

PARODY AS NORM CONTESTATION

Normative Jujitsu around the 2008 Russian-Georgian war

10th Annual Doctoral Conference at Central European University

Erna Burai

Central European University

1051 Budapest, Hungary

Nádor u 9.

tel: +36 30 536 0101

email: Burai_Erna@phd.ceu.edu

ABSTRACT

The justifications for Russian actions in Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014) are instances of a controversial phenomenon. While being openly critical of Western application of norms, Russia nevertheless adopted them in her own policies. If Russia strongly disapproved the application of the norms of self-determination and the intervention for protection purposes, why did she “replicate” them in Georgia and Ukraine, especially under controversial circumstances? The paper argues that this puzzle can be understood through the concept of *parody*, and the implications of parody in norm contestation. In reproducing the original text in a parody form, the parodist creates a “rhythm of counter-expectation” that is, however, never fulfilled. In literary terms, parody thus reveals the conventions and expectations that are at play in the original text. The paper contrasts the Western “original text” deployed in Kosovo (that extreme violence impairs coexistence in one state, legitimizes intervention to protect and that it might lead to the recognition of independent states), and its Russian replication in three episodes of norm contestation around the 2008 Russian-Georgian war. It argues that Russian replication of Western normative argumentation in a parody form serves to magnify and drive attention to the discrepancies in the original text, and to expose the ever-present rift between normative concerns and power politics. Since “parody” exposes the hypocrisy involved in all normative justifications but obscures the various degrees to which normative and other concerns overlap, the impact of this discursive strategy is to weaken and destabilize Western normative arguments. Hence, instead of mere denouncement, parodying normative justifications should be accounted for as a powerful strategy of norm contestation.