

**BORDERS AND BURDENS: METAPHOR, MYTH, AND MEANING IN
RUSSIAN POLITICAL DISCOURSE ON THE EUROPEAN
MIGRATION CRISIS¹**

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Abstract: This article investigates the metaphorical framing of the European migration (refugee) crisis in Russian media discourse, focusing primarily on the representation of state and institutional actors. Drawing on a corpus of news articles from two prominent outlets Vesti.ru (state-run) and Komsomolskaya Pravda (pro-government tabloid) published in September 2015, the study employs a discourse-analytical and metaphor-based approach to examine how media discursively construct foreign political actors, such as the EU, individual European states, and the United States. The selected media were chosen for their wide reach and consistent reporting on the migration topic. The analysis reveals a set of recurring images portraying Europe as weak, old, and disoriented, while migrants appear mostly as a backdrop to highlight the perceived vulnerabilities of European states, with the United States often constructed as the external instigator orchestrating the chaos. These metaphorical representations function ideologically to contrast European

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disorder with Russian order and to legitimize Russia's stance on migration and geopolitics. The study contributes to understanding how media discursively construct political actors through crisis coverage and adds to broader debates on media, migration, and metaphor.

Keywords: European migration crisis, Russia, media, political discourse, metaphor

SINIRLAR VE YÜKLER: AVRUPA GÖÇ KRİZİ ÜZERİNE RUS SİYASAL SÖYLEMİNDE METAFOR, MİT VE ANLAM

Öz: *Bu makale, Avrupa göçmen (mülteci) krizi bağlamında Rus medya söyleminde metaforik çerçevelmeyi, özellikle devlet ve kurumsal aktörlerin temsiline odaklanarak incelemektedir. Çalışma, Eylül 2015'te yayımlanan ve göç meselesine sürekli olarak yer veren iki önde gelen medya kaynağı — devlet destekli Vesti.ru ve hükümet yanlısı tabloid Komsomolskaya Pravda — haberlerinden oluşan bir derleme üzerinden söylem ve metafor analizine dayalı bir yöntem izlemektedir. Medyada Avrupa Birliği, tekil Avrupa devletleri ve Amerika Birleşik Devletleri gibi dış politik aktörlerin nasıl temsil edildiği araştırılmaktadır. Seçilen medya kaynakları, geniş kitlelere ulaşmaları ve göç konusunu tutarlı biçimde işlemeleri nedeniyle tercih edilmiştir. Analiz, Avrupa'nın zayıf, yaşlı ve yönünü kaybetmiş olarak betimlendiği bir dizi tekrar eden imgeyi ortaya koymaktadır; göçmenler ise çoğunlukla Avrupa devletlerinin kırılganlıklarını vurgulamak için bir arka plan unsuru olarak yer almaktadır. ABD kaosu yöneten dış kışkırtıcı olarak sıkça kurgulanmaktadır. Bu tür temsiller, Avrupa'daki kaosu Rusya'nın düzeniyle karşılaştırarak ideolojik bir işlev görmekte ve Rusya'nın göç ve jeopolitik konularındaki tutumunu meşrulaştırmaktadır. Çalışma, kriz bağlamında medyanın politik aktörleri söylemsel olarak nasıl inşa ettiğini anlamaya katkı sunmakta ve medya, göç ve metafor üzerine yürütülen daha geniş tartışmalara katkıda bulunmaktadır.*

Anahtar kelimeler: *Avrupa göç krizi, Rusya, medya, siyasal söylem, metafor*

INTRODUCTION

In the autumn of 2015, the world's attention was drawn to what was then referred to as the European migrant crisis or the European refugee crisis. Since then, anti-immigrant sentiment has noticeably increased. Minority groups, particularly refugees and immigrants, have increasingly been blamed and scapegoated for a range of societal issues. Public discourse, shaped in large part by mainstream media and political actors, frequently associates migrants with

rising crime rates and unemployment. Such representations have fueled growing public anxiety over safety, economic well-being, and the political future of their nations. In this regard, the role of the media over the course of the crisis cannot be overstated. Mass media and mass migration emerge as two intertwined forces that feed off one another and shape the dynamics of contemporary global politics.

This article focuses on the representation of the refugee crisis, notably through the prism of the Russian press. The position of the official Russian discourse on the European crisis has received limited scholarly attention. Given the wide range of issues encompassed by immigration, the topic holds significant discursive potential, which the Russian media has actively exploited to advance its own political agenda. In addition to refugees and immigrants, Russian discourse specifically assigns roles to various state actors, ranging from the European Union and its member states to the United States. This study explores the portrayal of diverse political and institutional actors during the European migration crisis.

I. THEORY: DISCOURSE AND METAPHOR

I.A. METAPHOR AS A GATEWAY TO DISCOURSE

Discourse is a central concept in this study. It is often defined as the language in use or language in context (see Fairclough, 1995; Gee, 2011). According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), language serves as a tool for creating meaning, and this meaning is embedded in systematic patterns of choice. The human mind constructs meaning out of the discourse using language alongside extensive background knowledge (Chilton, 2004: 61). Therefore, the discourse analysis as employed in this research aims to unveil subtle meanings, identify recurring patterns, and systematize the narratives.

The main proposition of the discourse approach states that we perceive the world through the lens of language and can only make sense of it discursively. While physical reality exists objectively, its significance manifests itself exclusively within the framework of discourse. Jørgensen and Phillips (2002: 9) illustrate that phenomena like rising water levels and subsequent flooding may occur independently of human thoughts and words; these events are material facts. However, when people interpret such events, they become entwined with discourse. The portrayal of the event, its ramifications, and attributions of responsibility vary depending on the discourse employed. For instance, the environmental discourse may interpret this event as a consequence of the greenhouse effect. Accusations of government mismanagement may be heard in the political discourse of opposition parties. From a religious point of view, this event can be seen as a manifestation of divine will, where God's wrath is believed to be a response to human sinfulness. Moreover, these discourses can

be further subdivided; for example, religious discourse can be Christian or Muslim, each offering different interpretations. In general, it is a process in which people continuously construct and reconstruct reality through discourse.

Theorists of discourse studies expand the scope of the concept of “discourse” beyond the limits of ordinary oral and written speech, covering all forms of semiotic imagery and applying it in various genres. At the same time, they emphasize the impact of mass media and communication technologies on shaping the perception of reality. As Fairclough suggests (1995: 52), the media serve as a kind of barometer of socio-cultural changes. In this sense, as Van Dijk (1995) notes, the so-called “freedom of the press”, which presupposes the ability of the press to shape the agenda, should also be understood as “the power of the press”.

One of the important characteristics of mass media is their ability to generate information related to various aspects of life. For many people, the media serve as the main source of knowledge about social groups, nations, and world events (Harris & Sanborn, 2014). The influence of the media should be considered in relation to their capability to shape perceptions and public opinion, especially within the framework of migration-related discourse.

Media representation of immigrants, refugees and the countries involved in their migration, that is, the places of origin and points of destination, is frequently achieved through various discursive mechanisms. Conceptual metaphors are one of the methods of interpreting these mechanisms. According to cognitive scientists, metaphors play an important role in shaping social perception. The theory of conceptual metaphor included in this study of discourse postulates that people make sense of the world through metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980).

A conceptual metaphor is thought to consist of two distinct cognitive domains: a source domain and a target domain. Typically, the target domain, being abstract and less tangible, is understood primarily through the concrete and easily perceived source domain (Kövecses, 2010). The source domain is the base system through which meaning is conveyed to the target (Gentner, 1982). In other words, a metaphor involves a topic, which represents the object or phenomenon being described, and a vehicle, another object or phenomenon used to understand the topic. For example, the concept of “argument” is often metaphorically understood in the context of “war.” One can defend one’s position, employ strategies, make comments that hit the mark, and ultimately win the argument. In essence, through the process of conceptual mapping, terminology associated with “war,” a physical form of conflict, saturates the understanding of “argument”, which is a primarily verbal conflict. Traditionally, the formula of conceptual metaphors is denoted by small capital letters, for example, ARGUMENT IS WAR.

As the discourse producer strives to manipulate opinions, sway judgments, and assert dominance, metaphor emerges as a potent ideological instrument (see Charteris-Black, 2004). Thanks to access to the media tools, politicians and other influential groups have the ability to construct a specific worldview in people and a certain vision of the events that takes precedence over alternative perspectives.

The discourse on migration is often intertwined with various themes such as global terrorism and military incursions. Portrayals of migrants as extremists and hostile troops are widespread in news coverage, which contribute to a broader narrative that depicts the host countries as fighting against them. Within this framework, the Russian discourse poses several questions about the ability of European countries to cope with the crisis. Are they (Europeans) sufficiently resilient to withstand the force of immigration? Are they “smart” enough to recognize the threat? Can Europe maintain its unity and was there ever a “real” union, or is the European Union on the verge of disintegration, echoing a centuries-long narrative about the decline of Europe? Who is to blame for this decline? The Russian discourse also tries to offer ready-made answers to these questions.

I.B. APPLICATIONS OF METAPHORS IN MIGRATION DISCOURSE

Many studies have employed conceptual metaphor theory in discourse research. Several key works have applied it to migration discourse, showing how metaphors shape public images of immigrants and, in particular, national-level framings.

Notably, Santa Ana (2002) demonstrated how metaphors influence public perception of Latinos in the U.S. and serve to legitimize anti-immigrant discourse. Drawing on articles from the Los Angeles Times, he identified and categorized metaphors such as IMMIGRATION IS A FLOOD, AN INVASION, A DISEASE, and IMMIGRANTS ARE ANIMALS and PARASITES. Particularly relevant for this study are the national-level metaphors such as NATION AS BODY and NATION AS HOME, which offer insight into how territorial boundaries are imagined in discourse.

O’Brien (2003) explored early 20th-century U.S. immigration debates, identifying metaphors drawn from ORGANISMS, OBJECTS, NATURAL DISASTERS, WAR, and ANIMALS. He argued these generate subconscious fears. To illustrate, picturing immigrants as diseased organisms evokes threats to national hygiene and public health.

Charteris-Black (2006) analyzed the 2005 British election campaign, showing how metaphors legitimized right-wing immigration agendas. He identified two dominant types: natural disaster metaphors (such as flood) and container

metaphors (pressure inside or outside a vessel). In relation to the current study, these metaphors are especially interesting for how they frame the nation as a space under threat, where securing borders is equated with controlling social change.

More recent works, such as those by Catalano & Musolff (2019) and Montagut & Moragas-Fernández (2020), likewise emphasize the crucial role of metaphor in shaping how migration is represented. Building on these and other relevant studies, as well as the established corpus of metaphors discussed below, this research draws upon and categorizes metaphorical patterns that are central to the framing of immigration discourse.

II. METHODOLOGY

II.A. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This research aims to examine the perspective of the Russian government and its affiliated voices, commonly referred to as the “official discourse.” In this context, social representation is approached as a fundamentally political matter, closely tied to broader international dynamics. The central objective of the analysis is to unveil the ideological foundations embedded within Russian discourse. To achieve this, the study adopts critical discourse analysis (CDA) as its primary methodological framework, given its effectiveness in uncovering the power structures and ideological forces that shape political narratives.

The current study adopts a sociocognitive approach to discourse analysis. Van Dijk (2014) argues that discourse analysis must account for its cognitive dimensions. According to Van Dijk, social actors rely on a collective framework of perception, known as social representations, which mediate between the social system and the individual cognitive system. By emphasizing cognition, this approach is widely employed in the analysis of social representations in media discourse. This model of analysis particularly emphasizes the socio-psychological dimension of critical discourse analysis (Meyer, 2001).

Building on this cognitive turn, scholars have increasingly looked to cognitive linguistics for more fine-grained tools to explore meaning-making in discourse. Hart (2010, 2011) notes that cognitive linguistics, which focuses on the relationship between language structures and cognition, had not been a primary framework for discourse analysis until recent years, but has since gained increasing influence. Both the sociocognitive approach and cognitive linguistics share a “listener oriented” and “pattern oriented” perspective. Within the framework of cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor theory has proven to be an excellent tool for discourse analysis, as conceptual metaphors are believed

to be crucial for shaping human understanding of reality. Thus, this article, approaches discourse analysis through the lens of metaphor

Conceptual metaphors should not be confused with metaphorical expressions. A metaphorical expression is a linguistic unit, such as a word, phrase, or sentence, that represents the surface realization of an underlying conceptual metaphor (Lakoff, 1993). In contrast, conceptual metaphors are deeply embedded in human cognition and shape how we perceive and make sense of the world. Based on a well-established corpus of conceptual metaphors, such as Master Metaphor List, common target domains include LIFE, LOVE, THEORIES, IDEAS, ARGUMENTS, SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS, NATION-STATES and emotions such as ANGER. These are typically understood through source domains like TRAVEL, WAR, BUILDINGS, FOOD, ANIMALS, and PLANTS.

However, the discursive approach to metaphor allows metaphors to originate in discourse, meaning that dominant discourse can embed the metaphor in the conceptual framework. Scholars like Charteris-Black (2004) and Musolff (2004, 2016) have expanded the use of conceptual metaphors to political discourse. Consequently, metaphors in immigration discourse should be viewed as driven by the rhetorical intentions of the discourse producer.

II.B. DATA COLLECTION AND SELECTION

Almost all types of press were considered in the selection process, with the exception of regional outlets. The Russian media classifiers identified the 100 largest federal-level mass media outlets, divided into five categories based on their discursive orientation³. These were the key media outlets operating during the crisis period. The first two categories represent media with an anti-Russian stance, one consisting of foreign outlets publishing in Russian, and the other made up of domestic opposition media. The third includes outlets focused on specific topics such as culture and business. The final two categories are classified as government and pro-government (or “patriotic”) media. Accordingly, the selection in this study focused on these latter two categories, as outlined in the columns below (see Table 1), to capture the essence of official discourse.

In the next step, media sources with the least audience coverage and impact were eliminated. As outlined in Table 2 below, the final selection phase focused

³ In 2019, the Federal News Agency (FAN) published a classification of one hundred Russian media outlets by category: foreign, local anti-Russian, socio-cultural, state, and patriotic. FAN has been widely described as the flagship outlet associated with the late Yevgeny Prigozhin. Shortly after his failed mutiny in the summer of 2023, Prigozhin dissolved his media holding.

on the most popular media sources at the time, based on data from the Russian Media Monitoring and Analysis Service “Medialogia”. An additional criterion was that the sources should have a large volume of articles on the topic to avoid episodic cases that might not provide an accurate representation or complete narrative. Although the immigration crisis was not the primary focus of most Russian media, two media outlets, one state-owned and the other state-affiliated (pro-government), covered the topic in detail.

Table 1. State and Patriotic Media in Russia

State-owned	Pro-government
<i>Российская газета</i>	<i>Звезда</i>
<i>Парламентск. газета</i>	<i>Газета.ру</i>
<i>Красная звезда</i>	<i>Царьград</i>
<i>ТАСС</i>	<i>Известия</i>
<i>РИА Новости</i>	<i>ФАН</i>
<i>«Интерфакс»</i>	<i>Национальный курс</i>
<i>Russia Today</i>	<i>Политическая Россия</i>
<i>Россия-1</i>	<i>Комсомольская правда</i>
<i>Россия-24</i>	<i>Инфореактор</i>
<i>Первый канал</i>	<i>Sputnik International</i>
<i>Маяк</i>	<i>НТВ</i>
<i>Вести FM</i>	<i>РенТВ</i>
<i>ТВ центр</i>	<i>Life.ru</i>
<i>360</i>	<i>Ньюинформ</i>
	<i>Труд</i>
	<i>Народные новости</i>
	<i>Новостной фронт</i>
	<i>Слово и Дело</i>
	<i>Госновости</i>
	<i>Экономика сегодня</i>
	<i>Пятый канал</i>
	<i>Политика сегодня</i>
	<i>Новые известия</i>
	<i>Политэксперт</i>
	<i>АиФ</i>

The first is the website Vesti.ru. It is the official site of the government channel Russia 24 (*Россия 24*), formerly Vesti. It is part of the All-Russian State

Television and Radio Broadcasting Corporation (*ВГТРК*). “Russia 1” (*Россия 1*) and “Vesti.FM” from the table above are part of the same organization. In this respect, Vesti.ru is also the website of the Radio broadcast Vesti.FM and main news program “Vesti” on Russia 1. So, all data was pulled from Vesti.ru (hereinafter — VR).

The tabloid daily newspaper *Комсомольская правда* (*Komsomolskaya Pravda*) is another source. It was founded in 1925 as the official journal of the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League (*Komsomol*), the Soviet Union’s political youth organization. Table 2 shows that *Komsomolskaya Pravda* (hereafter referred to as *КП*) is the only media outlet that covers two columns: the top ten print newspapers and the top ten news sites. Both selected media sources cover a wide range of news genres and reach a broad audience.

Table 2. The Most Popular Media Outlets in Russia as of 2020⁴

Printed Newspapers	TV Channels	News Websites
1. <i>Известия</i>	1. <i>Первый канал</i>	1. <i>Rbc.ru</i>
2. <i>Коммерсантъ</i>	2. <i>Россия 24</i>	2. <i>Russian.rt.com</i>
3. <i>Ведомости</i>	3. <i>РЕН ТВ</i>	3. <i>Gazeta.ru</i>
4. <i>Российская газета</i>	4. <i>Россия 1</i>	4. <i>360tv.ru</i>
5. <i>Комсомольская правда</i>	5. <i>НТВ</i>	5. <i>Lenta.ru</i>
6. <i>Московский комсомолец</i>	6. <i>Телеканал 360</i>	6. <i>Fontanka.ru</i>
7. <i>Парламентская газета</i>	7. <i>Телеканал Звезда</i>	7. <i>Meduza.io</i>
8. <i>Новая газета</i>	8. <i>ТВ Центр</i>	8. <i>Кр.ru</i>
9. <i>Аргументы и факты</i>	9. <i>5 канал</i>	9. <i>News.ru</i>
10. <i>Независимая газета</i>	10. <i>Телеканал Дождь</i>	10. <i>Starhit.ru</i>

This study covers news articles published between September 1 and September 15. Different searches were carried out using Google Trends, such as: *Европейский Миграционный Кризис* (*European Migrant Crisis*), *Миграционный Кризис* (*Migration Crisis*) and *Беженцы* (*Refugees*). Based on the results, the topic was trending from mid-2015 to early 2016. The peak occurred in early-mid September 2015. After September 13, the curve on the

⁴ The latest 2025 version of the table shows very little change in the positioning of the selected media.

chart went down rapidly, which is also evidenced by a sharp decrease in the number of articles on the topic.

Finally, empirical data were collected to compile the corpus. The KP website has labeled all the news about the refugee crisis as *Нашествие Мигрантов в Европу* (Migrant invasion of Europe). Articles from VR were published under the tag *Нелегалы в Европе* (Illegals in Europe). Articles that were labeled but did not cover the topic were removed. For VR, an additional step was taken: articles not accompanied by a video reportage on channels “Russia 24” and “Russia 1” were excluded. Therefore, selected VR articles can be considered as texts reflecting both television and written news reports. The corpus includes various types of materials, such as news, opinion pieces, interviews, and other journalistic genres. In total, 54 articles were collected and numerated: 22 from KP and 32 from VR, all in Russian.

Table 3. Mini-corpus

Media	Number of Articles	Words
KP	22	20767
VR	32	15844
Total	54	36611

III. METAPHOR IDENTIFICATION AND INTERPRETATION

Methodological concerns raised by Musolff (2004) guide the next stage of analysis, especially two key questions: (1) how to locate metaphors, and (2) what qualifies as a metaphor. While linguistic features like words are accessible through surface-level analysis, conceptual metaphors are harder to detect, as they operate at a deeper cognitive level. This highlights the shift from content analysis to meaning-driven discourse analysis.

Since metaphor use is not always consistent with accurate metaphor recognition, defining what counts as metaphor is not straightforward. Steen (1999) proposes a three-level model for metaphor analysis: linguistic, conceptual, and communicative. Each corresponds to what is said, implied, and conveyed. This model aligns with Charteris-Black’s (2004) three-step procedure within the critical metaphor analysis approach: metaphor identification, interpretation, and explanation. These stages, in turn, mirror Fairclough’s (1995) three-part model in critical discourse analysis: description, interpretation, and explanation. Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive approach can also

fundamentally be understood as a combination of linguistic, cognitive, and social dimensions.

While conceptual metaphor theory provides a theoretical base, the Pragglejaz Group (2007) addressed the procedural gap by proposing a more systematic method for identifying metaphorically used words in discourse. The process involves: (1) reading the text to gain an overall understanding, (2) identifying lexical units. This study employs core tools of corpus linguistics, particularly KWIC (Key Word in Context) or concordance, which enables rapid searches, pattern detection, and the generation of second-order data (Stubbs, 2001). Such tools also help identify collocations and organize them into semantic fields.

Next step (3) determines each word's contextual and basic meanings. For clarity in distinguishing between these meanings, this research utilizes authoritative Russian dictionaries, primarily the electronic edition of the Dictionary of the Russian Language edited by Evgenyeva. Lastly, (4) labeling a word as metaphorical if a contrast between meanings is observed.

IV. ANALYSIS

IV.A. THE EUROPEAN JUNGLE

This section explores a central theme in the metaphorical representation of the European migration crisis — namely, the use of the “jungle” metaphor in Russian media, which functions to symbolize and mythologize migration as inherently chaotic and threatening to order.

Since the 2000s, the Calais suburban area in France has been colloquially referred to as the “jungle”. The nickname gained prominence during the 2015 crisis, and Russian media discourse adopted this well-known imagery. While the word “jungle” carries a similar meaning across languages, there are nuanced differences in connotation. The following cases refer to a “jungle” in Europe.

1) *Во французских “Джунглях” беженцы строят деревянные хижины.* (VR:04)

In the French “Jungle” refugees are building wooden huts.

2) *Пригород французского Кале. Это место называется “Джунгли” — лагерь для беженцев из стран Ближнего Востока и Африки, которые стремятся сюда, чтобы попасть в Великобританию.* (VR:04)

Suburb of French Calais. This place is called “The Jungle” - a camp for

refugees from the Middle East and Africa, who aspire here to then get to the UK.

By comparison, we can consider the alternative word “forest” (*лес*), which has a similar meaning to “jungle”. Fixed collocations in the Russian language, such as “dense forest” (*дремучий лес*) or “impassable forest” (*непроходимый лес*) underline thickness, darkness and obscurity. Associations for “forest” like conifers (*хвойный*) and pines (*сосновый*) indicate the type of trees and the geographical characteristics of the terrain. These imageries are empirically familiar to the imagination of the Russian people. The connotations for “jungle”, on the other hand, are impassable (*непроходимый*), tropical (*тропический*), Amazon (*Амазонка*), savannah (*саванна*), ivy (*лиана*), Vietnam (*Вьетнам*), monkey (*обезьяна*). It is drawn mainly in the tropics, subequatorials and equatorial zones of the world. Etymologically, the word derives from the Sanskrit “*jangala*” and was referred to “desert”. Afterwards, the word made its way to English through Hindi (Ayto, 2005). Subsequently, it was adopted by the Russian language.

The traits associated with the “forest” bear cultural and spatial symbols that resonate within Russian narratives. The forest is perceived as the “other”: different and terrifying. Symbolically, the forest and the jungle have a common characteristic of “otherness”. However, the jungle does not have this mystical allure that the forest holds in the Russian psyche. The jungle is more alien, but less mystique. It is more alien due to the lack of physical contact, but not so mystical, due to its absence from the folk narrative.

In other words, the forest is steeped in folklore, often portrayed as a place of mystery and danger, yet with a deeper cultural resonance as the quintessential “other” compared to our “home”. The jungle, on the other hand, is so foreign that it contrasts with our home and “our” forest. We often hear Russians talk about “their” rivers, lakes and forests. Therefore, the “forest” is more of an intranational phenomenon, unlike “jungle”, which is alien primarily due to its geographical distance and the lack of the mythical or mystical connotations that the forest carries in Russian cultural narratives. In many old Russian fairy tales, the forest serves as a central setting where numerous actions unfold. This narrative backdrop shares common ground with European stories, such as those collected by the Brothers Grimm, reflecting a broader cultural imagination.

In contrast, the image of the jungle entered Russian cultural consciousness through stories like Mowgli and Tarzan, which introduced a more exotic and distant portrayal compared to the familiar forest settings of Russian tales. These images contributed to the perception of the jungle as an alien place, but its mythical ingredient for Russians is almost elusive.

When talking about the Calais Jungle refugee camp, its meaning conveys certain connotations evoked by the lexeme “jungle”. The jungle particularly refers to a state of disorder and wildness. The common idiom “the law of the jungle” (*закон джунглей*) is often used figuratively to denote lawlessness and violence. In both Russian and English, it signifies “survival of the fittest”, “kill or be killed”, and “every man for himself”. In other words, “the law of the jungle” echoes themes of natural order and survival instinct, highlighting the harsh realities of life in untamed environments and the situations where competition, aggression, and self-preservation dominate.

The expression originated from Rudyard Kipling’s “The Jungle Book”. But in the book, it does not necessarily refer to an unprincipled battle. Instead, it rather represents a moral code followed by the jungle wolves. However, the reader’s and general public perception of this law also includes the behaviors of other animals, such as the jackal and Shere Khan, along with the pervasive dangers of the jungle environment.

The concept behind the “jungle law” can be traced back to Hobbes’ notion of the “state of nature”, characterized by the principle *homo homini lupus est*, meaning “man is a wolf to man” — reflecting a condition of conflict and competition until a social contract and political order are established. This pre-social state essentially symbolizes *bellum omnium contra omnes*, that is “the war of all against all”, often depicted metaphorically with themes of violence and chaos.

It is important to note that Kipling’s version of this principle, as applied in the literary discourse of colonialism, suggests that the state of nature is a condition devoid of human governance and the civilizing impact of society. This portrayal emphasizes the untamed and wild aspects of the jungle, where natural laws prevail and the intervention of civilization is yet to come (Nelson, 2017; see also Ibrahim & Howarth, 2015).

3) *Какая уж тут дружба, если между собой европейцы договориться не могут. Каждый сам за себя. (VR:04)*

What kind of friendship is this if the Europeans cannot agree among themselves. Everyone is for himself.

According to Russian discourse, this principle of “the law of the jungle” continues to dominate in other parts of the world (the so-called Global South). A similar thought can be found in another work by Kipling, “The White Man’s Burden”. In a certain sense, this idea has become symbolic of the mission of colonial powers and the justification and legitimization of their colonial policies. Thus, with regard to the Russian discourse on the crisis in Europe, Russia also assumes a missionary role of salvaging civilization. Within Russian discourse, Europe is portrayed as having become completely blinded, engaging

in a politics of tolerance where it fails to distinguish between civilized (self) and barbarian (the other). “The burden of civilization” has transformed into an “economic burden”, as in examples below. “Burdened societies” (societies burdened with unfavorable conditions and insufficiently well-ordered; see Rawls, 1999) have shifted their “burdens” onto well-ordered societies in the Europe. Within the corpus, 17 cases (3.5%) were identified where immigrants or refugees were metaphorically represented as burdens.

4) *По мнению Орбана, нынешнее нашествие мигрантов опасно не только тем, что расходы на их содержание лягут тяжелым бременем на страны Европы.* (КР:07)

According to Orban, the current invasion of migrants is dangerous not only because the cost of their maintenance will be a heavy burden on European countries.

5) *Так что, помимо дополнительного финансового бремени из-за беженцев, [...].* (КР:14)

So, besides the additional financial burden due to refugees, [...].

6) *[...] какую ответственность я взял на себя, [...].* (VR:11)
[...] what responsibility I have taken upon myself, [...].

7) *Битте, садитесь на нашу шею, не стесняйтесь!* (КР:05)
Please, sit on our neck, don't be shy!

In Russian discourse, the narrative suggests that refugees from the Middle East and Africa seek to reach Europe. Upon their arrival, they are believed to transform it into a chaotic environment akin to a jungle. The camp itself was named “Jungle” due to its inhabitants, symbolizing the perceived impact of their presence. The implication is that wherever these refugees settle, the environment becomes subject to disorder and lawlessness, reflecting the metaphorical “law of the jungle”.

The law of the jungle is viewed as a state of chaos and disorder in which the fittest survive. The European continent is no longer seen as a secure and well-regulated land. Europe imbibes the qualities of metaphors about the animal kingdom or the barbaric habitat. The perceived “civilizing” influence of liberalism and multiculturalism (as discussed in later sections) is deemed ineffective in restoring order, as it is seen as contributing to the problem itself. When Europe welcomes “aliens” it is believed that established societal norms and agreements are undermined, leading to a state of collapse.

8) *Узнать Европу здесь и в самом деле трудно. Беженцы живут так, как привыкли у себя на родине. Африканцы строят хижины из ветвей деревьев, потому что жить в палатках им неудобно.* (VR:04)
It is really difficult to recognize Europe here. Refugees live the way they

are accustomed to in their homeland. Africans build huts out of tree branches because they find it inconvenient to live in tents.

IV.B. SICK MAN OF EUROPE

In addition to the image of chaos, another recurring frame concerns the rhetoric of “sick Europe”. Across the corpus, Russian discourse characterizes the current state of Europe as one of weakness, decay, old age, blindness, and folly.

Europe is also often shown as a “woman” or, more specifically, an “old woman” who is incapable of defending herself. Metaphors such as EUROPE IS [AN] OLD [WOMAN] and EUROPE IS A SICK PERSON, as illustrated below, align with the broader narrative of Europe’s decline and powerlessness. Furthermore, as an “old woman” she cannot give birth. This also entails the demographic situation in Europe, reinforcing the theme of a continent in a state of decline and nearing death.

9) *Ваш прогноз судьбы старушки Европы, Андрей Ильич.* (KP:02)
Your prediction of the fate of old [lady, granny] Europe, Andrey Ilyich.

10) *“Не будем забывать, что мы стареющий континент в демографическом плане, нам нужны будут таланты, прибывающие с разных концов света”, — заметил глава Еврокомиссии.* (VR:31)
“Let’s not forget that we are an aging continent in terms of demographics, we will need talents coming from different parts of the world,” said the head of the European Commission.

The image of Europe contrasts sharply with that of the people immigrating to the continent. Representing IMMIGRANTS AS YOUTH and IMMIGRANTS AS HEALTHY MEN underlines that unlike the aging Europe, immigrants are full of life and energy. In the corpus, immigrants were introduced as men 26 times. On eight occasions, it was clearly indicated that they were young, robust and of military age.

11) *[...] сильные молодые мигранты [...].* (KP:17)
[...] strong young migrants [...].

12) *[...] в Европу бегут здоровые мужчины призывного возраста.* (KP:08)
[...] healthy men of military age are fleeing to Europe.

13) *[...] преобладают молодые и здоровые мужики.* (VR:11)
[...] young and healthy men predominate.

14) *95 процентов беженцев молодые парни.* (KP:03)
95 percent of refugees are young men

15) *на днях 34-летний “беженец из Африки” зарезал 48-летнюю жительницу города Лезум.* (KP:03)

the other day, a 34-year-old “refugee from Africa” stabbed to death a 48-year-old female resident of the city of Lezum

16) *- мужчины моложе 35 лет.* (KP:02)

- men under 35 years old

In this context, metaphorical models of CRIME/VIOLENCE and WAR are integral to the narrative. The former appears 63 times throughout the corpus, comprising 12.9% of all metaphors about refugees, while the latter appears 27 times, or 5.5%. Hence metaphors REFUGEES ARE CRIMINALS and REFUGEES ARE INVADERS proved particularly instrumental, as they provided a necessary representation of chaos, as discussed above. It also highlights the distribution of power, portraying Europeans as the targets of violence and the subjugated party.

17) *В Бичке уже сутки продолжается конфликт мигрантов с полицией. Плакаты. Слезы. Эмоции.* (VR:06)

In Bicske, a conflict between migrants and the police has been going on for 24 hours. Posters. Tears. Emotions.

18) *Ведь у мигранта может при себе оказаться нож [...].* (KP:14)

After all, a migrant may have a knife [...].

19) *В телефонах многих беженцев сцены насилия, массовых казней.* (KP:10)

The phones of many refugees contain scenes of violence, mass executions.

20) *Колонны беженцев на дорогах Европы.* (VR:18)

Columns of refugees on the roads of Europe.

21) *Этническое нашествие происходит, что же еще.* (KP:08)

There’s an ethnic invasion going on, what else.

22) *“Беженцев нет. Это вторжение! Они приезжают сюда с криками: “Аллаху акбар! Они хотят взять над нами верх”, — уверен епископ.* (VR:11)

“There are no refugees. This is an invasion! They come here shouting:

“Allahu Akbar! They want to take over us,” according to the bishop.

Some statements can be interpreted by applying the push-pull factors model in migration theory (Lee, 1966; Van Hear, Bakewell, & Long, 2017). Rhetorically, the “pull” factor suggests that people are not fleeing persecution but are seeking well-being and material opportunities. In other words, it is not violence that drives them from their country but the allure of Europe. In this sense, refugees can be specifically introduced as immigrants. The sample (23) below uses the

pull factor common in anti-immigration discourse by personifying “Old Europe” as “attractive” (like a woman) to young immigrants. This implies that it is not life-threatening conditions driving these people from their countries of origin but rather the economic conditions in Europe that “attract” them (see Hart, 2011). This perspective also connects to the metaphor REFUGEES ARE FREELOADERS, which is used 47 times, representing 9.7% of all metaphors about refugees.

23) [...] *привлекательная для мигрантов Старая Европа* [...].
(VR:13)

[...] an attractive Old Europe for migrants [...].

24) *Швеция — вторая по миграционной привлекательности страна ЕС.* (VR:18)

Sweden is the second most attractive migration country in the EU.

25) *Венгрия, желанный Евросоюз.* (VR:01)

Hungary, the desired European Union.

26) *У мигрантов одна мечта — Германия.* (VR:22)

Migrants have one dream - Germany.

27) *Молочные реки и кисельные берега – это в Европе не особенность климата. Это результат работающих там людей.*

(KP:08)

Milk rivers and jelly banks are not a feature of the climate in Europe. This is the result of the people working there.

28) [...] *стремятся туда, где сытно, тепло, большие пособия.*

(KP:02)

[...] tend to go where it is nourishing, warm, and where there are great benefits [allowance].

Russian discourse can also be understood through the “passionary” theory of ethnogenesis developed by the Russian ethnologist Lev Gumilyov. (2001). Highly speculative yet influential among Russian patriots and media narratives, the theory suggests that certain ethnic groups experience periods of excess “bioenergy.” During these times, these groups are filled with impulses that enable them to reverse historical events and change the societal status quo. Examples include the Mongol conquests, the advance of the Seljuk Turks, and the early spread of Islam. These events serve as a backdrop to the theme of the refugee crisis in the social imagination of many Russians, as this article shows.

Contrary to this image, Russian discourse portrays modern Europeans as passive and powerless, devoid of this energy. For instance, sample (30) states that Europe has no will. Consequently, as indicated in (32), the enemy enters

European cities without a battle. This notion of entering cities without any resistance is akin to entering a house with open doors. “Open doors” symbolizes multicultural policy, suggesting that the enemy army can easily pass through open and unprotected borders without combat.

29) *Как и во времена конкистадоров, большинство мигрантов с Ближнего Востока бежущих в Западную Европу — циничные и пассионарные приспособленцы.* (КР:21)

As in the time of the conquistadors, most of the migrants from the Middle East fleeing to Western Europe are cynical and passionarie opportunists.

30) *[...] безволие и абсолютная аморфность — вот что можно сейчас говорить о Европе.* (КР:13)

[...] lack of will and absolute amorphousness - that's what you can now say about Europe.

31) *[...] все вместе критикуют [...] Еврокомиссию — за пассивность.* (VR:11)

[...] all together they criticize [...] the European Commission for its passivity.

32) *В города входит вражеская армия. Входит без боя.* (КР:08)

The enemy army enters the cities. Enters without a fight.

In Russian discourse, refugees are often portrayed metaphorically as a force capable of causing destruction, akin to tearing down walls or breaching the body's defenses like a disease. This is exemplified by metaphors such as “flowing waters” (33), “natural disaster”, which also often involves large masses of water (34), “armed forces” (35), and “infection” (36). These metaphors underscore the perception of refugees as a powerful and potentially disruptive force.

33) *Власти ЕС ищут выход из кризиса и пытаются уйти от накрывающей Европу волны беженцев.* (КР:09)

EU officials are looking for a way out of the crisis and are trying to escape the wave of refugees covering Europe.

34) *Но на Европу идет орда, цунами!* (КР:17)

But a horde is coming to Europe, a tsunami!

35) *По поводу драматического массового нашествия беженцев на Европу страсти кипят нешуточные.* (КР:22)

The mass invasion of refugees in Europe arouses strong emotions.

36) *Германия приостановила прием беженцев из-за эпидемии кори и ветряной оспы, которая возникла сначала в лагерях, а потом*

перекинулась на население городов. (КР:03)

Germany suspended the admission of refugees because of the measles and pox epidemic that started in the camps and then spread to the urban population.

There are also instances where the specific nature of the unstoppable force attributed to refugees is ambiguous, leading to the use of a more general metaphor REFUGEES IS A FORCE. It is apparent from the examples provided below that refugees and immigrants exhibit a dynamic nature. In all these cases, Europe is depicted as the party that suffers and bears the brunt of the impact.

37) Великобритания профинансировала строительство дополнительных ограждений с колючей проволокой. Но мигрантов это не останавливает. (VR:04)

The UK has funded the construction of additional barbed wire fences. But this does not stop immigrants.

38) [...] именно это и стало поводом мигрантам стремиться в ЕС [...]. (КР:16).

[...] this was the reason for migrants to aspire to the EU [...]

39) В этом году чуть ли не все беженцы рвутся в Германию, [...]. (КР:22).

This year, almost all refugees are rushing to Germany, [...].

40) Потому-то эти люди не остаются в Венгрии, Румынии, Греции, Сербии, а рвутся напролом через полицейские кордоны в богатые Германию, Австрию, Швецию, Англию. (КР:02)

That is why these people do not stay in Hungary, Romania, Greece, Serbia, but break through the police cordons to wealthy Germany, Austria, Sweden, England.

While immigrants are perceived as a dynamic force, Europe is characterized as prone to complete stagnation (as seen in 41, 42, and 43). This contrast emphasizes a narrative that portrays immigrants as agents of change or destruction and Europe as stagnant and unresponsive to the challenges posed by immigration.

41) В Венгрии, где было парализовано движение поездов [...]. (КР:06)
In Hungary, where train traffic was paralyzed [...].

42) Зайти в подземный переход нельзя — все перекрыто. (VR:25)
You can't enter the underground passage - everything is blocked.

43) В Дании, например, полиция распорядилась временно остановить железнодорожное сообщение с Германией. (VR:10)

In Denmark, for example, the police ordered a temporary halt to rail links to Germany.

IV.C. THE GREAT SUBSTITUTION

The substitution narrative, often referred to by conspiracists in anti-immigration discourse as the “Great Replacement” theory, suggests that native populations will gradually become a minority due to ongoing immigration over time. This shift is influenced by demographic factors such as a high proportion of seniors, delayed marriages, and smaller family sizes among Europeans. Meanwhile, multicultural policies attract refugees who are typically younger, fertile, and come from larger families. Consequently, as outlined earlier in this study, the image of healthy refugee youth contrasts sharply with elderly and sick Europeans. This narrative of “replacement” portrays newcomers as “aliens” who are displacing native Europeans and acquiring their land and property.

44) *За прошедшие выходные Мюнхен принял почти 30.000 беженцев. [...] 24.000 граждан Германии живут на улицах. (KP:05)*
Over the past weekend, Munich received almost 30,000 refugees. [...] 24,000 German citizens live on the streets.

45) *Квартиросъемщики г. Оснабрюка должны освободить свои квартиры для беженцев. (KP:04).*
Osnabrück tenants must vacate their apartments for refugees.

46) *Мэрия города намерена размещать беженцев в квартирах горожан. (KP:03)*
City Hall intends to accommodate the refugees in the apartments of the townsfolk.

47) *[...] требуют освободить квартиру для семьи африканцев, [...] (KP:03)*
[...] they demand to vacate an apartment for an African family [...]

Some news reports forecast a future “Caliphate of Munich” or “Sultanate of Marseille” appearing on Europe’s map. In other words, the Russian media depicts a future Europe devoid of native Europeans. While geographic names may persist for now, the indigenous European population is undergoing replacement. To illustrate how this process might be reflected in place names over time, consider the United States: state names like Massachusetts and Tennessee reflect the Native American tribes that once inhabited these regions, suggesting a potential evolution in Europe’s nomenclature as well

Sample (48) provides a historical parallel, noting that France was previously known as Gaul. Additionally, (49) discusses direct colonization narratives

within Europe. Other examples underscore how migrants capitalize on Europe's physical and spatial capacities. These portrayals collectively highlight a key narrative in Russian discourse: that Europe is undergoing a profound transformation — demographically, culturally, and symbolically. This metamorphosis is often framed as a loss of identity and sovereignty, echoing broader narratives of civilizational decline.

48) *Но страна ныне называется Франция, а не Галлия.* (КР:02)
But the country is now called France, not Gaul.

49) *Она получила новых колонизаторов, совершенно не понимая, что освоение новых земель за счет народов на них проживающих, [...].* (КР:21)

She received new colonizers, completely unaware that the development of new lands at the expense of the peoples living there, [...].

50) *Еще десять лет назад я писала о мигрантах, живущих во Франции, а Марсель уже тогда был на треть арабским.* (КР:15)
Ten years ago, I wrote about migrants living in France, and Marseille was already a third Arab.

51) *Румыния, например, предлагала им для заселения пустые деревни и землю. Беженцы отказались.* (КР:08)

Romania, for instance, has offered them empty villages and land for settlement. The refugees refused.

52) *[...] заполонившие континент мигранты.* (КР:03)
[...] migrants that have filled the continent.

53) *Через сколько времени банально кончится место?* (КР:17)
How long will it take for the place to run out?

54) *Есть же физический предел...* (КР:17)
There is a physical limit...

55) *Геополитика и геоэкономика, как и природа, не терпят пустоты.* (КР:02)
Geopolitics and geoeconomics, like nature, do not tolerate emptiness.

56) *[...] боевики ИГ уже чувствуют себя как дома.* (КР:10)
[...] ISIS militants already feel at home [in Europe].

57) *Их логика проста: раз позвали - так подайте все, что хотим, а сами подвиньтесь...* (КР:03)
Their [refugees] logic is simple: since they called us, then serve everything we want, and move over [get out of the way] ...

In terms of the metaphysics of presence, while Europeans are envisioned as characterized by their “absence” in the future Europe, asylum seekers and irregular immigrants are defined by their “presence.” This situation diverges from the typical framework of representative political systems. Citizens in such systems are empirically identifiable through various means such as residence IDs and social security numbers, ensuring their recognition and inclusion in civic processes like elections and military service (Miller and Fox, 2007: 24). In other words, each citizen is named and numbered. A citizen is recognized by their physical presence; they occupy space and are accounted for as necessary. In contrast, undocumented immigrants exist in a state of quasi-invisibility: their labor is unregistered, they evade taxes, and their whereabouts are often untraceable. In other words, from the standpoint of the state, their existence is denied. It is as though they do not even exist.

However, the discourse surrounding anti-immigrant sentiments emphasizes the conspicuous presence of immigrants. Through metaphors, symbols, allusions, and hyperboles, including exaggerated numbers, Russian media emphasize the presence of immigrants in Europe. This overwhelming presence is portrayed in various forms, including as floods, invaders, terrorists, and other dramatic portrayals. So, the immigrant is partly invisible in law and marginalized yet hyper-visible in discourse.

IV.D. WELCOME TO GERMANY

Over 1000 interviews were conducted in refugee camps in Greece and Türkiye in mid-2015. The data collected indicated that the primary destination for refugees (mostly from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and Syria) was Germany (Kuschminder and Koser, 2016), with Sweden being the second most preferred choice. Interestingly, some respondents simply answered “Europe” as their destination. So, Russian discourse highlights Germany as the main focal point and a center of gravity for refugees.

58) *Германия становится целью путешествия для тысяч нелегалов,*
[...]. (KP:04)

Germany becomes a travel destination for thousands of illegal immigrants
[...].

59) [...] *в Германию, которая стала Меккой для мигрантов.* (VR:26)
[...] to Germany, which has become a Mecca for migrants.

The primary themes in Russian discourse about Germany are its perceived lack of sovereignty and the self-destructive nature due to its multicultural policies. The main narrative revolves around Germany’s transformation, which is extrapolated to encompass all of Western Europe. In sample (60), quoting

Spiegel, Germany is depicted within the “machine” domain, implying that it should typically be cold and calculated, but this is no longer the case. This highlights Germany’s shift from rationality to emotionality. In the Weberian sense, a bureaucratic machine is typically characterized by its rationality, making this transformation particularly noteworthy.

60) *“Страна холодной рациональности, политику которой в прошлом определял расчет и чековая книжка, внезапно стала прислушиваться только к своему сердцу. Во главе стоит канцлер, известная в первую очередь своим безжалостным прагматизмом. Некоторым кажется, что Германия потеряла рассудок” (VR:11)*
“The country of cold rationality, whose politics in the past was determined by calculation and a checkbook, suddenly began to listen only to its heart. At the head is the Chancellor, best known for her ruthless pragmatism. Some people think that Germany has lost its mind.”

The metaphor RATIONALITY IS COLD reflects how Russian discourse frames its own politics. By using the metonymy PART FOR THE WHOLE, it also activates the stereotype that Germans are supposed to be cold and rational. This stereotype, which shapes cultural expectations, is a subject of public debate, or “Conversations,” as Gee terms it. Competing stereotypes are reinforced by relevant discourses. In this context, the liberal discourse of the “nurturing parent model,” as described by Lakoff, has come to dominate Germany today. Germany is now identified with the “heart” of Body Politics (see Musolff, 2004) rather than the “brain” (rational machine) associated with the “rational actor model.”

Furthermore, the politics of the “heart” symbolizes not only Germany but also the liberal ideology of the left (nurturing parent) in Western Europe. The heart metonymically represents altruistic feelings, love, and compassion (Niemeier, 2003). Today’s Germany, described in one article as a “magical tablecloth” welcoming immigrants, stands in contrast to the traditional stereotype of a rational and calculating nation. This shift is especially striking given Germany’s history of Nazi ideology and exclusion.

It is worth noting that Russian discourse does not suggest that all of Germany or the liberal West is solely governed by emotions. It also acknowledges that the “collective West”, as Russians often term it, occasionally enacts “heartless policies”— but such characterizations typically appear within other narrative contexts beyond the migration discourse.

61) *Меркель признает, что Германия изменится в результате. И уже меняется. (КР: 02)*
Merkel admits that Germany will change as a result [of accepting migrants]. And it’s already changing.

62) *“Правительство должно открыть сердца и умы, изменить отношение с тем, чтобы поддержать отчаявшихся людей, [...]”*
(VR:21)

“The government must open hearts and minds, change attitudes in order to support the desperate people [...].”

In sample (63), highlighted below, the focus is on Merkel, the most frequently mentioned figure in the corpus. Despite the presence of European Commission President Juncker, Russian discourse identifies German Chancellor Merkel as the de facto leader of the EU, suggesting that Brussels is effectively controlled by Berlin. However, it is also claimed that Berlin can no longer navigate events in a measured manner, as noted in (64), because it is under Washington’s influence (65). This implies that all of Europe is swayed by the United States (66). This reflects the famous gradatio: “He who controls Berlin controls Germany; he who controls Germany controls Europe; he who controls Europe controls the world” (Burke, 1969).

63) *Расшалившегося депутата в маске Ангелы Меркель, намекавшего на то, что Брюссель пляшет под дудку Берлина, [...]”*
(VR:11)

A spoiled deputy in the mask of Angela Merkel, who hinted that Brussels was dancing to the tune of Berlin, [...].

64) *У немцев за десятилетия вины и покаяния вытравлена способность самостоятельно оценивать происходящее с ними и сопротивляться... хоть евробюрократии, хоть мигрантам.* (KP:17)
For decades of guilt and repentance, the Germans have etched the ability to independently assess what is happening to them and resist ... either the European bureaucracy, or migrants.

65) *Зато перед американцами немцы преклоняются.* (KP:03)
But the Germans bow before the Americans.

66) *И Европа пляшет под ее дудку.* (KP:12)
And Europe is dancing to her [USA] tune.

IV.E. LIBYAN WALLS

The North African region is primarily regarded as a transit zone for migration. According to the UN World Migration Report (2018), Africa’s largest migration corridors to Europe included Libya, Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. The busiest route in 2016 was the Mediterranean passage from Libya to Italy. Libya holds a significant place in Russian discourse, as it exemplifies the failure of European policies toward this country.

The lack of governance in Libya led to the rise of ISIS (Pack et al., 2017). Libya became known as the entry point for ISIS into the EU (see Morajea and Faucon, 2017; Reals, 2015; Raghavan, 2019; Sherlock and Freeman, 2015). The Russian media weaponized the narrative of terrorists infiltrating Europe. More importantly, in the context of the refugee crisis, it is argued that this situation would not have occurred under Gaddafi's rule. Following Merkel, Orban, and Juncker, Gaddafi is one of the most frequently mentioned figures in the corpus. As shown in the illustrations below, Libya's role is depicted as highly instrumental, conceptualized essentially as a barrier.

67) *До того как в Ливии произошла война, эта страна сдерживала поток мигрантов.* (КР:15)

Before the outbreak of war in Libya, Libya held back the flow of migrants.

68) *Ведь это «государства –тампоны», «прокладки» между Европой и Африкой к югу от Сахары. Они спасают старушку Европу от наплыва мигрантов с черного континента [...] В Ливии тогда сидел Каддафи. Не тампон, а настоящий железный заслон, мышь не проскочит, не то, что орды беженцев!* (КР:02)

After all, these are “buffer [lit: tampon] states” [countries of North Africa], “gaskets” between Europe and Africa south of the Sahara. They are saving old [lady] Europe from an influx of migrants from the black continent [...] Gaddafi was then in Libya. Not a tampon, but a real iron barrier, a mouse will not slip through, not like the hordes of refugees!

69) *Каддафи: «Вы бомбите стену, не пропускавшую поток африканской миграции в Европу, стену, останавливавшую террористов „Аль-Каиды”. Этой стеной была Ливия. Вы разрушили ее. ...».* (КР:02)...

Gaddafi: “You bombard the wall that stopped African migration to Europe, the wall that stopped al-Qaeda terrorists. That wall was Libya. You destroyed it. ...”.

70) *Все, начиная с Каддафи, предупреждали: их смоеет волной беженцев, но они не слышали.* (КР:17)

Everyone, starting with Gaddafi, warned that they would be washed away by a wave of refugees, but they did not hear.

Libya is primarily portrayed emphasizing its function as a protective barrier (whether as a wall or coast guard) between Europe and refugees. When depicted as a wall, it emphasizes the separation between internal and external areas. This “wall” imagery activates the “inside” and “outside” parts of container image

schema⁵ and the associated conceptual framework (home, private space, “us” vs. “them”, family, etc). Refugees are painted as running waters attempting to “infiltrate” Europe. In this context, the wall resembles a dam; once breached, Europe is no longer seen as safe. This metaphor of migrants and refugees as floodwaters, using terms such as “wave,” “influx,” “flow,” and “flood,” is a common trope in anti-immigration discourse across many languages.

71) *Каждый день на Европу накатывает очередная волна мигрантов.* (VR:20)

Every day another wave of migrants comes into Europe.

72) *Власти ЕС ищут выход из кризиса и пытаются уйти от накрывающей Европу волны беженцев.* (KP:09)

The EU authorities are looking for a way out of the crisis and are trying to get away from the wave of refugees covering Europe.

73) *Все, кто следит за происходящим в Европе, предполагали, что рано или поздно плотину прорвет.* (KP:08)

All those who follow what is happening in Europe have assumed that sooner or later the dam would erupt.

74) *И все эти мигранты хлынули через Средиземное море в Европу.* (KP:15)

And all these migrants poured across the Mediterranean to Europe.

At the same time, referring to immigrants as “hordes” and using the symbol of the “fall of the wall” invokes deep-seated historical and cultural allusions. These references include the iconic Great Wall of China, symbolizing defense against nomadic invasions; the Ottoman siege of Istanbul (Constantinople), representing clashes between East and West; the legendary Siege of Troy, symbolizing deception and invasion; the Cold War-era Berlin Wall, a stark symbol of division; and prophetic references to Gog and Magog (Yajuj and Majuj in Islam), representing apocalyptic forces. These allusions construct a narrative where civilizations historically erect barriers to protect against perceived threats from outsiders, often imagined as “barbarians” or existential dangers to traditional order and stability.

IV.F. AMERICAN TRICKSTER

Throughout the corpus, the United States is shown as the catalyst of the European refugee crisis. Various metaphorical models illustrate the US as the

⁵ Image schemas are embodied patterns of experience that structure the way we understand various concepts. They serve as a kind of cognitive template (see Clausner & Croft, 1999; Croft & Cruse, 2004; Johnson, 1987).

origin of immigration. For instance, in water metaphors, the US is portrayed as a spring. In travel metaphors, the US is seen as supplying the funds necessary for immigrants to undertake their journey. This also implies that they finance terrorism, as terrorists are frequently depicted as being hidden among refugees in Russian discourse.

75) *Вот они, истоки нынешнего бурного потока мигрантов.*

Который будет нарастать. (KP:02)

Here they are, the sources [spring] of the current turbulent flow of migrants. Which will grow.

76) *[...] американские компании, институты тратят немалые*

суммы денег на организацию потоков мигрантов в Европу. (KP:02)

[...] American companies and institutions spend considerable amounts of money on organizing the flow of migrants to Europe.

77) *Кто же их инструктирует? [...] Многие беженцы*

проговариваются, что деньги им на дорогу дали какие-то

американские организации. (KP:03)

Who is instructing them? [...] Many refugees let slip that some American organizations gave them money for the journey.

78) *“Вот говорят, что в этой волне беженцев виноват сирийский*

президент Асад. Никто в нашей дурацкой государственной и

негосударственной прессе не упоминает, что виной всему Америка.

Ее внешняя политика”, — отметил один из жителей Германии.

(VR:05)

“They say that Syrian President Assad is to blame for this wave of refugees. No one in our stupid state and non-state press mentions that America is to blame. Its foreign policy,” said one resident in Germany.

The US is seen as the driving force behind several major global issues. Russian discourse characterizes the US as either an archetypal Trickster or Evil Incarnate. As an enemy with Trickster traits, Russian discourse suggests that the US incites migration by deceiving both immigrants and European authorities. Through this manipulation, the US perpetuates the chaos it generates. The concept of “controlled chaos” is also a recurring theme.

The second model portrays America as the quintessence of absolute evil. In this myth, the focus is on making and orchestrating the movement of refugees to Europe or Russia. Using Tolkien’s terminology in (79) below, the purpose is described as creating a horde of “orcs” to attack Russia. To put it in perspective, unlike humans, the orcs are raised by Morgoth, a godlike spirit from Tolkien’s “legendarium,” which forms the mythological foundation for The Lord of the Rings. Morgoth, akin to Lucifer in Christian theology, rebelled against his

maker (Carter, 2011). In this fantasy context, Morgoth symbolizes the “Dark Enemy” or “Dark Lord.” The discourse explicitly identifies Americans as the instigators of the crisis, depicting them as the creators of “orcs”. Refugees are implied to be servants or instruments of the US, functioning as an archetypal “henchman” to carry out “dirty work.” Thus, Europeans and Russians are conceptualized as humans, refugees as orcs, and the USA as the Dark Enemy, the creator of orcs pitted against humans.

79) *[А именно [цели и задачи] - создание массы «орков», которых можно будет бросить на Россию. (KP:02)*

Namely [goals and objectives] - the creation of a mass of “orcs” that can be thrown at Russia.

IV.G. ORIENTAL “OTHER”

The Russian media utilizes an Orientalist discourse, which structures political reality through the opposing concepts of the Self and the Other. This approach employs stereotypes about the East to mobilize the necessary conceptualizations. The Orientalist framework has often been overlooked in discourse studies. For example, as Sandıkçioğlu (2003) noted, Lakoff’s critical analysis of American policy during the Gulf War did not consider the Orientalist perspective.

According to Van Dijk (1995), while the collective Western mind portrays itself as modern, liberal, and democratic, the East, as famously analyzed by Edward Said, has always been depicted as primitive, wild, and radical. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the discourse on the Middle East was revitalized with new vigor. Russian discourse perpetuates these centuries-old narratives, viewing the Middle East as a jungle where the principle of “everyone for himself” is fully realized.

Moreover, applying the container image schema, one can argue that the balance of Europe will be disrupted by an excessive “influx of immigrants”. When the volume of new “substance” added to a container becomes too great, the nature of the container is defined by this added material. In this regard, Europe is grasped as a specific container, namely the cloaca (“Cloaca Maxima”). Refugees are depicted as emerging from the cesspool and transforming Europe into one; they are the substance that fills the cloaca, symbolized as dirt or sewage (see sample 80). Again, this metaphorization fits into the myth of “transformation” that envisions Europe as a place of filth and chaos.

80) *Если Европа будет переполнена под завязочку, если нарушится баланс, она превратится ровно в такую же клоаку, из которой все*

эти беженцы бегут. (KP:08)

If Europe is overcrowded to the eyeballs and the balance is disrupted, it will turn into exactly the same cloaca from which all these refugees are fleeing.

Regarding Türkiye, the narrative aligns with the negative portrayal of the Middle East (see 81). However, using various metaphorical models, Türkiye's primary discursive role was as a transit point for immigrants on their "journey" to Germany, their final destination, as previously described. The route from Türkiye to Greece across the Aegean Sea was a major transport hub, alongside the Mediterranean route. Türkiye is also viewed as the keyholder to the gates of Europe. If immigrants are represented as liquids, then these gates become a specific type: floodgates, as seen in sample (84). In March 2016, the EU and Türkiye signed an agreement, which led to a decrease in the number of refugees arriving in Europe.

81) *В турецкой провинции Гизи ее изнасиловали, ограбили и убили.* (KP:08)

In the Turkish province of Gizi, she was raped, robbed and killed

82) *А начало опасного пути — на паромах из Турции до Греции.* (VR:20)

And the beginning of the dangerous journey is on ferries from Türkiye to Greece.

83) *Турция для беженцев — это уже пройденный этап.* (VR:01)

Türkiye for refugees is already a passed stage.

84) *Это Турция открыла мигрантам шлюзы, новый маршрут в Европу.* (KP:02)

It was Türkiye that opened the floodgates for migrants, a new route to Europe.

It is important to note that this study addresses the topic at the height of its public debate in Russia, and does not account for the abrupt change in the discourse regarding Türkiye's role that occurred a few months later. Specifically, on November 24, 2015, shortly after Russia entered the war in Syria, an unidentified at that time Su-24 aircraft that violated Turkish airspace was intercepted and shot down by a Turkish Air Force F-16 fighter. The downing of the Russian jet significantly damaged bilateral relations between Türkiye and Russia, with tensions persisting until the following year. The incident also contributed to a negative portrayal of Türkiye in Russian discourse during this period. Therefore, prior to these events, the focus on Türkiye's role in the European refugee crisis was limited.

IV.H. THE LAST BASTION

While the Russian media portrayed politicians like Merkel and Juncker in a negative light, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán — along with Libya’s Gaddafi — was depicted positively. Russian discourse highlights Orbán’s anti-immigration stance as advocating for the preservation of European culture and identity. Hungary is portrayed as the penultimate stage before refugees reach their final destination. Using a “quest” metaphor, which can be seen as a variation of the “travel” metaphor, Germany is presented as the destination, Türkiye as a transit point, and Hungary as a challenging stage just before arrival. Emphasizing Hungary’s role as the “last bastion” in Europe, it is depicted as an obstacle in the way, the final point of resistance before reaching the goal, that is the Western European countries, and Europe’s last moment before it bows to “invaders” and loses its civilization.

85) [...] *Венгрия направляет на защиту от нелегалов армию.* (VR:20)
Hungary sends an army to protect against illegal immigrants.

86) *Полиция Венгрии применила слезоточивый газ против беженцев, которые отказывались ехать во временный лагерь.* (VR:26)
Hungarian police fired tear gas at refugees who refused to go to a makeshift camp.

87) *Орбан: Вопрос не должен быть в том, можно ли защитить границы, — это необходимость.* (VR:14)
Orbán: “The question should not be whether the borders [of Europe] can be protected, it is a necessity.”

88) *Премьер Виктор Орбан обвинил его в том, что армия не смогла в срок достроить 4-метровый забор от мигрантов на границе.* (VR:16)
Prime Minister Viktor Orbán accused him of the fact that the army was unable to complete the 4-meter fence from migrants at the border on time.

89) *Венгрия стала крупнейшим транзитным узлом для десятков тысяч нелегалов с Ближнего Востока и Севера Африки, [...].* (VR:16)
Hungary has become the largest transit hub for tens of thousands of illegal immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa, [...].

90) *Венгрия, в свою очередь, стала бутылочным горлышком на пути в [...].* (VR:11)
Hungary, in turn, has become a bottleneck on the way to [...].

91) *Формально Венгрия не должна пропускать дальше мигрантов: [...].* (VR:22)
Formally, Hungary should not let migrants go further: [...].

Regarding Eastern Europe in general, Russian discourse portrays it as relatively insignificant. In the example (92) below, immigrants and Eastern European states are metaphorically represented as waste material (garbage to be discarded) and a trash can, respectively. Russian media aims to depict a divided Europe, where Western European states do not regard Eastern Europe as their equal. This “distribution” of migrants highlights the perpetually unfair and unequal relations between these regions. The chaotic setting in Europe is also present in this narrative.

92) Полагаю, постарается выбросить часть мигрантов в Восточную Европу. В те же Венгрию, Словакию, Чехию, Польшу, Болгарию, Румынию, страны Прибалтики... (КР:02)

I think it will try to throw [away] some of the migrants to Eastern Europe. To Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, the Baltic countries ...

CONCLUSION

The analysis aimed to uncover what is referred to as “official” Russian discourse. As such, the rhetoric is reflective of state politics and ideology. As demonstrated in the article, today’s Europe is perceived as a place governed by the “Law of the Jungle.” Europe is depicted as being unable to defend itself against “foreign armies” or distinguish refugees from the “terrorists” infiltrating the continent. The “flow” of immigrants encounters no “barrier” to halt it. The “open doors” policies, representing multiculturalism, a significant theme in Russian discourse on the refugee crisis, permit “aliens” to enter Europe without any resistance. These “invaders” are rather welcomed. The traditional order, along with its moral system, can no longer endure. This narrative is also a part of a century long story about the “downfall” of Europe.

Moreover, Europe’s “fall” is portrayed not only as moral decay and the displacement of locals by immigrants with different lifestyles but also as Europe “falling apart”. Certain political forces within the EU are at odds with the overall direction of the European bureaucracy. Russia media leverages this discord to advance its narrative about the EU’s fragmentation. Russian media portrays a divided Europe, unable to agree on crucial issues like self-defense. This article provides numerous examples illustrating that refugees are seen as a looming threat to Europe. Despite the pressing need for collective action, there is no consensus. Here we can also observe the myth of the apocalypse.

The main message behind this narrative is not just that Europe struggles to act as a union, but that the very concept of a supranational organization is seen as unnatural and contrary to each state’s national interests. One of the central themes in this discourse is the traditional definition of sovereignty by

philosophers like Bodin. Sovereignty, in this regard, means indivisible (not shared with others) and unlimited (not subject to any external authority) power. Yet, as Russian media discourse suggests, EU member states share their sovereignty among each other, and European authorities are influenced by external forces, particularly the United States. Consequently, they are dependent on these outside influences. Without true sovereign policy, a nation cannot make the best decisions for itself. In times of crisis, like the refugee crisis, the actual level of a state's sovereignty becomes more evident (see Schmitt, 2005).

The Russian press asserts that the number of immigrants, described as full of energy, will eventually surpass the “passive” Europeans, rendering Europe unable to “digest” them. This will weaken Europe's “immune system,” causing the “elderly” Europe to become more vulnerable. “In Europe, there now exists a colossal weakening of public immunity”, as one of the lines suggests. In medical terms, Europe has become “tolerant” to foreign elements or “parasites.” “Tolerance has gone too far”, says another passage. This is also consistent with the narrative about foreign invasion. Besides, the tolerant Europe as an organism cannot distinguish between good and bad intakes, which correlates with the storyline of the failure to detect terrorists. Essentially, Europe is weak, immunodeficient, and overly tolerant, thus, cannot adequately react to outer threats. This model is supported by metaphors such as EUROPE IS A SICK PERSON and EUROPE IS [AN] OLD [WOMAN].

Using various archetypes, the USA is depicted as both deceiver and embodiment of evil. In this narrative, America sends orcs (refugees) to fight against humans (of Europe or Russia). Additionally, Russian discourse suggests that Europe is pursuing a “suicidal” policy by falling into a trap set by the United States, despite repeated warnings from Russia.

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