian threat (Mälksoo, 2018). The sense of an abrupt change in the security environment resonated strongly in the Czech Republic. While direct military threat was not seen as very probable, many wondered about a different form of Russian interference in the form of propaganda campaigns or even an "information war" (Maďar, 2015; Smoleňová, 2015). An early article described the threat bluntly: "It appears that the struggle [between Russia and the West . . .] will be waged at multiple fronts. The media-information one is among them, first Russian paratroopers have already landed" (Ševela, 2014). Similarly alarming words were presented also by the Special Forces General Karel Řehka, whose comment "In a way, we are already at war, we just do not realise it or are not able to admit it" (Lang, 2015), became echoed in the public debate (Gazdík, 2017).

However, while the sense of insecurity defined the public discourse, it also spurred competing narratives on what was going on and what the appropriate reaction should look like. Some downplayed the impact of information operations and portrayed Russia primarily as a conventional threat and called for strengthening the military capabilities of NATO and increasing the resilience of security sector (Kříž, Shevchuk, & Ševkov, 2015). Others argued that the main problem lay in the

lack of media literacy skills, which enabled fake news and conspiracies to flourish. The solution was thus to be found rather in education and targeted capability-building projects (Golis, 2016). Despite these alternatives, it was the narrative that directly connected suspected pro-Russian activists and fake news websites with "Russian hybrid warfare" that was most visible in the official discourse and influenced national security policy. For instance, the notion of RHW and its emphasis on covert foreign influence and threats emanating from cyberspace has been incorporated into key national security documents, such as the Security Strategy of 2015 and the National Security Audit of 2016, and it served as the rationale for the creation of new institutions, for example, the Centre against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats (for details, see Daniel & Eberle, 2018).

The RHW narrative portrayed Russian actions as a multifaceted security issue. As Russia cannot attack the Czech Republic by military means, so the story goes, it instead engages in covert hybrid warfare, which aims at destroying Czech sovereignty, democracy, and "Western" identity by spreading fake news, using corruption and a network of local supporters. In this view, the ultimate Russian goal is to bring the Czech Republic under its influence and undermine Czech belonging to the West. To tackle the novel and insidious tools of hybrid warfare, both increased the resolve of civil society in its struggle against "Russian agents" and a Russian information campaign as well as the strengthening of security agencies as needed (Janda, 2016; Ministry of the Interior, 2016). While comprehensive mapping of the private and public actors who subscribed to this narrative can be found elsewhere (Daniel & Eberle, 2018; Rychnovská & Kohút, 2018), in this article we focus rather on the narrative's public articulation. Specifically, we concentrate on two of its major proponents—Jakub Janda and Ondřej Kundra. They became the central figures of the RHW agenda, due to their ability to connect different parts of this like-minded group together, participation at numerous public events, and their public recognition as experts on the information (or hybrid) warfare (Rychnovská & Kohút, 2018, pp. 72–78).

Jakub Janda served from 2013 until 2018 as the Deputy Director of the European Values, a center-right think tank, which established itself as one of the most publicly visible institutions working on the RHW agenda (a story described in Janda, 2017 as well as Daniel & Eberle, 2018). Janda also became the head of the Kremlin Watch program, a specialized "task-force" of European Values analysts specifically dedicated to tackling Russian hybrid operations (European Values, 2018). He has also frequently appeared at diverse public events and in the media, commenting on the issues of Russian influence and information operations. Ondřej Kundra is a leading Czech investigative journalist. A long-time employee of the prominent liberal weekly *Respekt*, Kundra won several national awards for his reporting. His articles on Czech fake news portals, Russian organized crime, and intelligence services as well as his book *Putin's Agents* (2016) helped to provide the narrative with examples of past and contemporary Russian covert activities in Europe and the Czech Republic.

The following pages unpack the dominant RHW narrative around the three categories of sticking points: valued signifiers, fantasies, and biographical narratives. The analysis is based on Kundra's book (2016) and Janda's autobiographical article (2017) as the two key texts articulating comprehensive versions of the narrative, as well as posts on Kundra (@okundra) and Janda's (@_JakubJanda) Twitter accounts in 2014–16 (altogether more than 1,000 RHW-related tweets), and a range of secondary resources on broader Czech biographical narratives.

Valued Signifiers

The most important positively valued signifier in the RHW narrative is "the West," which is used as a recurring point of identification and functions as the ostensibly final ground, something that does not really have to be explained any further. It appears that there is no need to specify what is meant by "our Western orientation" (@okundra, July 1, 2016) or "incorporation to the defence and political structures of the West" (Kundra, 2016, p. 27). In the Czech—and broader Central

European—intertext, the word is associated with the Huntingtonian notion of a "Western," or "Euro-Atlantic," civilization (Kuus, 2007). The tweets explicitly draw on this idea, directly using affect-laden terms when relating to the concept. "Westernness" is linked to joy: "I am so happy that we are already in a different civilizational circle" [than Russia] (@_JakubJanda, March 5, 2014). In contrast, disinterest in being and acting like "the West" is a source of horror: "The scariest thing about Russia's actions is that they don't even bother pretending to be a state from a European civilizational circle" (@_JakubJanda, April 14, 2014). Crucially, "the West" carries affective investment through which the RHW narrative connects to broader discourses on Czech identity. The "West" functions as a desired marker of the self and a symbol of hope and aspiration (Eberle, 2018). By linking to "the West," other signifiers and narratives are laden with the affect that goes with it—a point that will be further elaborated in the sections on fantasy and biographical narratives, as "the West" is a key building block for both.

There are multiple designations of the enemy-other, but it is above all "the Kremlin" that is laden with affective investment and functions as a nodal point. "Kremlin Watch" is the name of the European Values' program on "influence and disinformation operations" (European Values, 2018), whereas a key text boasts about "building a defence wall against hostile influence of the Kremlin." (Janda, 2017) The word is almost always used in a strongly negative connotation, with "Kremlin lies" (Janda, 2017), "Kremlin propaganda" (@_JakubJanda, March 1, 2015; @okundra, February 19, 2016), and "risk of Kremlin's influence" (Janda, 2017) as examples. The affective force of the signifier comes especially from connections to the Soviet invasion of 1968. "From the Kremlin Comes the Frost," originally a title of the memoir of one of the architects of the Prague Spring, Zdeněk Mlynář (published in English as Mlynář, 1980), became a broadly used phrase to describe the Soviet aggression or hostile intentions in general. Via references to "the Kremlin," the RHW narrative is knotted together with deeper discourses of Czech(oslovak) national humiliation and serves as a container for the transmission of affects invested in these dark memories.

A whole series of strongly denigrating signifiers further appears to label different sorts of "Putin's agents" (Kundra, 2016) in the Czech Republic. These are presented as "the fifth column" (@_JakubJanda, May 20, 2015), "Trojan horses" (@_JakubJanda, May 20, 2016), or "useful idiots" (@okundra, October 19, 2015; @_JakubJanda, March 7, 2016), all words laden with affective baggage. President Zeman, a particularly popular target for such attributions, is referred to as "resident" (@_JakubJanda, March 28, 2016; @_JakubJanda, July 6, 2016), a pun signaling subordination to his supposed spymasters in Moscow. A specific subcategory of "agents" are the "communists." While current or former members of the Communist Party are indeed a common target, the labels "communists," "Bolsheviks," and "comrades" are often used as indiscriminate offences and ascribed even to those whose "communist" identity is questionable at best. The affect invested into such signifiers is evident in the tweets. One calls for "rout[ing] Bolsheviks out of Czech political scene" (@_JakubJanda, July 9, 2016), while another considers "Deathtocommunism" as the winner of "wifi password of the month" (@okundra, September 6, 2015).

The last of the key valued signifiers is "occupation," a word used to denote a series of Russia's actions not only in Ukraine, but in a number of events over the last century. In the RHW narrative, "occupation" is something that Russians cannot help themselves doing. One tweet mockingly states that "Western homosexuals put a church in Moscow on fire, occupation of any neighbouring country of Russia is expected" (@_JakubJanda, March 15, 2015). Elsewhere, "Russia's final guarantee is occupation." (@_JakubJanda, November 27, 2016). In the Czech context, the word "occupation" has a particularly negative connotation, as this is how two of the darkest moments of modern history—1939 and 1968—are remembered. "Occupation" (rather than "war" itself) is thus seen as the worst-case scenario. Via references to "occupation," the RHW narrative is anchored to memories of foreign aggression and national humiliation, and their affective content is projected onto the reading of Russia's current actions. In an intriguing self-reporting of *feelings*, one tweet states that "Putin's

occupation of Crimea cemented all stereotypes, which we know and feel about Russia from our history" (@_JakubJanda, March 30, 2015) Through "occupation," Russia imposes on other nations all the pain that what "we" have gone through in some of the most traumatic events of our collective memory.

Fantasy

Fantasy is an affect-laden type of narrative that has the structure of an ideal state, in which the subject is promised the satisfaction of its desires, as well as an obstacle to it, which often takes the form of a fearsome and/or disgusting enemy-other. In the Czech RHW narrative, we identify a single most important fantasy: the idea of the Czech Republic as a "kidnapped West" (Kundera, 1984). It presents the Czech we-subject as uprooted from its "Western" trajectory (ideal) by the dark forces of "the Kremlin" and its "agents" (obstacle). In this logic, "our" very identity is at stake, forcing a binary choice between "awakening" and recapturing the beatific future of being a free "Western" subject and the horrific future of being an "occupied" vassal-object. The whole structure is apparent in the following statement: "Russia never withdrew its agents from here, on the very contrary, it has even reinforced their ranks in the recent years [. . .] Their goal is to undermine our still settling and shaky democracy, bring chaos into it, weaken our integration into the defence and political structures of the West" (Kundra, 2016, p. 27). We now examine each of the elements in detail.

Fantasy first has to describe the current situation. In our case, it portrays the Czech subject as disturbed from its post-1989 development, which supposedly progressed towards the ideal state of becoming a fully recognized part of "the West" (Eberle, 2018; Slačálek, 2016). Suddenly, this is shattered by the reappearance of aggressive Russia. The shock and confusion that follows is often captured with the metaphors of "fog" and "blur," such as when saying that the "Russian disinformation campaign successfully blurred our concepts" (Janda, 2017). Behind these clouds and smokescreens, however, the fantasy already sees a "durable threat" (Janda, 2017) of the most serious kind. "The game for the survival of the Czech Republic as a sovereign and secure state has begun" (@_JakubJanda, June 30, 2016). Thereby, uncertainty of the situation is covered over by language that spreads shock, fear, and a sense of urgency, further exacerbated by the way the we-subject is described: as weak, confused, unprepared, and struggling for its very survival.

Probably the strongest sticking points are presented by the images of the obstacle, the enemy-others that stand in the way of achieving the ideal state of being fully "Western." These enemy-others—"the Kremlin" and its "agents"—are portrayed as horrifying, as stealing away from us what we hold dear and enjoying themselves in the process. While the we-subject is weak, as its judgment is clouded by the "fog," "the Kremlin" is strong and scary. Russians are presented as being ahead in the game, as they are ruthless and possess all the spy skills they have learned throughout the years. "The Kremlin [. . .] learns from its own mistakes, which does not correspond to the often nonchalant contempt of Russians' skills by the West" (Kundra, 2016, p. 102). The Czechs cannot put up with Moscow's sophisticated spy game, as the state apparatus does not even have enough resources to monitor all suspected agents (p. 154). Russia's strength is complemented by its supposed moral inferiority, which invites affect in the form of contempt: Through its "systematic and repeated lying," "the Kremlin" excludes itself from a "decent society" (Janda, 2017). Its "understanding of the world. . . [is] devoid of any values and rules." (Kundra, 2016, p. 89); "the Kremlin" suffers from a "constant urge to threaten others" (p. 32). This threat, which attracts affect in the form of fear, is further highlighted by the supposed omnipresence of Russian agents within the "Western" body in the shape of potentially suspicious Russian students, interns, managers, or brides (p. 101).

A particular meaning of the RHW threat is cemented not only by presenting the enemy-other as scary and loathsome, but also by suggesting that they are trying to steal something essential, something that is of strong affective value to us. It can be "our children" or our safety in a "favorite

café," as Russian agents are highly skillful in posing as ordinary members of the society (Kundra 2016, p. 88), or even the "deepest national aspirations and desires" that were supposedly "sold" from Estonia by a Russian agent together with sensitive information (p. 185). This deeply affective sense of a looming loss is contrasted to the cold, merciless, almost inhuman ways of "the Kremlin." When Russia's foreign minister Sergey Lavrov denied the Czech Republic's "Western" status by labeling the country as belonging to "Eastern Europe," "the words worked cold, just like the expression of Lavrov's sharp-featured face without a single gesture revealing emotions" (p. 35).

Thereby, the fantasy pictures the weak and vulnerable we-subject facing a strong and omnipresent enemy in an existential struggle. The future is portrayed as a binary choice between excessively horrific and excessively beatific scenarios, cementing the meaning of the situation by projecting affect on both hope and desperation. The horrific version of the future is not elaborated in much detail, as it in fact means a return to the dark past. By failing to grasp the seriousness of the situation, everything would more or less get back to the "time when we, as a subdued and collaborating satellite, belonged to the Russian sphere of influence" (Kundra, 2016, p. 35).

Against this background, it is above all the beatific vision of a different, "Western," future and the seductive notion that we can still reach it if we try, that helps fix the meaning by providing attractive sticking points. The binary logic is well captured in the following lines:

> The Czech Republic can get fully stuck in the web of Russian interests and become a peripheral, unimportant and wholly untrustworthy member in the EU and NATO, a sort of odd Eastern bastion of Putin's regime. However, we have a second option: to rise from the Russian fog and start taking seriously the defence of freedom, which we regained in 1989 and which the Kremlin and its secret services strive to dismantle once again. (Kundra, 2016, pp. 194, 195)

The beatific scenario is built around this metaphor of "rising" or "awakening" (Janda, 2017). At first, only a few scattered people "wake up," get together, and stand up against "the Kremlin." This includes the "young dedicated people" in the European Values think tank (Janda, 2017), or individuals within the Ministry of Interior. It is thanks to these pioneers that security professionals come to understand that "the threat [. . .] is real, urgent, and horrifyingly underestimated" (Janda, 2017). Finally, even "the Czech state" is "pushed" by this avant-garde group "to take the threat of Russia's hostile influence seriously and start doing something with it" (@_JakubJanda, December 16, 2016) Embarking on this path is explicitly connected to "Western" recognition. "Many of our allies realize with cheerful astonishment that Czechia [. . .] takes concrete steps with respect to this issue" (Janda, 2017). In this happy ending scenario, this "cheerful" affective wave hits also the Czech subject, as the narrator himself admits when describing his feelings when the security apparatus adopted the RHW narrative: "I felt immense satisfaction [. . .] I am grateful that we at the European Values think-tank could contribute to this" (Janda, 2017). However, in the very logic of the fantasy, even these images of joy and fulfilment are merely temporary, as the omnipresent enemy can always dislocate them.

Biographical Narratives

The final step in our analysis lies in embedding valued signifiers and fantasies in broader national biographies. The Czech RHW narrative acquires its meaning and affective force from two of those in particular: history as a lens for interpreting the present, which provides a temporal axis, and East/West geopolitics, which presents a spatial anchoring.

In the first biographical narrative, history is seen as the main source of knowledge about current and future developments. To understand what is going on, one has to look to the past for analogies—rather than, for instance, derive scientific laws about the international system. In the Czech context,

it is often through references to historical traumas that foreign policies are articulated: "1938" is used as a justification to oppose anything constructed as "appeasement," while "1968" works as a "symbol of Russian imperialism" (Slačálek, 2009, pp. 244–246). As shown, this narrative backdrop gives meaning and affective force to signifiers such as "the Kremlin" and "occupation," and it is precisely this historical logic that gives rise to the horrifying idea of Russia's supposedly "natural" proneness to attack its neighbors: "Poland 1920, Finland 1939, Lithuania 1939. Latvia 1939, Estonia 1939, Romania 1939, Poland 1939, Germany 1953, Hungary 1956, . . . Czechoslovakia 1968, Afghanistan 1979–1989, Lithuania 1990, Moldova 1992, Geogia 2008, Ukraine 2014" (@_JakubJanda, August 20, 2016).

Apart from metaphors and signifiers, this biographical narrative also provides two broader plot templates: self-victimization and externalization of responsibility (Kořan, 2016). Self-victimization, the "[t]endency to use—or abuse—historical grievances committed on the national community," is linked to a set of "negative emotions, such as anger, self-pity and humiliation" (Kořan, 2016, pp. 19, 20). It reproduces past traumas, presenting the Czechs as a "victim of history" (Kořan, 2016, p. 21), an image in which the "occupations" of 1939 and 1968 play a central role. Relatedly, externalization of responsibility is a pattern of seeing oneself as too small and insignificant—a passive object rather than an active subject. An indivisible part of this self-image is the refusal to accept responsibility for any wrongdoings and projection of blame on external others (p. 23). These templates color the RHW fantasy in two different ways. First and directly, externalization of responsibility is used to ostracize Russia, as it is the actions of "the Kremlin" and its "agents" that lead the Czechs astray, rather than any domestic deficits or failures. Second, both templates reinforce the horrific vision of submission to "the Kremlin," where the Czechs become—once again!—helpless, humiliated victims of external forces.

The second narrative is the "dichotomisation of the surrounding world into East and West" (Holubec, 2015, p. 154). This falls into the pattern of Central European "identity-based geopolitics"; a discourse, in which "European, Western, or civilizational values are cited across the region as the self-evident and primary bases for a wide range of foreign and domestic policy decisions" (Kuus, 2007, pp. 39, 40). The East/West division is coded with affective values, with "the West" defined as a superior culture: "Czechs use the concept of *kulturnost* [culturedness] to construct a boundary between themselves and the uncultured East" (Holy, 1996, p. 151). The result is an "anti-Eastern" discourse, often bordering on "Russophobia" (Holubec, 2015, pp. 165, 178). This binary geopolitical vision then helps provide both meaning and affective investments for key valued signifiers, especially "the West" and "the Kremlin."

"The West" is coded as a civilization with "clearly positive values" (Holubec, 2015, p. 223). In the language of its key articulators, "the West" is less a geographic entity and more a community of values, principles, and culture (Holubec, 2015, p. 223): For Kundera (1984, p. 33), it is a "spiritual notion." The position of the Czech Republic (and Central Europe more broadly) is a very particular one, as it is "both an integral part and the eastern border of the Western cultural realm" (Kuus, 2007, p. 44). This further contributes to the affective salience of "Westernness," as it is a source of not only anxiety stemming from the understanding that Czechs can always be "kidnapped" from their "Western" trajectory by the forces of "the East" once again, and of particular pride and even Messianism. This is present not only in Kundera's (1984) depictions of Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia as defenders of "Western culture" in 1956/1968, but also in Vaclav Havel's post-1989 discourse, which echoes through the RHW narrative and suggests that "[p]ostcommunist Central Europe can offer to the West exactly what it is lacking, which is the willingness for sacrifices in the struggle for freedom" (Holubec, 2015, p. 225). Russia, in contrast, is seen as fundamentally different from "the West." After 1989, the Czech press portrayed Russia as "Oriental, despotic and reactionary," as well as "aggressive and expansive" (Holubec, 2015, pp. 171, 172). Such images are widely reproduced in the RHW narrative, which is not only full of references to the ostensibly "natural"

expansiveness of Russia and its proneness to "occupation," but also provides a list of depictions of Russians as "barbaric": mafia bosses serving grilled sharks at opulent dinners, bare-chested men on alcoholic binges, brutal thugs chasing Putin's opponents (Kundra, 2016).

Conclusion

The article explored why certain narratives become more dominant than others and impose themselves as "common sense" descriptors of social reality. Building on Lacanian psychoanalysis, narrative scholarship, and affect/emotions literature in IR, we argued that that narratives that manage to embed themselves within broader discursive resources *and* attract affective investment are more likely to stick. We developed an analytical framework for identifying affect within discourse via sticking points and explored it through our case study of the Czech narrative on "Russian hybrid warfare." We argued that a particular story, one based around the notion that Russia waged a "hybrid war" against "the West" and that this should be faced with quasi-military measures, incorporated a broad range of sticking points, which contributed to its success in transforming the Czech understanding of national security. The narrative utilized valued signifiers such as "the West," "the Kremlin," "agents," and "occupation," managed to weave them together into a fantasy of a recurring threat to the Czech Republic's "Western" identity, and intertwined this with the biographical narratives of history as a lens for world politics and East/West geopolitics.

Our argument has broader implications from both analytical and political points of view. Analytically speaking, our case study further demonstrates how the ostensibly rational issues of "high politics," with national security as the prime example, are inextricably intertwined with affects. Affective investments bind subjects to particular discourses, narratives, and identities and thereby lead them to perceive certain policies—such as those of confrontation in our case—as more desirable and appealing. We put special emphasis on how to translate this general argument into a methodological framework. Building on existing works on narrative and emotional methodologies, as well as psychoanalytically informed discourse analysis, we demonstrated how to analyze the essentially unobservable affect via its discursive traces and effects.

There are also political consequences to be drawn from our study. Security narratives are imposed as "natural" or "reasonable" not (only) because of the credibility and power of the narrator and the argumentative evidence channelled behind them, but (also) because of their often unreflected affective force. Therefore, once a particular narrative is established, it becomes very difficult to contest it. In the binary logic of the Czech RHW narrative, opponents are quickly reduced to Russia's "Trojan horses" or at least "useful idiots." Thanks to its deep grounding in the affective aspects of collective narratives of both traumatic (1938, 1968) and heroic (1989) events, arguing against the RHW story means that one also has to provide a broader societal counternarrative at the same time. Put simply, the conditions for a successful opposition are unfavorable, but not completely hopeless.

There are at least two strategies directly enabled by our focus on sticking points. The first follows the psychoanalytical procedure of putting into words what has so far been unreflected, such as the often unconscious affective attachments. By showing that the RHW narrative is supported by a range of sticking points, we can guide the debate towards these affective attachments. Through a process of critical reflection on the affective investments that sustain our political imaginations, we can at least hope to open space for a less binary and more dialogical, respectful, and open-ended debate. Second, when identified, affective sticking points can be strategically reincorporated into more inclusive and less totalizing counternarratives. For example, belonging to "the West" could be rearticulated in terms of a universal commitment to democratic tolerance, humanism, and open exchange of arguments. Similarly, we could reclaim national biographical narratives by pointing out different aspects from the past, for example, those in which openness to otherness triumphed over

jingoism, nationalism, or civilizationalist particularism. Crucially, both strategies should follow the goal of creating a more plural, inclusive, and democratic debate.

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