Cultural and Political Imaginaries in Putin's Russia

Edited by Niklas Bernsand
and Barbara Törnquist-Plewa

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INTRODUCTION

Cultural and Political Imaginaries in Putin's Russia

Niklas Bernsand and Barbara Törnquist-Plewa

Introduction

This volume is a part of a series of books published with support of the Centre for European Studies at Lund University dealing with cultural, social and political developments in Eastern and Central Europe in the period after the fall of the communist regimes in 1989-1991. While the preceding books in this series focused on the Balkans (Resic and Törnquist-Plewa 2002), Ukraine and Belarus (Törnquist-Plewa 2006), and Central Europe (Törnquist-Plewa and Stala 2011), this book deals with cultural developments in Russia in the 2000s, a period politically demarcated by the coming to power of Vladimir Putin. The book aims at identifying and analyzing developments in official symbolical, cultural and social policies as well as the contradictory trajectories of important cultural, social and intellectual trends in Russian society after the year 2000. Indeed, several chapters in the book proceed from the perception in Russian society of a fundamental difference between the seemingly less path-dependent first post-Soviet decade of the 1990s and the period following the gradual establishment of an authoritarian regime in the subsequent decades. Obviously, a view of the presidential shift from Boris Yeltsin to Vladimir Putin at the start of the new millennium as a symbolic watershed has also served as a recurring rhetorical figure used to prop up the legitimacy of the regime. In this regime-favored view, the 1990s saw the (partial) dismantling of the empire, deadly battles about dividing state property among shady constellations of individuals and corporations, and everyday economic hardships and dysfunctionality, while Putin's Russia of the 2000s offered stability and the strengthening of state institutions, growing prosperity, a successful fight with separatism, the expansion of state borders, and the return of great power status. Such a glaring contrast obviously caricatures actual developments, obscures the personal continuities and policy legacies between the two regimes, and distorts and embellishes policies conducted under Putin. However, this depiction of the 1990s is felt to be real enough by many Russians, and comparisons of the two periods consistently for many come out to the advantage of the latter.

As the title says, this book focuses on the cultural and political imaginaries of Russia since 2000, offering case studies on the vicissitudes of cultural poli-

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cies, political ideologies and imperial visions, on memory politics on the grassroot as well as official levels, and on the links between political and national imaginaries and popular culture in fields as diverse as fashion design and pronatalist advertising.

Keeping Them Out, Keeping Them Happy

In a widespread model of democratisation, the emergence of an economically strong and affluent middle-class will eventually result in demands for political and civic rights. Socio-economic emancipation and the acquirement of cultural and educational capital of this middle segment is thus expected to engender a will for real political influence, respect for property rights, and better quality of government. However, when affluence trickled down fast in Russia during the first part of Putin's rule in the wake of the then high prices on the energy markets, other explanations emerged for why increased (relative) material well-being in a country plagued by corruption and bad governance did not seem to engender a widely supported liberal or reformist opposition. Although coercion and repression in relation to political opposition was and remains part of the regime's toolbox, a common line of reasoning pointed to a social contract (Greene 2017), or a sort of tacit social agreement, being offered by the regime to the younger and more affluent urban layers in Russia. This tacit agreement arguably exchanged political complicity or non-interference of urban professionals in political life and the workings of the government (including them putting a blind eye to how the financial capital of ruling political, bureaucratic and economic elites was and continued to be accumulated) for access to the material and immaterial benefits and possibilities of globalisation. This did not only mean that members of the emerging urban classes to the extent of their financial possibilities could freely travel and have access to the latest technological innovations of global consumerist culture. Their self-realisation and individual development in terms of education (including foreign) and career opportunities, if not paired with the wrong kind of political ambitions, were also encouraged. This meant that values associated with a global "creative class", such as individualism, creativity and sophistication were embraced and encouraged as long as they remained expressions of individual trajectories (or of use for the state) and did not lead to the emergence of political demands and "class consciousness". In relation to wider segments of the population, it could be argued that the agreement rests on material improvements and on a symbolic rejection of the 1990s, a decade widely perceived as unpredictable, demoralizing, and lawless.

It would seem a demanding task to uphold such implicit agreements over time and in changing domestic and global political and economic conditions. The financial crisis in 2008, low oil prices as well as the sanctions imposed after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 made it more difficult for the regime to deliver its part of the deal, and in connection with the protests against the flawed elections in 2011 the regime indeed stepped up coercion as a way to deal with political challenges. Kolesnikov (2017) has argued that the patriotic fervor encouraged by state and regime-controlled media in connection with the annexation and the first phases of the war in Ukraine can be seen as a way of offering the citizens a partly remodeled agreement. In this version of the agreement, besides the old promises, Russians would stay out of politics in exchange for enjoying the great power status of their country, which is able to expand and set the agenda in its immediate surroundings and confronts Western ambition in global politics. Some researchers (e.g. Laruelle 2017) argue that the implicit social contract still largely holds, as the distrust of elites remains high, politics is continuously widely considered to be a dirty and unattractive domain, and Putin still enjoys wide support as a symbolic figure beyond politics. Still, analytics like Kolesnikov (2017), points to cracks in the façade as surveys indicate that citizens besides material benefits and great power status now demand better control of tax remedies, which per definition would mean an eventual break with the agreement. The protests in 2017 against the Moscow city government's plans to tear down hundreds of five-storey apartment houses to allow now high-profit high-rise projects, while offering their inhabitants unclear and unsatisfactory compensation, hints to the potential fragility of such social constructs. Networking to organize protests, disaffected members of the younger urban middle class here find allies among teachers, officers and retired people, i.e. from generally loyal sectors of society where few had expected overt discontent (Baunov 2017). Interestingly, some protesters felt as if the 1990s had returned (ibid), which could be seen as perception of a break with the tacit social agreement from the government's side.

Activating Them And Curbing Their Enthusiasm

However, as Laruelle argues, the regime cannot work only with strategies of demobilization, e.g. through tacit social agreements – it could also benefit from actively mobilising support, for which ideological content would be necessary. The nature of such a content is the object of competing analyses and constructs. In earlier phases of the Putin regime observers (e.g. Aslund 2012) have tried to discern the shifting battles for influences between more liberal

and more authoritarian camps associated with the Kremlin. As expansionist politics leading to the annexation of Crimea were accompanied with great power rhetorics and situational alliances with various nationalist groups, and Russian support for European populist right-wing parties increasingly caught attention, voices in Western media sometimes began to perceive the Putin regime in itself as radically right-wing (e.g. Inozemtsev 2017), designations which would need strong qualifications. For others, like the Russian-British journalist Peter Pomerantsev, the regime is rather a "postmodern dictatorship", a skillful situational adapter and compilator of contradictory social and cultural and political trends and currents, the manipulation of which can make it "feel like an oligarchy in the morning and a democracy in the afternoon, a monarchy for dinner and a totalitarian state by bedtime" (Pomerantsev 2014, 67). The key assumption here emphasises the regime's willingness to appropriate, imitate and distort the content of almost anything that might come to resemble real politics (with distinctive and uncontrolled actors having a real social base), and thus defuse the disruptive capacity of potentially threatening social movements or platforms. This understanding works well with Andrew Wilson's (2005) earlier term virtual politics for the way the political scene in itself has been manipulated and set up in some Post-Soviet societies.

In Laruelle's (2017) analysis, the regime presently rather maintains an "explicit but blurry conservatism", a flexible and adaptable doctrine built around a few common basic ideological tenets such as anti-Westernism, antiliberalism, and "traditional values". This ideological umbrella unfolds a large implicit ideological diversity that allows Russians to be inspired from contradictory and potentially conflicting "red" and "white" ideological packages, e.g. Soviet and Tsarist, Russian ethno-centrist and a multiculturalist celebration of cultural diversity within the empire. However, various instantiations of rebranded Soviet nostalgia is the single most important strand. Blurry conservatism has been selected for the present situation since it meets the least active opposition, mainly from a limited number of urban liberals (and can from time to time absorb "liberal" technocrats into the regime). In comparison, an outright and consistent, long-term embrace of a Russian ethno-centric nationalist outlook would risk being much more divisive.

Against the backdrop of such a gambit of "blurry conservatism" the regime has in the last few years increasingly sought cooperation with conservative forces and social movements in certain fields, such as the cultural sector, and in policies encouraging child birth (see Jonson's and Rakhimova-Sommers' respective chapters), and also with commercial actors such as in the fashion industry (see Kalinina's chapter). The visibility of the Orthodox Church in political and symbolic state-level contexts has also been more clearly empha-

sized. Whether this makes the regime politically and ideologically conservative in a meaningful sense is up for debate. As was outlined in connection with the tacit social agreement with the young creative urban class, advanced technology and, at least superficially, the connected packages of representations and associations are accepted, while there is little interest in political reforms, more effective institutions and power sharing. The term conservative modernization (see e.g. Trenin 2010) that at earlier stages has been used for the regime's policies and is historically identified with attempts in the late Tsarist period at reforms in order to preserve the existing political order, seems less relevant at this moment, as the meaning of both those elements for present Russian policies is unclear. The key goal for which tacit social agreements are calibrated and selective mobilization can be instrumentalised, is arguably the preservation of the regime itself. At most one might perhaps distinguish a few almost pre-political convictions or reflexes in the Russian leadership – firm central control internally, the vision of Russia as a great power dominating the area of the former Soviet Union, multipolarity at the global stage etc.

How, then, does this relate to ideological developments at the grassroot level? Some of the chapters in this book (Jonson on cultural politics, Morenkova on the memory of Stalinism, Kalinina on fashion design), give a clear indication that grassroot activism and ideological developments in various professional fields in contemporary Russia is an ideologically complex phenomenon (see also Chebankova 2015). The grassroots level is not necessarily a site of resistance generating liberals and human rights activists but can be activated in favor of the regime, as well as opposing the regime from even more illiberal standpoints.

Outline of the Volume

The chapters are organized according to the three different cultural-social spaces investigated: cultural policies and ideological movements behind them, mnemonic politics and culture, and last but not least popular culture and its embeddedness in politics.

The first part of the book looks at cultural policy in Putin's Russia and points to its connection to changing concepts of Russian national identity, geopolitical imaginary and nationalist ideologies of different leanings. Thus, it starts with the chapter by Lena Jonson that analyses the change of cultural and political values in Russia as reflected in dramatic turn in Russian state's policy towards the cultural sector since 2012. Jonson discusses how this turn came about by focusing on small intellectual communities that were crucial for

formulating ideas and concepts for cultural, social and political change. These groups, which Jonson calls "critical communities" included both liberals and conservatives. Both created during the 2000s small embryos of social movements that confronted the Russian system. After the protest movement 2012-2013 the liberals were significantly weakened while the conservatives got the upper hand since their ideas were adopted by the Putin regime. This had a profound impact on the cultural sector.

Jonson's account is followed by the chapter written by Igor Torbakov. He nuances further the picture of Russian liberalism and conservatism by demonstrating how the legacy of the ideological and intellectual construct called Eurasianism is used both by conservative and liberal nationalists in contemporary Russia. While the Kremlin with the help of some conservatives exploits Eurasianism to legitimise the concept of "Russian World" with a clear neo-imperial strand, there are both conservatives and liberals that deplete it to argue for abandoning the imperial ambitions and create a smaller, but stronger Russian nation. Thus the struggle over what should constitute the main pillars in the construction of Russian identity continues.

One of the extreme political groups involved in this struggle is Eduard Limonov's National Bolshevik Party (currently part of the Other Russia party coalition). Andrei Rogatschevski looks closely at this phenomenon in the third chapter of the book. He scrutinizes the NBP's s ideology (especially ethnic policy), its symbols and practices and asks how close the party is to a Neo-Nazi movement. Rogatschevski's conclusion is that the party has Nazi roots and displays features typical for Fascists. For a long time since its creation the party was rather marginalised and at the beginning of 2000s was even in conflict with the Kremlin due to its militancy. However, in face of the war in Ukraine in 2014-2015 they sided with each other and The Other Russia is a strong supporter of separatists in Eastern Ukraine.

The second part of the volume is concerned with politics of memory. Collective memory understood as representations of the past shared within the group and used to support the group's identity and cohesion is a tool that any political power tries to exploit (as widely argued for example by Connerton (1998), Olick (2007), Bernhard and Kubik (2014). Russian political rulers are no exception in this regard. At the same time, they face a society which is painfully torn in its relation to the Soviet past trying to reconcile the memories of "the glorious past" of the Soviet empire, a victor in the Second World War, with the tragic memories of Stalin's mass killings and Communist repressions. Three chapters of the volume deal with this complex subject. The first one is written by Olga Malinova and gives an overview of the evolution of the memory policy of Russian Federation over the last twenty five years. She shows how

the construction of the official narrative of the past takes place in official speeches, the so called Memory Laws (i.e. legislation that restricts particular ways of public representation of some historical events or processes) state symbols, national holidays, official and unofficial rituals, etc. She argues that in the 1990s the official narrative had integrated a discourse about "trauma and crime" as a part of legitimization of the post-Soviet transformation, but in the 2000s the choice was gradually made for an apologetic principle that marginalizes this topic. In the 2010s, however, one can notice attempts to create an eclectic official narrative which brings, in her view, ambivalent results. On the one hand the apologetic conception of the national past is very strong and even securitized as a "weapon" against the alleged foreign and domestic enemies. On the one hand, there are some opportunities opened for actors struggling for "coping with the difficult past".

A good illustration how it is done can be found in the next chapter, written by Tomas Sniegon who analyses how Gulag memory is framed in some crucial sites of memory of political repressions in Russia: the former execution site in Butovo, one of Moscow's suburbs; the State Museum of Gulag History in Moscow, and the museum and former labor camp Perm-36 in the Ural region. Sniegon argues that in recent years a new common "patriotic" narrative of the Gulag is developing under the control of the state. The Gulag is not necessarily denied, but the memory of communist terror and crimes is not framed within liberal discourse. Instead the public at the sites in question is presented with narratives in which the new nationalist perception of the Gulag memory converges with the religious, Orthodox and Soviet-nostalgic views of the past.

Sniegon's contribution is followed by another, case-based study which deals with memories on the role of Stalin in Second World War in Post-Soviet Russia. The study conducted by Elena Morenkova Perrier complements the previous chapters by focusing not so much on public memory and its representation but more on the reception of it. Morenkova Perrier focuses on grass roots' reactions to critical memory of Stalin, the so called trauma and crime discourse described by Malinova in the chapter 4. By exploring the new memory-related practices and activism within Russian social media, Morenkova shows the socially divisive effects of this discourse, as it both engenders support and triggers resistance. She examines debates and mobilisations, both online and offline, generated by two controversial memory initiatives in 2010 and 2011 at the local and federal level concerning the re-evaluation of Stalin's role in the Great Patriotic War. Focusing on the tension between two intertwined symbols – the controversial figure of Stalin and the sacred symbol of the Victory she brings to light the complex attitude towards historical Stalinism within contemporary Russian society.

The third and last part of the volume pays attention to popular culture and provides examples of how its different expressions and media are used as a propaganda tool in the service of the state politics and ideology. It also brings to the fore the workings of what Michael Billig (1995) called banal nationalism – the seemingly non-ideological, everyday representations of the nation. This part begins with a study by Elena Rakhimova-Sommers who analyses Russian pronatalist ideology as expressed in a state-sponsored "boost the birth rate" campaign, which was a response to a sharp demographic decline during the severe economic crisis of the post-Soviet era. Rakhimova-Sommers' study offers "a window into the workings of a new pronatalist ideology that focuses on creating associations between fertility and ethnic and national homogeneity" (p. 177 in this volume). The study demonstrates that in the 2000s, the Russian state adopted a more active role in the sphere of bio-politics, as motherhood had become increasingly defined in terms of social success and patriotic duty. Rakhimova-Sommers discusses the state's interpretation of the "women's question," the changing dynamics of the state-mother-child relationship, and the notion of the "absent father" in this gendered post-Soviet space. As Rakhimova-Sommers examines a series of emblematic billboards and commercials, she takes the reader inside the mechanics of the advertising industry's methods, which aim to capitalize on the anxieties of young women.

The following chapter, written by Ekaterina Kalinina, further develops and deepens the discussion on how the Russian state uses the visual means of popular culture to extend its power over both the physical and political bodies of a population. Kalinina shows how fashion is employed to ideologically indoctrinate masses. Targeting predominantly young people, the Kremlin designers strive to intensify myths about World War II, celebrate the current rulers and facilitate the mobilisation of the state ideology, in which the authority of the present dictates a certain presentation of the past. The author discloses that these propagandistic manipulations take place under cover of ironic, humorous, "postmodern" designs, which increases their effect by disarming and confusing the public.

This important idea about the ambiguous functions of irony and humor, not least as instruments of political power is a point of departure of the next chapter, which is a result of collaborative work by three researchers: Alena Minchenia, Barbara Törnquist-Plewa and Yuliya Yurchuk. The authors examine the content of a selected number of Russian political jokes and humorous cartoons, presented in popular Russian TV-programs and dealing with Belarusian and Ukrainian leaders. The scholars investigate how Russian-Belarusian and Russian-Ukrainian relationships and Russia's self-perception feature in these representations. Their analysis shows that the comical representations serve to

conserve the existing ethnic stereotypes of Belarusians and Ukrainians and to maintain the Russian feeling of superiority over its neighbours. This kind of humour bolsters Russian nationalism and at the same time tries to conceal Russia's imperialist stance by presenting the Russian state as a benevolent power that is ready to support and help its neighbours. The authors argue that Russian humour in this context can be seen as tool of hegemony and expression of the colonial legacy.

The last chapter of the volume, written by Natalia Majsova, delivers yet another example of how political messages can be smuggled in cultural expressions that on the surface have nothing to do with political power. Majsova studies the Russian phenomenon of "noocosmology" – a project (or a set of ideas), propagated via internet that mimics scientific discourse in form and at the same time broadcasts a secular but quasi-religious worldview. Noocosomology uses Soviet nostalgia, more precisely some parts of the tradition of so the called cosmists (the founding fathers of the successful Soviet space program) to preach a new, seemingly science-based metaphysics, It has some similarity with scientology in the West, but also displays some common features with post-gravity art and astrosociology. Remarkably, noocosmology appoints the Russian security services to play the role of a kind of priesthood in this non-proclaimed religion. They are endowed with a special, educational if not messianic mission not only in Russia but in the global community as well – assigned to be the mediators between the higher spirts of the universum and human beings. Considering that the activities of the Western churches and scientology are prohibited by law in Russia, noocosmology can be seen as one of a number of Russian equivalents of the Western spiritual movements, including new age phenomena. However, its celebration of Russian security forces implies that the project also has a political agenda. It can be seen in light of its usefulness for the current Russian rulers that can exploit peoples' metaphysical longings to uphold their power.

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PART 1

Cultural Policy and Ideological Movements

CHAPTER 1

Russia: Culture, Cultural Policy, and the Swinging Pendulum of Politics

Lena Jonson

Putin's political agenda after he returned as President in May 2012 reflected a drastic turn towards authoritarian conservatism. The turn was the result of processes going on for most of the 2000s, but as it became official policy in 2012, it reminded of a pendulum in swing that had reached an extreme position. It was a paradigm shift and a turn of 180 degrees away from Mikhail Gorbachev′s and Boris Yeltsin′s efforts to reform, democratize and develop Russia. A first question of this paper is how the new conservative agenda was reflected in the cultural sphere, in state cultural policy. A second question is what made the pendulum make the swing that far towards authoritarian conservatism.

The term culture may have two meanings: on the one hand it denotes the values specific for a certain society at a certain time. Culture has been defined as "the linked stock of ideas that define a set of common sense beliefs about what is right, what is natural, what works" (Rochon 1998, 9). In a more narrow sense it may denote the sector of the arts and intellectual thought. A direct link exists between these two meanings as people of the cultural sphere are crucial for society's production of ideas and concepts whether formulated along predominant discourses or posed as alternatives. This function of the intellectuals has historically been the starting point for all discussions regarding their importance for social and political change.[1]

Cultural change takes place in society as the conceptual categories with which reality is defined are altered (Rochon 1998, 15). Such alterations may be the result of campaigns and manipulations from above or they may emanate from below. When social, economic or political realities drastically change, new ways of looking at life and new concepts with which to comprehend reality, are needed. Without concepts to analyze a phenomenon, it is difficult to respond to it. What concepts and categories are used will determine the analysis, and thus also the direction of the response. This is the basis of the dynamics of political contention in society between various political forces. Conten-

1 Compare Antonio Gramski, *Prison notebooks*.

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tion may take place between the predominant discourse and those questioning and challenging it, but also between factions within these flanks.

Several factors explain why and how a paradigm shift takes place. One factor, most often underestimated, is the role played by small intellectual communities in formulating new ideas and system of values that correspond to and capture people's sentiments of fear, hope and demands. By providing "ideological glasses", they also indicate recipes of what has to be done.

The formulation of new ideas occurs initially within relatively small communities of critical thinkers, writes Tomas R. Rochon (1998, 22). These intellectuals do not necessarily belong to a formally constituted organization, but are rather part of a self-aware, mutually interacting group that he calls "critical communities". They are critical of the political establishment and challenge ways of looking and interpreting. Such communities have only an indirect influence, however. They become powerful only when they are picked up by social or political actors, which integrate them into social and political movements, carry their ideas to a wider audience, provoke a re-examination of existing values, and thereby create social and political pressure on the authorities for change.[2] Their ideas can also be directly picked up by those in power, who appropriate the concepts for their own purposes thereby selecting concepts that are instrumental in legitimatizing policy. This means that what once started as ideas of a counter-establishment community may become the forefront ideas of the ruling regime or of a lobby group close to the regime.

A first part of this paper analyses the drastic turn of Russian state cultural policy after 2012. A second part discusses how this turn came about by focusing on the role of various small intellectual communities for the change of policy.

A Conservative State Cultural Policy in the Making

Putin had for a long time recognized the problem of formulating a national concept that would unify the nation and legitimate the regime.[3] In this regard his speech at the Valdai Club in September 2013 did not differ. There he emphasized the importance of identity in the spiritual, cultural and national senses, and seriously called for restoring a cultural code with links to Russian national tradition and history. Answering the questions "Who are we?" (*Kto my?*) and "Who do we want to become?" (*Kem my khotim byt?*), he gave the signal for the

2 Rochon writing about democratic societies have mainly this option in mind.

3 Already Boris Yeltsin set up a commission to work out a concept of a "national idea" for Russia. During Putin this task became more urgent.

working out of a new state policy for the cultural sector (Rossiskaya gazeta 2013). His words turned the political focus directly to culture. Since the Russian Constitution explicitly forbids any state ideology, Putin's call was formulated as a question of identity and as a need for a Russian 'national idea'. His speech was welcomed by conservative groups which regarded it a first step forward in formulating a state ideology (Stepanov 2013).[4]

His first priority when reinstated as president in May 2012 had been to wipe out the protest movement. The police clampdown at the Bolotnaya Square demonstration on the day before his inauguration was followed by waves of arrests of demonstrators, charges of causing 'mass riots' and various forms of harassments against the leaders of protest. These acts seriously coloured the atmosphere in society. Media campaigns forwarded the message that protests were created by foreign secret services and were initiated by the West for the purpose of undermining Russia.[5] Laws hastily introduced in the Duma during the summer targeted oppositional activities.[6]

Putin's new political agenda made patriotism, religion and moral restoration the political priorities. In October 2012 a special section of the presidential administration dedicated to issues of patriotic education and strengthening spiritual–normative values was set up (*Grani* 2012). Work started on introducing patriotism as a subject in schools (*Grani* 2014).[7] Previous plans to write new history schoolbooks according to a patriotic understanding of history developed further, and in February 2013 he ordered a commission to work out

4 "We hope the Valdai speech becomes the first step in formulating a state ideology without which national unity and a genuine Russian revival are impossible."

5 The films 'Provokatory' I, II and III by Arkadii Mamontov were broadcast on TV1 on 24 April, 11 September and 16 October 2012. 'Anatomiya Protesta' I and II, were made by NTV and broadcast on 15 March and 5 October 2012. See also Mel'nikov (2012).

6 It became illegal to organize, participate in or call for participation in demonstrations for which the authorities had not given permission. The penalties for such activities were substantially increased (Federalnyi zakon RF ot 8 iyunya 2012g, N 65-F3 g, Moskva. [Federal law]). A new law on slander was introduced with a vague definition that would limit the opportunities for journalists and the opposition to criticize public leaders and civil servants (Federalnyi zakon ot 28 iyulya 2012g. No 141-F3)). Foreign financial support for non-commercial non-governmental organizations was stigmatized and effectively obstructed, since such NGOs had to register as 'foreign agents' (RF Federalnyi zakon. O vnesenii izmenenii v otdelnye zakonodatelnye akty RF v chasti regulirovaniya deyatelnosti nekommercheskikh organizatsii, vypolnyayushchikh funktsii inostrannogo agenta (RF Federalnyi zakon ot 2007.2012g. No 121-F3. One Duma delegate who was especially active in initiating new draft laws was Alexander Sidyakin, the author of the drafts of three laws – on meetings, on non-commercial organizations as 'foreign agents' and on responsibility for offending the feelings of believers. Sidyakin has been referred to as a 'Zhirinovsky' of United Russia (New Times, 2012).

7 In late March 2014 special school lectures were introduced to explain the events of the Crimea joining Russia (Grani 2014).

a concept for a series of school history books "without internal contradictions and ambiguous interpretations" (*Lenta* 2013).[8] The Orthodox Church was given a central role in formulating and spreading ethical, moral and religious values. The Church got a foothold in the school system through courses on Orthodox culture in 2012 for the fourth class, and the church later tried to further extend its influence and position in the schools (*Grani* 2014). A new law aimed at protecting the health and moral of children outlawed text material that could be suspected to be "propaganda for non-traditional sexual orientations" (Russian Government 2013). A draft on protecting the feelings of believers from offence and defilation of religious sanctuaries had by the time it was signed by the president in the summer of 2013 broadened the definition of the crime to include "acts of clear lack of respect to society carried out with the urpose of offending the religious feelings of believers" (*Federalnyi zakon* 2013).[9]

The new political agenda was branded "conservative" and Putin now directly and strongly positioned his policy upon conservatism (*Nezavisimaya gazeta* 2013). The new atmosphere in society was immediately felt in the cultural sector, first of all on the art scene, where in 2012 a wave of scandals appeared around exhibitions of contemporary art. The major contraveners were Marat Gelman, one of Russia's most famous gallerists, and representatives of the Orthodox Church, various rightist patriotic–religious organizations such as Narodnyi sobor, and Cossack organizations. The latter called Gelman an active blasphemer and a Russophobe and tried to prevent two exhibitions he had curated ("Rodina" and "Icons") from touring the country (Jonson 2015a).

The distinctly conservative profile of the new Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinskii, appointed in May 2012, was well placed in the new political situation. Known as an historian and the author of a series of books entitled *Myths about Russia*, his views were well known. One critic, Aleksandr Morozov (2013), characterized them as Russian "Weimar *resentment*", that is, feelings of national indignation over the lost position of a once great power.

Medinskii immediately tried to make an imprint on policy. In contrast to his predecessors, who had left the cultural sphere to fend for itself, Medinskii wanted to actively intervene in cultural life. He embarked on a reorganization of cultural institutions. Referring to economic efficiency and strict management, he started to merge, reorganize or close institutions and replaced respected directors with young, loyal managers. The result was sometimes that the whole staff resigned, as in the case of the Museum of Cinema.[10] He con-

8 Then President Dmitrii Medvedev had initiated such work already in 2009.

9 For a discussion of the implications of the new law see Mel'nikov and Orlova (2013).

10 About this conflict see Nicodemus (2014).

sciously used the allocation of resources as a carrot or a stick to have institutions follow state policy. Critics clearly saw an effort by Medinskii to redesign cultural life according to the new conservative paradigm.

Medinskii early demonstrated an interest in hands-on decision-making and the film sector became the first field in which he directly intervened. His combination of appointing loyal people, steering the flow of monetary support, and using expert councils was perceived as a model for how he was to gain control over other cultural sectors as well (Borisova 2012). Declaring a priority for patriotic films, he took control of the Film Fund for State Support to Film Production. A first conflict took place over the film *Milyi Khans, dorogoi Petr* (Dear Hans, Dear Peter) by Aleksander Mindadze. It told about the friendship and competition between a Russian and a German engineer during a sensitive period of Soviet–Russian cooperation in the end of 1930s immediately before the war. The ministry sent the film to a military–historical council whose experts turned it down, arguing that such cooperation in which Hans and Petr participated could hardly have taken place that late before the war. Critics of this decision concluded: "This case…shows that portraying historical events can be done only the way the state remembers them. Otherwise, in the name of the ministry, the state will create as many expert councils as necessary in order to have its way." Mindadze gave in, changed the time period of his film and secured financing from the ministry (Karev and Aleksei Krizhevskii 2013).[11]

The very thought that the ministry would be allowed to intervene in cultural production found little support within the arts community. Many feared a future direct state involvement in which the state commissions, for example, film productions. Naum Kleiman (2014), the former director of the Cinema Museum (Muzei kino), warned against such commissioning. He said, "Not a single ministry, not the wisest minister, not a single civil servant even if he passed three academies, can do what the artists do: catch the movement of hearts, understand the despair and the hopes of society and find the corresponding vivid system, which at least a bit reorganizes, improves, and raises society to a new level."

Contemporary art early became a target of conservative criticism as evident from the verdicts of guilty in the legal processes against the organizers of the art exhibitions *Beware! Religion* of 2003 (verdict reached in 2005) and *Forbidden Art* of 2007 (verdict reached in 2010) (Jonson 2015a). Medinskii seemed to especially target contemporary art for its critical edge. He reduced its impor-

11 See also the interview with Medinskii 'Ministr kul'tury RF Vladimir Medinskii (*Kul'tura* 2013).

tance by using the term "contemporary" for all living artists.[12] In the Ministry's report of activities during 2013, priority was given to academic and traditional folk art.[13] Although the ministry continued to finance a lion part of the Moscow biennale of contemporary art and Medinskii opened it in 2013, his words about the major project of the biennale were given great media attention: "I kept thinking: Why doesn't anyone shout 'the king is naked!'?" He asked rhetorically, "Why do we, under the label of contemporary art, have to see something abstract–cubic, clumsy, in the form of a pile of bricks? And, moreover, it is paid for by public money! Not to mention that this is incomprehensible to the absolute majority of the inhabitants of Russia" (Iablokov 2013).

The reaction therefore became strong when in December 2014 Medinskii's deputy, Vladimir Aristarkhov, announced that the ministry planned to sponsor art that has a "positive impact on people" (Lapina 2014). His words seemed a clear indication of where the ministry was heading in relation to contemporary art (*Nezavisimaya gazeta* 2014). Later that month the ministry's section for fine art that had focussed on contemporary art, merged with the section for folk art in the Ministry of Culture. The art community regarded this a sign of the ministry's negative attitude towards contemporary art and of a change in state cultural policy.[14]

In spring 2014 a draft for guidelines for a new state cultural policy were published and in December that year signed as a presidential decree "Foundations for a New State Cultural Policy" (Russian Government 2014). The draft was worked out by a group in the presidential administration (under the head of the presidential administration Sergei Ivanov and Vladimir Tolstoi, presidential adviser and director of the Yasnaya Polyana Museum), was published in May in *Rossiiskaya gazeta* (2014). It was a cleaned up and modified version of a working paper by the Ministry of Culture published in April by *Izvestiya* (2014), which had met strong reaction.[15] In spite of the more neutral wording and formulations of both the May document and the final one of the presidential decree, the major thoughts of the working paper remained. In order to understand

12 See the formulation from the ministry's report (2013a, 132): "A promising direction of the development of contemporary art in Russia is the traditional folk culture".

13 See the criticism in 'Minkult otorvalsya ot zhizni', *Nezavisimaya gazeta* September 18, 2014. For the report see Ministerstvo kul'tury Rossiiskoi Federatsii (2013a, 120-133).

14 See the criticism by Leonid Bazhanov of the NCCA in "Minkul'tury likvidirovalo otdel, otvechavshii za sovremennoe iskusstvo", *Izvestiya* December 30, 2014.

15 Twenty-three members of the Russian Academy of Sciences immediately reacted first of all to the main proposition that "Russia is not Europe". They argued in *Colta* (2014) that the document was based on the idea of a compulsory ideology which was in direct violation of the Russian Constitution's article 13, which prohibited any state ideology. "Akademiki RAN raskritikovali 'Osnovy gosudarstvennoi kul'turnoi politiki'".

the version signed by the president, it is therefore useful to also analyze the previous documents.

First, the document legitimated the idea of a Russian "Sonderweg". Russia was described as a unique civilization beyond the categories of "West" and "East" but uniting these two worlds. This was an indirect way of declaring Russia different from Europe. The controversial formulation of the April document that "Russia is not Europe" was abandoned in later versions, but the idea remained that Russia is based on a specific system of spiritual values, referred to as a "cultural-civilizational code". Rejecting the "liberal-Western postulate" of Universalist values, this code embraces what is considered to be traditional Russian values, i.e. national, patriotic and religious ones. These values are characterized as "conservative" and rooted in Orthodox Christianity. While restating the key role of Orthodoxy, the final version of the document mentioned the contributory role of other religions and non-Russian ethnic groups on Russian territory.

Although the major task of state cultural policy was said to preserve the identity of the Russian civilization and its specific values, an interesting about-face took place in the presentation of Russia's relationship with the European tradition. Putin's notion that many Western countries had abandoned their roots in the Christian values of Western civilization opened the way for Russia to be portrayed as the true defender of traditional European values. Consequently, in an interview in September 2014 Medinskii called Putin a "Russian European" defending traditional European values: "Many of our emperors were authentic Europeans", he noted, "and nowadays, after an interruption of a century, a Russian European again stands as the head of Russia" (*Kommersant* 2014). The Putin regime had obviously discovered the potential for partnerships with authoritarian nationalist movements and parties of the "new right" on the European political scene.

Second, the document reflected an instrumentalist view of culture and a belief in its educational function. The purpose of state cultural policy is "to steadily form a national mentality", it was said, since the way to unify the nation is through strengthening the Russian value system and forming the moral orientation of the individual (Russian Government 2014). *Third,* the state was given an active role in the cultural sphere. The ministry, in the name of the state, was described as no longer to be "just a patron" of cultural activities but an investor. In the latter capacity the state was to become the regulator of the system of cultural institutions. Although the blunt formulations of the April working paper were removed like "not everything that presents itself as 'contemporary art' can expect to receive state support", and "a behavior that is unacceptable from the perspective of the traditional Russian system of values"

can never be legitimatized by any references to the freedom of creativity, this approach remained. Early formulations that had indicated a censorship function like calls to cautiously scrutinize cultural products in order "not to accept the capitulation of Russian values to values alien to Russia" were omitted. *Fourth,* the documents reflected a managerial approach to culture. Culture was not assigned a value in itself but regarded as an investment in the development of the country in a similar way as other state investments. This was also modified in the final version.

When President Putin on 24 December 2014 signed the decree the modified formulations made it seem like a compromise document. Nevertheless, the major thoughts remained from the first working paper. This became obvious when after the Russian Crimean annexation the political atmosphere in society took a further step along the authoritarian-conservative paradigm.

The scandals around several theatre productions during spring 2015 clearly reflected that a battle was going on around culture but also that the hunt for the "internal enemy" and "fifth colon" was taking on speed. The buzzwords of the day were "offending the feelings of religious believers "and of "violating traditional Russian values" (interpreted as patriotism, orthodoxy, anti-liberalism, traditional family values and strong support for Putin as leader). These buzzwords had already been used in scandals in the arts sphere during the previous years. The spring 2015 scandal around the production of Wagner's opera "Tannhauser" at the Novosibirsk Theatre for Opera and Ballet well illustrates the intensity of the conflict, its absurdities, and the much more active and interventionist policy of the Minister of Culture who now directly intervened and fired the theatre manager (Jonson 2015b).

In this tense political atmosphere cultural productions that did not correspond to official policy came under attack. The goal of the new state policy was spelled out by Valentina Matvienko, Chairman of the Federal Council, who in 2013 stated that Russia since long was in need of new cultural standards. She was reported to have said that "during the last decades, we have witnessed a direct intervention by currents and trends which are completely alien to our unique way of life and culture" (Federation Council 2013).

Thus, reading the guidelines on state cultural policy signed by Putin in December 2014 in the context of the political debate at that time, the document comes out as a clearly authoritarian- conservative policy document.

Swings of the Pendulum and the Role of Critical Communities

How come that this specific version of conservatism became official policy? Towards the end of the 1990s reforms in Russia had come to a standstill, corruption was rapidly growing while a rough form of capitalism had resulted in enormous social gaps. The Yeltsin regime was never able to fully carry out the economic and constitutional reforms necessary for securing a democratic development. Institutional structures and authoritarian ideas of the previous Soviet system would therefore soon reappear although this time without their previous ideological content. Society seemed in a state of fluidity where no rules of the game existed, nothing was for real and everything could be bought for money. The fluidity and cynicism of the post-communist era are illustrated in, for example, the novels *Generation P* by Viktor Pelevin (1999) and *Around Zero* (2009) by Vladislav Surkov, the grey cardinal of the Putin regime for most of the decade.

Putin, a servant of the state's secret police, reacted according to the logic of the authoritarian system every time he felt the system to be under threat. He responded to crises like the 2004 Beslan terrorist attack in the North Caucasus and the 2004 Ukrainian Orange Revolution, by centralizing the administrative system and strengthening control from above. By the end of his second mandate period (2004-2008) he had cut channels from below to influence and modernize the system.

Putin prepared the ground by his authoritarian policy and the fact that he wiped out the liberals from the public debate. His responses triggered the revival of authoritarian ideational structures. After the Beslan incident, Putin (2004) described Russia as a country under attack and at war. The Ukrainian revolution made him fear that something similar would be enacted in Russia, and he intensified his search for the 'national idea' that could unify the country and legitimatize the authoritarian Russian regime.

The deputy head of the presidential administration Vladislav Surkov formulated the concept of 'sovereign democracy' in 2005, i.e. Russia as a 'democracy' built on the Russian political traditions of authoritarian rule, a strong state, society as one entity, and a strong leader (Surkov 2006, 2007). 'Sovereignty' could here be interpreted both as the Russian state being sovereign in relation to other states but also as a political system in which the will of the people had transferred power to the leader, who saw to the interests of the state as a whole.

Moreover, Surkov reintroduced the enemy concept into the public discourse. Emphasizing the unity of the state and the nation when commenting on the Beslan attack, he spoke of the enemy from within who acts together with the external enemy in order to undermine Russia. He emphasized the

urgency of the situation by stressing that "the enemy is at the door" and that "the front runs through every city, every street and every house" and called for "vigilance, solidarity, team spirit, and united efforts by citizens and the state" (Surkov 2004). When using the term "fifth column" he pointed to the critics of the Putin regime.[16] Surkov, a skilful organizer and manipulator, was no original thinker.[17] But he was innovative as he found inspiration from both Russian political philosophy and European interwar conservative theorists. Carl Schmitt seemed to have inspired Surkov's enemy concept, his use of the term sovereignty for defining the new Russian political credo and for defining Russian authoritarianism as its unique political tradition. By the time Surkov picked up by Schmitt's ideas, they were already part of a Russian radical-conservative thinking.

The Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church strongly contributed to forward a conservative paradigm. In dialogue with radical conservative thinkers the Church formulated a a coherent political-ideological platform for a Russian identity policy, a set of moral–ethic–political guidelines, a definition of Russianness built on the Orthodox belief, support of patriotism and the strong state. Its agenda of close cooperation between church and state (symphony) was a logical consequence (Bodin 2009). Thus, authoritarian-conservative thinkers found support for their ideas in the Church. The increasing influence of the Church over state and society during the first ten years of the 2000s was reflected by the verdict of guilty in the two legal cases against organizers of the art exhibitions 'Beware! Religion' and 'Forbidden Art'. Thus, an Orthodox interpretation now dominated the interpretations of judges of the secular state of what kind of art is permitted in the public space. The patriotic–Orthodox activists who had taken the organizers to court felt the wind in their sails.

By the time the 2008 international financial crisis hit Russia, the Russian government had no clear strategic direction. There was no clear idea of how to develop the country and no meta-narrative that could show the way.[18] The government seemed to oscillate between a desire for reform and a rejection of reform. In September 2009 then President Dmitrii Medvedev called for modernization and reform in his article "Go, Russia!" and criticized corruption

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16 He named them "limony" (from the surname of the National Bolshevik leader Eduard Limonov) and "iabloki" (after the liberal party Iabloko under Grigorii Iavlinskii). Limony and iabloki are Russian words for lemons and apples.

17 Surkov created new political actors like the pro-Putin youth organization Nashi and even new political parties. Compare Pomerantsev (2014), "The Hidden Author of Putinism." *The Atlantic*, November 7, 2014.

18 Compare how this lack of meta-narratives was mirrored in Russian fiction of that time. (Ågren 2014).

and weak democratic and legal institutions (Russian Government website 2009). By the time of his speech to parliament in November 2009, his project seemed already buried (Bilevskaya et al. 2009). The crisis and the lack of a consistent policy response to it triggered processes in society. Medvedev's criticism had made it legitimate to discuss these issues publicly. His words had given rise to hopes and expectations that an alternative policy might be possible, and society woke up from its state of political lethargy and demanded democratic change. But his words and the events that followed also triggered the Conservatives.

The Liberal Reaction

Although liberal, leftist and anarchist opponents of the regime gathered in joint political manifestations in December 2006, such manifestations remained marginal with only a limited number of participants. After the 2007 elections no liberal parties were represented in parliament. Political organizations with democratic and liberal agendas were small and exerted no influence. Instead, it was people from the culture sector who, towards the end of the first decade of the 2000s, reacted against the ongoing authoritarian development and came to play the role of critical communities forwarding democratic ideas. Within contemporary art, literature, theatre and music, democratic critical ideas took a stronghold. Visual art in particular played an important role. This can be partly explained by the expansion of galleries and art centres, mainly financed by the private sector, which contributed to making the art scene a 'free space', more independent and free than any other field of culture (Jonson 2015a).[19] The community of contemporary art had reacted strongly to the trial against the 2007 "Forbidden Art" exhibition and the verdict of guilty in 2010.

Between 2009 and 2011 a critical intellectual mobilization took place. With better access to information and possibilities to travel, people from these circles could more easily draw their conclusions in favour of an alternative, democratic and liberal-oriented policy. The arts reflected a search for values other than the conservative, patriotic and religious ones of the official discourse. Individuals stood up as among the first to break the wall of silence and publicly announced that they disagreed with where society was heading (Jonson 2015a). In a way, their behaviour became examples of civic courage and an echo of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's call from the 1970s "Don't live by lie" (*Zhit ne po lzhi*).

19 The following builds on the study: Jonson (2015a).

A counter-culture developed from within the subcultures of the arts (Jonson 2015a).

Social–political grassroots movements started appearing, such as the one against the building of a motorway through the Khimki natural park in the outskirts of Moscow. The Khimki movement had the support of people from the cultural sector.

Moves by Putin triggered the rapid growth of discontent and criticism. The announcement in September 2011 that he was to stand for president and Medvedev would withdraw raised a strong negative reaction. Opinion polls in the spring of 2011 had shown a long-term trend of falling support for both Putin and Medvedev, now the support fell further. By the autumn, when the campaign for the December elections to parliament started, critical voices against the regime filled the Internet.

The outcome of the parliamentary elections of early December resulted in protests against the manipulations and administrative interventions in the election process. In this respect the election did not differ much from previous elections but now there was a critical mass willing to voice its protest. The protest demonstrations of December 2011 and early 2012 that gathered around 100,000 people were a euphoric wave of hope that political change was possible. The demonstrators honestly believed that they could influence the political leadership to instigate reforms. When in December Medvedev promised smaller political reforms of the election system, this seemed to open a window of opportunity. In the March 2012 presidential election an independent liberal candidate participated for the first time – the oligarch Mikhail Prokhorov. He received 8 per cent of the votes in the country as a whole and more than 20 per cent in constituencies in Moscow. Even the art performance by Pussy Riot in the Moscow Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in February 2012 may be viewed as a reflection of the belief that people's protests can make a difference. Nevertheless, this very act was fully exploited by the conservatives in the offensive that followed.

All participants of the mass demonstrations of 2011 and 2012 were not liberal. They were a mix of Liberals, Leftists and Nationalists. Yet, at the core of their demands was the quest for democratic rights and freedoms. In that sense theirs was a liberal reaction.

The Conservative Reaction

A conservative reaction within Putin's United Russia Party was evident already when Medvedev announced the modernization campaign. 'Conservatism' was

written into the party program in November 2009. At the party congress the same month, Boris Gryzlov, the party leader next to Putin, claimed that 'conservatism', meaning stability, development, spirituality and patriotism, fully corresponded to the modernization that Medvedev had called for (*Izvestiya* 2009). The call for modernization might have been a reflex by the Russian top leadership fearing the consequences of the international financial crisis in early 2009. The conservative amendment to the United Russia Party program seems to have been a counter-move by people who wanted to contain the radical thought evoked by Medvedev.

Gryzlov interpreted conservatism in terms of preserving the status quo and preventing drastic and rapid social and political change. However, as Putin's and Medvedev's support was falling and criticism against them intensifying, the regime needed a more 'dynamic' conservative approach. A militant authoritarian conservatism had already been formulated within small 'critical communities' of various shades of radical and authoritarian conservative thought. Their voices would now become listened to.

Already in the 1990s Sergei Kara-Murza had formulated the ideas of a counter-offensive against the liberal paradigm of the Yeltsin regime. His book *Manipulation of the Mind* (Manipulatsiya soznaniem) was published in 2000 and was later reprinted and available electronically on the Internet (Kara-Murza 2005, 56-57). It was used in university courses and was widely disseminated. Kara-Murza was of the opinion that culture was of key sector as a battlefield of values. He believed that people of liberal ideas without both values and respect for authority and sacred symbols, had come to dominate the cultural sphere, and thereby also had the channels to manipulate people's minds. He blamed them for the breakdown of the Soviet Union and traced the ideas of perestroika back to the 1960s and the revolt at that time by the elite of the intelligentsia of the humanities against the Soviet state. With indirect reference to the novels by the Strugatskii brothers, where progressive envoys from Planet Earth were sent to change backward planets, Kara-Murza compared the liberals with such "progressors". He saw their activities as if small but well-organized army of aliens (the intelligentsia) stood against a large, peaceful population who were entirely unprepared for such confrontation.

Referring to Antonio Gramsci, Kara-Murza claimed that the intelligentsia always has a key role in formulating and spreading an ideology and thus in setting up and breaking down the hegemony of one class over another (Kara-Murza 2005, 552).[20] In Russian society a split now runs, he said, along core

20 It is ironic that Kara-Murza referred to Gramsci who is usually used in emancipatory and leftist discources.

values and norms and therefore two opposite systems of values and norms had arisen. Favouring the "Soviet project", he found liberalism and Westism to be alien to Russian thought and was against everything that he identified with the heritage of the Enlightenment of the 18th century. He thereby provided a common platform for various conservative ideas and his book was a call for a counter-offensive. It is not surprising that his name was referred to in the April 2014 document of the Ministry of Culture.

Close to the ideas of Kara-Murza were those of Alexander Prokhanov, writer and chief editor of the strongly patriotic paper *Den'* (The Day) of a pro-Soviet conservative blend. The paper had started in 1990 and later took the name *Zavtra* (Tomorrow). When towards the end of the first decade of the 2000s conservative voices were often heard on TV and radio, Prokhanov was frequently invited. Close to his ideas were those voiced by the communist nationalist Sergei Kurganyan and his Kurganyan Center, set up in 1990 and that gradually grew into a network of discussion clubs around the country.[21] These people belonged to a pro-Soviet conservatism although without the Communist ideology.

A second direction of authoritarian conservatism was reflected in the 800-page volume *Russkaya doktrina* (Russian Doctrine) (2005). This volume was an effort to formulate a Russian idea defined as "dynamic conservatism" and based on Orthodoxy, first of all. The editors were A.B. Kobyakov, V.V. Averyanov and Vladimir Kucherenko of the Center for Dynamic Conservatism, but the initiator of the project had been the young nationalist Egor Kholmogorov. The intention was to "consolidate a new generation of conservative intellectuals in Russia of various ideational nuances and directions" (Organisation website 2009). Emphasizing Russian "traditional values" based on the Russian Orthodox Church as the platform for restructuring Russia, the manifesto was a militant call for direct political action.

Presented in its first version in 2005, the main theses of the project were described by Kholmogorov as: a vision of the future of Russia; Russia as a unique civilization and a sacral nation based on its Orthodox belief and its grand history; the role of culture for the control of ideas; autocracy (samoderzhavie) as a system of concentrated state power; a national economy based on national interests instead of globalization; Russian demographic nationalism [in the sense of caring about the growth of the ethnic Russian population];[22] and the idea of Russia as a civilization of the North (Tyurenkov 2008).

21 His movement *Sut vremeni* was set up in 2011.

22 For its concrete expressions see the chapter by Rakhimova-Sommers in this volume.

The church played a key role in spreading these ideas. In September 2007 Kirill organized, when still the Metropolit of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, a roundtable discussion on Russkaya doktrina at the Orthodox International Russian Popular Assembly (Kobyakov et al. 2008). He thereby moved this volume from discussions among small groups of nationalists to broad circles of the Church, and gave it his blessing. As a result it was discussed widely at universities and in the media. Critics called it "a manifesto of a new Russian conservatism" (Krug 2009) and the journal *Ogonyok* compared it to "the manifesto of Mussolini" (Soldatov 2007). After Kirill in 2009 became the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church the ideas of the Russkaya doktrina were put forward in the anti-liberal and conservative political platform of the church. These ideas also gave inspiration to various extreme political groups. Among them was Narodnyi sobor, whose leader Oleg Kassin had been the left hand of the Russian fascist leader Barkashov of the Russian National Unity up until 2001 when the two split.

A third direction of militant conservatism was presented by Alexander Dugin's ideas of "Eurasianism". His lofty theories predicted Russia to be the future great empire of the continental Eurasian landmass in permanent conflict with the Atlantic powers led by the USA (Dugin 2000). His imperial version of state nationalism also had much to offer as an alternative to a Russian ethnic-based nationalism.

Dugin was the creator of the movements Euraziya (2000), the Eurasian Movement (2003) and the Eurasian Youth Union (2005). After 2005 his political and academic career took off: he became an adviser to the Duma, cooperated with ministers and the presidential administration, and frequently published comments in the media. In 2008 he was invited to create the Institute of Conservative Studies at the Department of Sociology of Moscow State University (MGU), where he became a Professor and set up his educational programme (Dugin website). Becoming the head of the section of sociology of international relations at the department in 2010 (until June 2014), his chances to spread his message increased tremendously (Dugin website).

However, Dugin may have been more important as a translator and introducer in the early 1990s of European interwar theorists and philosophers of authoritarian conservative thought, i.e. European theorists of the so-called conservative revolution. Among them are Julius Evola, Ernst Jünger, Oswald Spengler and Carl Schmitt. As the ideological inspirator of the conservative Underground of the early 1990s like the National Bolshevik Party,[23] Dugin socialized with people from cultural circles and spread these ideas. The intensive

23 For more about this formation see the chapter by Rogatchevski in this volume.

nihilist anarchism of Evola made a strong impact among artists and punk musicians of St Petersburg participating in the activities of the National Bolshevik Party during those years. The National Bolsheviks continued a conservative revolutionary heritage but in a mainly anarchist form. In 1998 Dugin broke away from Limonov and from the National Bolsheviks.

Carl Schmitt's ideas resonated in Russia in large part owing to Dugin's courses at the MGU on the political philosophy of Schmitt at the MGU, where numerous academic essays on Schmitt were produced. The cold realistic–pragmatic concepts and analyses by Schmitt as a critic of the constitutional democratic but weak Weimar republic of Germany in the 1920s provided the analytical tools for an analysis of Russian post-communist society and for formulating a strategy for a Russian conservative revolution. Over the period 2000-2014, 10 of Schmitt's works were published in Russian. These ideas were linked to those of the contemporary European "new right". Alain de Benoist published his book C*arl Schmitt Today* (Karl Schmitt segodnya) in Russian with a special introduction, "Carl Schmitt for Russia" (de Benua and Shmitt 2014).

In his essay from 1991 "Carl Schmitt: Five Lessons for Russia" Dugin emphasized the idea of the nation as a unique entity based on its internal spiritual and volitional laws of development. The state was looked upon as the representative of the will of the people and the popular will as a unified entity. In line with Schmitt he found everything 'political' to be related to the state and state interests were regarded to be supreme and to penetrate all issues in society. Like Schmitt Dugin was against a 'universalism' with regard to the idea that all individuals have equal rights and value and that mankind has common interests. The cornerstone in Schmitt's thinking – the emphasis on "sovereignty" in the sense of the state´s interests being supreme both within the country and internationally and his sharp distinction between the enemy (both internal and external) and the friend of the state – are emphasized by Dugin (1992). Thus, from here Surkov seems to have found inspiration for his formulations of "sovereign democracy" and "the enemy from within". The ideational heritage from radical conservative thought of the European 1920s can be found today among the United Russia Party and the Duma as exemplified by Evgenii Fedorov, a member of the United Russia Party and a Duma delegate, who in the early 2010s created the so-called Russian Liberation Movement (NOD). Fedorov represents a fourth and radical conservative direction, which can best be described as a kind of pragmatic fascism, yet without the lofty theories of Dugin's Eurasianism.

Thus, although there was a multitude of various conservative ideas and directions in Russia in the 2000s, they all shared ideas of anti-liberalism, 'anti-Westism', patriotism, belief in the mighty state, the strong leader, the authori-

tarian and hierarchical society, moral restoration, the central role of religion, and the *Sonderweg* as the national path based on the uniqueness of the nation. And they all were convinced that time was now on the side of the Conservatives.

Militant conservative ideas were institutionalized during the late 2000s when think-tanks, discussion clubs and analytical institutes were created out of previous less formal clubs and centres. These people stood by Putin when in the spring of 2011 opinion surveys revealed a drastic and long-term fall in support for him, they supported him in the creation of the conservative pro-Putin All-Russian People's Front in May 2011. They stood by him when, in his most vulnerable moment after the mass protests in December 2011, he needed manifestations of support. They organized pro-Putin mass meetings in Moscow that helped create the image of his grand comeback.[24]

In spite of all differences these groups of militant conservatism, they have a lot in common. In an effort to create a common platform for discussions between Conservatives of various brands and state representatives the Izborskii club of experts was created in September 2012.[25] The intention behind the club was to create an alternative to the Valdai Club, which they found too "liberal".

Thus, already during the 1990s conservative ideas of a revolutionary kind were formulated by small communities of intellectuals critical of the Yeltsin regime. These communities consolidated during the 2000s and their ideas spread. They did not manage to build or link to social movements. Their main contribution was instead the intellectual work of formulating a more outspoken nationalist and conservative ideology, defining concepts and inspiring

24 The pro-Putin mass-rallies were organized by the Anti-Orange Committee (Anti-oranzhevoi komitet) which was led by a coalition of various conservative forces including Sergei Kurginyan, Aleksander Prokhanov, Aleksander Dugin, Vadim Kvyatkovskii head of the patriotic movement Georgevtsii, Vyacheslav Sivko head of the fund in name of General Kocheshkov in support of heroes of the Soviet Union and Russia, Nikolai Starikov head of the movement TradeUnion of Russian Citizens, and the journalists Mikhail Leontiev, Maksim Shevchenko and Marina Yudenich. Their website <http://anti-orange.ru> no longer exists. However, their internal meeting of 22 February 2012 was filmed and can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2074&v=LIjgCMPYr2Y>.

25 Created in September 2012 the Izborskii club had among its permanent members chief editor of Zavtra Alexander Prokhanov, the head of the Institute of Dynamic Conservatism V.V. Averjanov, the presidential adviser and co-founder of the Rodina party Sergei Glaziev, the leader of the Eurasian movement Alexander Dugin, the TV journalist Mikhail Leontiev, the head of the Russian National Liberation Movement and Duma delegate for United Russia Andrei Fursov, and Arkhimandrit Tikhon (Shevkunov) the head of the Sretenskii monastery. Postoyannye chleny Izborskogo kluba. Most interesting is that in this first conference to discuss the ideological platform of the pro-Putin All-Russian People's Front also participated the new minister of culture Vladimir Medinskii.

visionary and strategic thinking. They gave food for thought to the Putin regime and offered it useful concepts. They also contributed practical, direct and organizational work in support for him at a crucial moment.

When Putin returned as president in May 2012, his political agenda was influenced by these new allies. With these ideas partly reminiscent of ideas that had dominated Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, Medinskii was correct when he wrote Putin into European history as a European Russian. Putin followed the dark authoritarian tradition of European ideas.

Political Change and the Role of Critical Communities

Putin's agenda of 2012 was not status-quo-oriented. Instead it was offensive in the sense that it was intended for inserting conservative values and marginalizing remnants of liberal thought. It was formed under the impact of revolutionary conservative ideas. Against this background, culture became a key sector for implementing change.

In discussing the factors behind Putin's conservative turn, this chapter focussed on the role played by small, critical communities for formulating new ideas and concepts. Both the conservative and liberal intellectual communities were reactions to the development of the post-Soviet political system. None of them were able to create social movements. The conservative-revolutionary communities, although unable to build social movements, were successful in gradually consolidating their position. In the end they were the most successful as their ideas were adopted by the Putin regime.

Putin acted according to the logic and mechanisms of the authoritarian Soviet system, which institutional and ideational structures were never fully deconstructed after 1991. Yet, his choice of the brand of authoritarian conservatism with its ideational links to a interwar European political heritage and to the contemporary European 'new right', can only be explained by the influence from ideas of the radical conservative communities. Their ideas were instrumental to the regime.

The protest movement of 2011-2012, which emanated from critical communities, first of all from within the cultural sphere, brought a large emancipatory potential based on values of civic rights, the rule of law, and the freedom and rights of the individual. As these ideas were transferred into embryonic social–political movements, they were articulated as liberal, liberal–conservative, leftist, anarchist, and nationalist political views. Without a common political agenda beyond the demands for free elections and the release of political prisoners, these mass protests became first of all a manifestation of a value system

in conflict with that of the Putin regime. It was neither a political opposition nor a proper social movement.

After the protest movement was repressed in 2012-2013, liberal critical communities within the cultural sphere survived, although they were diminished in size as conformism spread in society. A critical eye and an interest in social issues that had been an important trend in Russian theatre, film and art during the early 2010s remained. However, now a more wary look at the possible consequences was needed.

The Russian annexation of the Crimea in the spring of 2014 further consolidated the official conservative agenda and also resulted in a polarization of society that split families and friends. Support for Putin was secured by what Russian sociologist Lev Gudkov (2014) called "a conservative consolidation around power". Public opinion polls showed an increase in support for Putin to more than 80 per cent. That much support, Gudkov explained, is possible only when there is a feeling that the very existence and survival of the nation and the state are under threat. This feeling had spread as a result of the daily cannonade of state propaganda hammering in the message through TV, the media on which most people rely for their information and news reporting. The atmosphere was like an emergency situation in which, according to authoritarian conservative thought, the role of the leader must increase and his rights extended to decisions that may violate the norms of the regular situation. Putin's handling of the crisis in Ukraine in 2014 and 2015 seemed to follow the prescriptions of the radical conservative communities of what need to be done in a situation that they defined as an existential threat to Russia, a question of "life or death".

Against this background the 2014 proposal of state cultural policy seemed to be a logical part of the new conservative paradigm. This does not mean that the leaders of these conservative communities were offered good positions in the new government. Yet, they became part of the political establishment and their ideas were now à la mode.

Looking back it is obvious that the conservative intellectual communities were more successful than the liberal ones. None of them were able to create sustainable social movements, but the ideas of the conservative communities were picked up by the regime at a movement of desperate search of new ideas to maintain power and control over society. Some of them are now adding to a development that takes Russian policy further and further into a conservative extreme.

However, those responsible for the new state policy had probably not counted on the continued resistance from people of the cultural sphere. Moreover, they seem to have ignored the fact that cultural life in Russia is partly privately

financed and thus presently is beyond the capacity of the ministry to control. To implement a new state cultural policy according to an agenda of authoritarian conservatism may therefore turn out to be more difficult than expected in spite of the latest Conservative swing of the pendulum.

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CHAPTER 2

'Middle Continent' or 'Island Russia': Eurasianist Legacy and Vadim Tsymburskii's Revisionist Geopolitics

Igor Torbakov

Russia's reaction to Ukraine's political upheaval and in particular its Crimea gambit have raised anew the question about Russian national identity and the goals of the country's foreign policy. Moscow's brutal violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity and its defiant rhetoric with references to the ambiguous notion of *Russkii Mir* (Russian World) – a geopolitical vision that ostensibly compels the Kremlin leadership to act as protector of all "Russians and Russian-speakers" irrespective of where they live, thus placing a stronger emphasis on ethnic rather than civic understanding of Russianness – appear to mark a clear break with the policies pursued over the previous 20 odd years, when Russia's conduct seemed to be based on two main pillars: upholding international law in its foreign policy and seeking to build a civic nation of *rossiiane* in its domestic politics. But if this radical shift did indeed take place, what is it that Russia is now striving to achieve? What is its ultimate strategic objective? Do we now have a better sense of what is the nature of the supposedly "new (ethnic-based) Russian identity" and how the latter will help shape the country's international behavior?[1]

It would appear that Vladimir Putin sought to shed some light on these issues in his speech at the July 1, 2014 gathering of Russian ambassadors in Moscow (Putin 2014). Yet this attempt to clarify the situation should be regarded as a failure. What Putin's remarks actually revealed is that both Russian identity and the country's foreign policy are in flux. The only thing that was crystal clear was that Russia's resentment against the West reached a new high, but other than that Putin's address did not contain any signs of a coherent and comprehensive foreign policy strategy. Neither did it make clear, what is Russia's place in contemporary world. Likewise, the question of what Moscow is up to in its Eurasian neighborhood remains moot. On the one hand, Putin

1 For an argument advancing the thesis that recent transformation of Russian national identity has indeed led to the emergence of the new foreign policy doctrine, see Zevelev (2014); Garton Ash (2014).

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seemed to put a premium on realizing the project of ethnic solidarity with *Russkii Mir*; yet on the other, he was equally enthusiastic about pursuing the ambitious project of Eurasian integration.

However, pursuing both projects simultaneously seems impractical as their objectives are hardly compatible (Trudoliubov 2014).[2] At the heart of policy contradictions is the way the governing elites conceive of Russia's national identity. A dominant strand in their self-understanding is the vision of themselves as being simultaneously the heirs of the Russian Empire and of the Soviet Union – an outlook that, as one commentator noted, correctly, is itself rather contradictory (Pastukhov 2014). The wariness of the West, pining for "historic Russia," which is perceived as an "organic and unique civilization," and *derzhavnichestvo/velikoderzhavnost'* (extreme statism combined with great-power status)[3] are those features of the Kremlin leadership's political mindset that seem to have an affinity with some ideological constructs of classical Eurasianism. Indeed, Eurasianism appears to be all the rage in contemporary Russia (Clover 2016). "Today," one commentator notes, "during Vladimir Putin's fourth term, it is one of the best known and most frequently mentioned political movements of the [interwar] period" (Pryannikov 2014). Eurasianism, however, appears to be conceptually inadequate to help Russia's ruling elites to deal with the growing public stirring based on the ethnic understanding of Russianness (Kolstø 2016a): ever greater number of Russians want to live in a culturally homogeneous "Russian national state" and are loath to act as donors for a quasi-imperial multiethnic "Eurasian" entity.[4] To respond to the challenge presented by ethnic nationalism, the Kremlin ideologues have come up with an eclectic vision of Russian national identity that combines, in a mechanical and ad hoc manner, some Eurasianist tropes (the image of Russia as

2 Some analysts contend that the Russian leadership has already made its choice in favor of one project – that of the "gathering of Russian ethnic lands." As Tatiana Zhurzhenko argues, "the annexation of Crimea and the threat to use all means necessary, including military intervention, to protect the rights of Russians and Russian speakers in Ukraine, indicated that the Kremlin prioritizes the violent 'gathering of ethnic lands' over interstate integration" (Zhurzhenko 2014).

3 A recent policy paper stated bluntly: "Let's face it… We simply like to play an important role in the world. We should not coyly repudiate *velikoderzhavnost'*. It does exist; over 300 years of imperial history it has become deeply imbedded in the national value system" (Likhacheva & Makarov 2014, 30).

4 According to the December 2013 survey of the Levada Center, a well-respected independent pollster, 66% of respondents support the slogan "Russia for the Russians," 71% agree with the nationalist call "Stop feeding the Caucasus," and 78% want tougher regulation of migration (Dergachev 2014).

gosudarstvo-tsivilizatsiia) (Tsygankov 2016) and the elements of ethnonationalist thinking (a claim that Russians are the "state-bearing people").[5]

But what is behind the recurrence of Eurasianist imagery and are there more innovative ways of engaging Eurasianist intellectual legacy? This paper is going to discuss one such attempt at taking a new look at the body of work produced by the émigré Eurasianist thinkers which resulted in an incisive and boldly original critique of classical Eurasianism. Keeping my focus on the nexus of identity, geopolitics and foreign policy, I intend to do three things: to investigate how national identity, geopolitical imagery and international conduct are connected; to explore the reasons for the persistence of the "Eurasian visions" in present-day Russia; and to reflect on how the Eurasianist modes of thinking and theorizing space left their mark on the geopolitical constructs of some of the most sophisticated intellectual opponents of *Evraziistvo* (in particular, by examining the geopolitical views of Vadim Tsymburskii), while placing this discussion within a broader context of the debates on Russian national interest.[6]

Here I follow into the footsteps of the contemporary scholarship in the field of spatial history that seek to "interrogate a crucial characteristic of national identity – geographical territory and its symbolic meaning." Edith Clowes explains in her recent book why it is worthwhile to carry out such interrogation. "The geographical metaphors dominant in current discourse about identity," she points out, "convey the sense that *who* a Russian is depends on how one defines *where* Russia is" (Clowes 2011).[7]

My main arguments are as follows. While resurrecting the idea of "Russia-Eurasia" (as it was conceptualized by the classical Eurasianists in the 1920s) proved quite handy in post-Soviet Russia in the immediate aftermath of the Soviet Union's disintegration, this "Eurasian" orientation appears to be encountering growing opposition – particularly on the part of Russian (ethnic) nationalists. There is a tension between the "*imperial*" connotation of the notion of "Eurasia" – clearly visible in Vladimir Putin's pet project of the Eurasian Union – and the clamoring for the establishment of Russian *national* state. This tension is reflected in the apparent disconnect between Russia's foreign policy and its domestic politics. The Kremlin's strategic goal of Eurasian

5 Such eclecticism was on full display in Vladimir Putin's programmatic article "Russia: the national question" (Putin, 2012).

6 For a thoughtful discussion of the notion of national interest in Russian historical context, see (Mezhuyev, 2015; Pavlovskii 2015; Filippov 2015; Lukyanov 2015; Saradzhyan 2015; Yakovenko 2008; Pastukhov 2000; Mezhuyev 1999).

7 For a cogent analysis of the reasons for the growing appreciation of the importance of (Russian) geographical space, see Bassin et al. (2010).

integration aimed at ever closer association with the ex-Soviet countries and seeking to uphold free movement of goods, capital and people across the vast Eurasian expanse seems out of synch with the rising domestic concerns over the massive influx of "culturally alien" migrants and resultant xenophobic sentiments. The ambitious vision of Russia-led Eurasia that constitutes one of the world's main poles of power and is able to successfully compete with other poles (such as the European Union, the United States and China) and the vociferous claims to shut down Russia's borders with most of its Eurasian neighbors and toughen the country's immigration laws clearly work at cross purposes. The bold image of Russia as integrator and leader of the "Middle Continent" appears to be increasingly challenged by the more isolationist image of "Island Russia."

Debating Russian Identity

Speaking to David Remnick in the spring of 1996, Georgii Satarov, a Yeltsin advisor who would soon be charged with the task of elaborating a Russian national idea, made a revealing remark:

> When totalitarianism was being destroyed, the idea of ideology was being destroyed, too. The idea was formed that a national idea was a bad thing. But the baby was thrown out with the bath water. Our Kremlin polls show that people miss this (Remnick 1996).

More than fifteen years later, Sergei Karaganov, in an article entitled "Why Do We Need National Identity," basically echoed Satarov's old concerns:

> People were bored to death by the very notion of ideology after 70 years of communism. We hoped society would produce a new identity and ideology on its own. But this was wishful thinking. We parted with the Soviet identity, and the memory of the Great Patriotic War remained our only national idea. Nothing new was created… we still don't know what history we should associate ourselves with, whether we are an independent but peripheral part of Europe, and whether we want to become this… Even more urgent is the question of who we want to be and where we (the majority of the Russian elite and the general public) want to go (Karaganov 2013).

And recently one Moscow liberal media outlet summed it all up as follows:

> The painful transition from the defunct Soviet empire toward the new independent Russia has lasted for a long quarter century. So far, however, the search for a national identity appears to be at an impasse (Ot redaktsii 2013b).[8]

Now, how does the confusion over identity relate to Russia's international behavior?

IR scholars and political analysts have long disagreed as to what are the key drivers of Russian foreign policy, what is the latter's relationship to nationalism, and what role ideational factors play in shaping the Russian conduct. The representatives of *liberalism* would point to the crucial importance of Russia's domestic political philosophy at any given time – whatever its concrete historical content. For their part, the "*realists*" would counter by contending that, historically, Russia has almost always been a pragmatic international actor, whose conduct was largely driven by traditional concerns – above all, the matters of security and material interest – while remaining mostly unaffected by ideology or nationalist sentiment. Seeking to reconcile these opposite approaches, the third school – the *constructivists* – suggests that rather than seeing the internal and external factors as being antithetical they should be understood as being "dialectical and mediated subjectively via the policy process." Indeed, they ask, what does the notion of "national interests" actually mean? The latter, being externally projected, "are themselves always *subjectively* defined through the prism of domestic nationalism – a state can only agree on such interests if national identity itself is defined" (March 2011, 190).

The thing is, though, that more than 25 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union the post-Soviet Russia's identity is *not* clearly defined.[9] It would appear that Russia's quest for great power status and deep-seated anti-Western sentiment stemming from "a feeling of *obida* (injury) at perceived humiliation by the West" (Sherr 2009, 205) that allegedly denies Russia the coveted recognition of equal status act as the substitutes of a clear-cut self-understanding and the (emotional) basis for policy formulation. And this brings me to the classical Eurasianism and its resurrection in the 1990s.

8 For a comprehensive survey of the Russian thinkers' perspectives on the "Russian Idea," see *Natsional'naia ideia* (2012).

9 As contemporary Russian analysts note, "Russia has found itself in a rather difficult situation: since 1917, a Soviet identity was imposed on the country, while a pre-Soviet identity was systematically destroyed. Now the last remnants of Soviet identity are dying out, but a pre-Soviet identity was not brought back. In fact, it could not be brought back in its entirety" (Likhacheva & Makarov, 2014, 26; Kortunov, 2009, 5-15).

Visions of "Eurasia"

Searching for the reasons of Eurasianism's seemingly sudden reemergence following several decades of complete oblivion seems to be a no brainer. One cannot fail to notice structural similarities between the two Russian "catastrophes" – one in 1917 and the other in 1991. At the turn of the 21st century, as in the early 20th century, the ideologically disoriented mass publics lived through the collapse of the imperial state and Russia's loss of its great power status. In a situation of the radically redrawn borders Eurasianism with its creative "imagined geography" appeared just what the doctor ordered.[10] Yet probably no less important was the psychological and emotional atmosphere that these geopolitical cataclysms produced in their wake. "After all," notes Roger Griffin writing about the first of these cataclysms that erupted in the late 1910s, "this was a period when not just the political and economic, but the psychological and spiritual foundations of modern life were regularly shaken by seismic aftershocks following the collective trauma of the First World War"(Griffin 2011, 21). Remarkably, the Eurasianists' older contemporaries Nikolai Berdyaev and Vasily Zen'kovsky (both fellow émigrés) placed a special emphasis on the Eurasianist "catastrophic worldview" and the movement's psychological underpinning. "Eurasianism is first of all an *emotional*, not an intellectual movement," Berdyaev contended. "Its emotion is a reaction of creative national and religious instincts to the catastrophe we endured" (Berdyaev 1925, 134). For his part, Zen'kovsky asserted that "Not ideology, but *psychology*, is essential and influential in Eurasianism" (Zen'kovsky 1953, 106). Georgii Florovskii, one of Eurasianism's founding fathers and one of the first critics of the movement, also contended that Eurasianist theorizing was largely driven by strong emotions. "In Eurasian patriotism," he wrote, "one can hear only the voice of blood and the voice of passion, wild and intoxicating" (Florovskii 1928, 312). Psychology and emotions have undoubtedly played no small role in shaping the mindset of post-Soviet Russians, many of whom could not fail to immediately recognize the Eurasianists of the 1920s as their spiritual soul brothers. Thus there seems to be an interesting parallel between the Eurasianists' acute

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10 It would seem that an interesting parallel can be drawn between the resurrection of Eurasianism in the 1990s Russia and the fascination with geopolitics in the 1920s Germany. "The catastrophic trauma of the world war and the wrenching transformations it produced in German society and Germany's international position," one scholar argues, "fed a new fascination with the role of geography in precipitating the tragedy" (Murphy 1997, 1). For a broader comparison between Weimar Germany and "Weimar Russia," see (Starovoitova 1993; Yanov 1995; Hanson & Kopstein 1997; Shenfield 1998; Kopstein & Hanson 1998; Luks 2008).

dislike – if not outright hatred – of the West and the present-day Russian elites' deep *ressentiment* towards the leading Western powers, in particular the United States (Medvedev 2014).[11]

However, one should not underestimate the complexity and richness of the Eurasianist ideas. There are several important dimensions or facets of the classical Eurasianism: *geographical/geopolitical* ("Eurasia" conceived as a self-contained "Middle Continent," a unique civilization, and the "world onto itself"); *historical* ("Russia-Eurasia" as a state entity born out of the slow unraveling of the "Mongol Commonwealth"); *imperial* ("Eurasia" as a synthetic culture and polity created by the brotherly Eurasian peoples); *national* ("Eurasia" as a natural *mestorazvitie* [developmental space] of the Russian people and the arena of the future triumph of Orthodoxy); and *political* (Eurasia" as an illiberal polity ruled by a powerful idea with the governing elite regarding themselves as its custodians ("ideocracy")).

Thus, Eurasianism can be variously presented as a specific *type of Russian nationalism* (the only "true" nationalism as opposed to the multitude of false ones); a *conservative ideology* (that would critique European liberal values); or as a *modernist /anti-colonial movement* (that resurrected the discourse of 19th century Romanticism and adapted it to contemporary conditions) (Glebov 2010; Laruelle 2008; Shlapentokh 2007b; Wiederkehr 2007; Vinkovetsky 2000).

To get a better handle on the complexity (and ambiguity!) of the Eurasianist "system," its emergence and evolution should be contextualized (Torbakov 2015a; Luks 2009; Bassin 2003). The classical Eurasianism has emerged within a specific historical context: the movement was mostly shaped by the upheavals of the 1917 Revolution, the unraveling of Russia's multiethnic empire and its eventual reassembling – in a radically different guise – by the victorious Bolsheviks. Thus, Russian imperial entanglements, the relationship between nationalism/nationalisms and the reality of empire were at the heart of the Eurasianist discourse. Its linchpin has been a powerful image of "Russia-Eurasia": by advancing this image, the Eurasianists attempted to merge empire and nation, to craft – through a notion of "Pan-Eurasian nationalism" – an overarching "Eurasian" identity, whereby its subject will be diluted in a

11 Notably, Sergei Karaganov hailed the seizure of Crimea not least because with this move "Russia has put a limit to a nearly quarter century-long creeping military as well as political and economic expansion [by the West] into the spheres of its vitally important interests – in fact, the Versailles policy "in a velvet glove" – that spawned humiliation and the desire for revenge among the substantial part of the country's elites and mass publics." The annexation of Crimea (or in Karaganov's wording, its "unification with Russia") "provided a serious treatment against [Russia's] Weimar syndrome caused by Western policy." (Karaganov, 2014).

supranational construct. It was a desperate and intellectually audacious attempt, as some students of the classical Eurasianism nicely put it, "to save the empire through its negation" (Riasanovsky 1967; Glebov 2003).

Yet this powerful image contained a paradox or a crucial contradiction that Eurasianism was never able to resolve. This paradox was noticed and critically analyzed already in the 1920s by two perceptive observers (and one-time Eurasianists) Petr Bitsilli and Georgii Florovskii (Bitsilli 1927; Florovskii 1928). In fact, the image of "Russia-Eurasia" contained not one but *two* national and political projects, seemingly working at cross purposes. (These were "two facets" of Eurasianism, according to Bitsilli, "viable each in its own way" and aimed at the "ideal of Orthodox Rus'" and at the concept of the "federation of territories and peoples," respectively.)

Indeed, one was the vision of "Eurasia" as a multiethnic community, a synthetic culture created by the Eurasian peoples united by common space (the system of interwoven *mestorazvitiya* [spaces of development][12]) and their common destiny. The other vision, however, was quite different. All leading Eurasianists were deeply religious people and viewed Orthodoxy as the central factor of Russian cultural life and as the crucial spiritual resource for Russia's moral rebirth in the aftermath of the revolutionary turmoil. For them, Orthodoxy was what created Russia's ethnic/civilizational distinctiveness in the first place and gave Russians superior moral authority. Based on this perspective, "Russia-Eurasia" acquired a new meaning: as an "individuation" of Russian Orthodoxy that would ultimately nurture the culture of the *entire* Eurasian continent. To make such a fanciful prospect look viable, the Eurasianists came up with a flimsy concept of "potential Orthodoxy" whereby the diverse peoples of Eurasia (whether pagan, Buddhist or Islamic) are cast as "potentially Orthodox."

Thus, we have, on the one hand, a seemingly pragmatic project of the national-federal organization of the Eurasian space (with its specific ideocratic axis of Pan-Eurasian nationalism) and, on the other, a clear manifestation of Orthodox universalism (based, naturally, on a different type of ideocracy). The two could not, and did not, mesh well. (Notably, Florovskii and Bitsilli each have chosen one image of "Russia-Eurasia" and rejected the other. Predictably, Florovskii opted for Holy Rus', while Bitsilli for the Eurasian federalist vision.)

Indeed, recent scholarship on Eurasianism demonstrated that, all their flirting with "multiculturalism" notwithstanding, the Eurasianists ultimately failed to supplant Russian nationalism with a more inclusive national identity (Glebov 2008). At the end of the day, all their attempts to rethink national identity

12 For a good analysis of the concept of *mestorazvitie*, see Bassin (2010).

aimed at overcoming ethnic exclusivity have yielded to their strongest desire: to preserve at all costs "historic Russia" – the Russian empire – even if under the different name.

The Eurasianist Imagery and the Dilemmas of Russian Foreign Policy

The Soviet Union's collapse – a massive geopolitical cataclysm that led, among other things, to the loss of empire, ideological vacuum, and an acute identity crisis – gave Eurasianism a new lease on life in post-Soviet Russia. Ever since the early 1990s there goes on a lively debate on to what extent the assumptions, arguments and images that are part of Eurasianist discourse shape contemporary Russia's self-understanding and play a role in foreign policy formulation. Some analysts contend that for present-day Russia Eurasianism is a strategic dead end, and that we are currently witnessing "the end of Eurasia" (Trenin 2002). Others argue the opposite, maintaining that Eurasianism represents post-Soviet Russia's principal ideology and the intellectual wellspring of its foreign policy strategy (Lane 2014; Barbashin & Thoburn 2014; Chaudet et al. 2009). But the discussion of whether Putin is or is not a diehard Eurasianist (he is definitely not[13]) is largely beside the point. What really matters is that Eurasianism has introduced a new paradigm and a new vocabulary which enables new possibilities for (re)imagining history and geographical space. By virtue of being sufficiently vague and impressionistic, Eurasianist doctrine is very flexible, conceptually as well as discursively. It is precisely the intellectual richness and conceptual ambiguities inherent in the Eurasianist canon that encourage policymakers to draw upon it in the process of crafting and implementing Russia's strategy. "Eurasia" is being used, as Graham Smith put it, as "a protean mask" for legitimating various stances on foreign policy (Smith 1999).

Casting Russia as a non-Western great power, supporting the notion of "multipolarity," rejecting the Western hegemonic discourse of "universal values," upholding the "civilizational" approach and championing the vision of the world as one consisting of "civilizational blocs"(Tsygankov 2017) – which includes Putin's vision of an emerging Eurasian Union (Lukin 2014b) – are just

13 It gradually dawned even on Aleksandr Dugin, one of the most ardent supporters of Russian president's recent policies, that Putin's approach to nationalism is essentially a very pragmatic and instrumentalist one. "Before, we could have an illusion that Putin himself is a Eurasian patriot, a defender of Orthodox identity," Dugin said. "His hesitation now [to invade Ukraine] is a sign that he has followed this line by some pragmatic calculations, by some realistic understanding of the politics" (Sonne 2014).

cases in point. Russia's recent programmatic documents provide a good snapshot of the governing elite's strategic thinking. It is the firm conviction of the Russian leadership that the main essence of the current period of global history lies in the "consistent development of multipolarity." The main building blocks of what Russian strategists call the "new international architecture" are regional integration associations. It is noteworthy that the "regionalist trend" is given a clear civilizational connotation (Lukin 2014a). It is asserted that under the current conditions the significance of "civilizational identity" is being enhanced – a factor that in its turn prompts the world's leading powers to form "various civilizational blocs" (MID RF 2013; Lavrov 2013).

Russia's top politicians have long argued for closer integration between Russia and several other post-Soviet countries – a process that should ultimately lead to the formation of the "Eurasian Union." From Moscow's standpoint, the vision of the emerging Eurasian Union is strategically very important. According to the Kremlin's geopolitical outlook, Russia can successfully compete globally with the United States, China or the European Union only if it acts as a leader of the regional bloc. By bringing Russia and its ex-Soviet neighbors into a closely integrated community of states, Russian strategists contend, would allow this Eurasian association to become one of the major centers of power that would participate on par with other such centers in global and regional governance.[14]

Russia's entire Ukraine debacle is the direct result of the Kremlin being hell bent on bringing Kyiv into the Eurasian fold and on preventing the West from getting a "strategic bridgehead" on the territory of *Russkii Mir*. "Some sort of [Western-sponsored] geopolitical project was formed that started on Maidan," Russian foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov asserted. "This is really a geopolitical project with the intent of taking over the Ukrainian geopolitical space, and doing so at the expense of Russia's interests, at the expense of the Russian and Russian-speaking population of Ukraine itself" (Lavrov 2014). In Moscow, Ukraine has long been seen as a lynchpin of Putin's pet project of the Eurasian Union. Indeed, historically – in Russia's 1910s debates on empire and nation, in the immediate aftermath of the 1917 upheaval and again following the 1991 Soviet disintegration, as well as in today's discussion of the Eurasian integration – Ukraine has been perceived by Russia's rulers as an absolutely pivotal state. Without 40 million plus Ukrainians who would associate themselves with Russia-Eurasia (or, in Putin's preferred term, Russian "state-civilization") there could be no "Eurasia" as a geopolitical reality (a crucial "Euro" element will be

14 For a representative collection of Russian perspectives on Eurasian integration, see Liik (2014).

missing) and no Staatsvolk – the Greater Russian nation comprising also the other Eastern Slavs (Ukrainians and Belorusians) – to effectively rule these vast expanses. Note that in all his recent speeches Putin reiterated that Russians and Ukrainians are one people – the backbone of the broader "Russian World."[15] The latter notion was specifically designed to supplement the concept of the "Eurasian Union," with the emotive imagery of *Russkii Mir* seemingly amplifying an ethno-cultural dimension of Moscow's geostrategic blueprint (Laruelle 2015). Here, however, we have yet another example of the Kremlin trademark ideological ambivalence. Russian leadership tends to play the nationalist card very cautiously and with only one goal in mind: to perpetuate their stay in power. Thus Russia-sponsored *Russkii Mir*, as some astute analysts argue, is not so much a transnational "community of ethnic Russians or societies committed to Russian culture" as, indeed, a specific "civilization" – an "unwesternizable" and "unmodernizable" one that is based on distinctly "un-Western" principles: "disdain for liberal democracy, suppression of human rights, and undermining the rule of law" (Shekhovtsov 2014; Inozemtsev 2014). Whoever shares such a philosophical outlook belongs to *Russkii Mir* and is also a prospective member of the "Eurasian Union" as this association represents, in the words of one pro-Kremlin ideologue, an explicitly "non-Western model." "The culture and values of many former Soviet republics," Aleksandr Lukin asserts, "really do differ from what prevails in the West," (Lukin, 2014b) whose dominant "ideology of secular liberalism… will meet with increasing resistance and aversion" (Lukin 2014a).

Yet the Kremlin-led drive towards Eurasian integration is counterbalanced by the trend towards disengagement that reflects the profound shift in Russian public attitudes. In the minds of the growing numbers of Russians, millions of labor migrants (mostly from the Caucasus and Central Asia) working in the large Russian cities came to be increasingly associated with drug smuggling, other types of criminal offense, and violence. Migration is a complex phenomenon across the board, and it plays a particularly controversial role in the relations between Russia and ex-Soviet nations. On the one hand, migration provides one of the strongest links connecting the Russian society with those in post-Soviet Eurasia. But on the other hand, it acts as a major irritant,

15 The idea that Ukraine is absolutely central to Russia's self-understanding is wide-spread among Russian policy elites. "Strictly speaking, the very notion 'Russia' is not applicable to the new state formation [the Russian Federation] since Russia emerged as a result of the unification of all formerly Russian lands. Without Ukraine and Belarus, Russia ceases to be Russia in the strict sense of this word," argued Sergei Kortunov. Thus, he concluded, "the idea of Russianness is forever tied up with the Kievan roots and Kievan sources of Russian national statehood" (Kortunov 2009, 273).

fostering alienation and enmity between different ethnic communities and giving a boost to Russian nationalist sentiment and xenophobia.[16] It is noteworthy, however, that the social forces engaged in the critique of migration are much broader than the pockets of Russian skinheads. In fact, the discussion of the migration's impact on Russian society is increasingly becoming an important element of the discourses of Russian foreign policy and of Russian identity.

Domestic critics of the Kremlin strategy point out its compensatory, "quasi-imperial" function. Instead of resolutely rethinking Russia as a nation-state and sorting out the country's "true" national interest, Moscow continues to be mired in the ambiguous phase of "postimperium" – still desperate to assert its regional privilege and attain great power status. Yet the "Eurasian integration" that results in "swamping" Russia with millions of laborers from Central Asia and the Caucasus is precisely what prevents Russia from transcending the "post-imperial" stage and finally forming a non-imperial identity, critics of the Kremlin policies contend. While radical demographic changes that the massive migration is bringing in its wake make the task of building the Russian nation ever more difficult, the "Eurasian" geopolitical orientation distracts Russia from what some critics consider as the country's "true historical task" – building *Russian* civilization. Thus, one Russian analyst notes, "domestic considerations dictate the need to control, contain, erect protective barriers and detach from the region, with which Russian society no longer feels a cultural continuity" (Matveeva 2012).

Vadim Tsymburskii's Geopolitics

Remarkably, such an isolationist perspective – or, as one commentator put it, a "Russia First" approach (Matveeva 2012) – could well be the result of a quite different reading of the Eurasianist canon. A body of work produced by the late Russian geopolitician Vadim Tsymburskii (1957-2009) is an interesting example in this regard.[17] While Putin has famously characterized the Soviet Union's collapse as "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe" of our epoch, for Tsym-

16 Sociological surveys register the steady growth of the number of Russians who believe that the "settling in Russia of the representatives of other nationalities" constitutes the main threat for the country (Ot redaktsii 2013a). A recent poll by the Levada Center found that 84% of respondents support the introduction of a visa regime for citizens from Central Asia and the South Caucasus (Ot redaktsii 2013c).

17 For a good general overview of Tsymburskii's (geo)political thinking, see Mezhuyev (2012); Mezhuyev (2017); Tsygankov (2015); Khatuntsev (2015).

burskii, the same event was a blessing in disguise. "Russia enters a very promising epoch" – such was a sentence that concluded what has proved to be his most celebrated piece – the 1993 essay *Island Russia* (Tsymburskii 2007a, 27). Already in the early 1990s, during the first years of post-Soviet Russia's "infancy," he said elsewhere, "I acutely realized that this shrunken Russia is my country in which I want to live" (Tsymburskii 2009, 102).

Tsymburskii had a very complex intellectual relationship with Eurasianism (Vakhitov 2015): there have been both a sharp critique and multiple borrowings. Unlike Aleksandr Dugin, who appeared to have upheld one "facet" of the classical Eurasiansim – the metaphysical one – and who continues musing on the sacred "Heartland Russia" and the "Orthodox Empire,"[18] Tsymburskii offered a much more innovative reinterpretation of Eurasianism.[19] Two developments – the disintegration of the Soviet empire and Russia's embracing of modernity in the course of the 20th century (even if in an alternative form) that also included secularization – have opened up the way for getting rid of Eurasianism's most outdated aspects and for suggesting what Tsymburskii called a "secular geopolitical project."

In a nutshell, this project looks as follows. The Soviet Union's unraveling revealed a "core Russia" whose geographical contours strikingly coincide with those of 17th century Muscovy after it absorbed Siberia – the move that Tsymburskii deemed absolutely central for Russia's identity formation. It is not fortuitous that the 16th-17th centuries also saw the emergence of Russia as a distinct civilization – the rise of the "unique humankind on its own soil." (As Tsymburskii asserted, this distinct Russian civilization arose when the Russians came to understand that "*We* are the unique humankind, and *they* are a source of all our problems.")

Russia is *not* Eurasia. But Eurasia does exist: it comprises a long arc of the so called "stream-territories" stretching from the Baltics in the West to Manchuria in the East and including the New Eastern Europe of Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova; South Caucasus, and Central Asia. These "stream-territories" separate Russia from the other major "civilizational platforms" – European (Romano-German) in the West, Islamic (Arab-Persian) in the South, and Sinic (Chinese) in the South-East. It is this arc of the Great Periphery (or Great Limitrophe) containing, in Tsymburskii's words, "the peoples [squeezed] between civilizations" – i.e. those who failed to form distinct civilizations of their own

18 On Dugin's geopolitics, see (Umland 2012; Shekhovtsov & Umland 2009; Shlapentokh 2007a; Ingram 2001). For an analysis that counterposes Dugin's and Tsymburskii's geopolitical concepts, see Morozova (2009).

19 For Tsymburskii's critique of Dugin's geopolitical theorizing, see Tsymburskii (2007e).

(Tsymburskii 2007b) – that constitutes the Eurasia of today. Conceptualized in this way, Russia comes out not as a "Continent-Ocean" of the classical Eurasianism, but rather as the "Island Russia" surrounded by the long band of the Great Periphery.

Tsymburskii deployed this model and his "Island" metaphor for revisiting Russia's imperial history of the 18th – 20th centuries whose central content, he argued, was a whole series of "kidnapping of Europe." At the very beginning of its imperial period in the early 18th century Russia committed a mortal sin, having imagined itself as part of Europe. This unfortunate imagining led to its entanglement in the politics of the core European peoples (Romano-Germans) – mainly through its projecting power onto the European civilizational platform and taking part in European geopolitical contests. To be able to project power it had to absorb and incorporate the "stream territories" separating it from Europe. This development, in its turn, led to the gradual diluting of Russia's own civilizational foundation as it opened its doors to the mass of people who "were [culturally] alien and who had no clue about Russia's civilizational interests and principles." With the Soviet Union's breakup, the ensuing distancing from Europe and the reemergence of the Great Periphery shielding Russia from all sides, the "exuberant *pseudomorphosis* of its imperial age" – here Tsymburskii borrows Oswald Spengler's term – has finally ended, and Russia can now safely repair to its Island. "Russia is leaving the 'stream-territories' and returning to 'its own turf,' to 'its Island,' while restoring maximal distance from the other Euro-Asian ethno-civilizational platforms" (Tsymburskii 2007a, 22).

Having defined *what* Russia is through determining *where* it is, Tsymburskii spelled out his understanding of Russian national interest and unveiled his strategic blueprint for Russia's domestic politics and foreign policy. Internally, he argued, Russia faces a two-pronged task: finalizing Russia's modernization (building a "solid urban culture"), and revitalizing Russia's core areas, above all Siberia. This task could be achieved through: 1) the strengthening of internal market, 2) the technological renovation spurred by spiritual revival, and 3) the strict control the people would exercise over the elites – the "moral enserfment of the elites," as he put it.

Externally, Russia should: 1) eschew any global commitments, try to stay away from the clash between the West and the Rest, and take care only of those who voluntarily associate with it; 2) support U.S.-dominated "one-and-a-half-polar world," while seeking to frustrate any attempts to establish a full-blown Pax Americana; and 3) control the Great Periphery around Russia, preventing any other major power from establishing its strategic dominance there.

While there are clear divergences between Tsymburskii's ideas and the classical Eurasianists' outlook, there are also significant similarities:

- Fascination with Russia's 16th-17th-centuries Muscovite period. (Tsymburskii repeatedly called monk Filofei – the author of the famous letter addressed to the Great Prince Vasily III that had characterized Moscow as the "Third Rome" – "my dear Filofei" and "my hero.")
- Civilizational approach, the understanding of "Island Russia" as a largely self-contained world, as well as the acute anti-Europeanism.
- Similar to Eurasianists, Tsymburskii has advanced his own "Exodus to the East" – stressing the outmost importance of Russia's "own Orient" – Siberia and the Far East. (In fact, he repeatedly suggested moving Russia's capital to Novosibirsk in Western Siberia (Tsymburskii 2007c).
- Not unlike classical Eurasianists, Tsymburskii was not only concerned with Russia's "own Orient" which has to be integrated into imperial/federal space, but also with Russia's "internal West" – the westernized intelligentsia, who has yet to undergo a kind of "mental revolution" eventually compelling it to renounce pernicious Westernism.[20]

Basically, Tsymburskii's relationship with Eurasianism can be summed up as follows: the historical process has irrevocably resolved those paradoxes and dilemmas in the Eurasianist "system" that Eurasianists themselves failed to reconcile. The empire is no more, the vicious cycle of Russia's serial "kidnapping of Europe" appeared to have run its course, and Russia is now firmly ensconced on its Island thus reclaiming its true geopolitical niche that it took up back in the 17th century – at the moment it first realized that it constituted a distinct civilization. So the task is to approach the Eurasianist ideas creatively, discard what is clearly passé, and draw instead on the new vocabulary opening up new ways for imagining space that the classical Eurasianism introduced. And that is precisely what Tsymburskii did.

20 As Russian radical nationalists see it, the problem of Russia's "internal West" has become more acute following the Ukraine crisis and growing tensions between Moscow and the Western world. Some nationalist writers demand immediate and "serious rotation of political elites," referring to what they call "internal Donbas" – a community of "true Russian patriots" who helped the insurgents in eastern Ukraine to establish a secessionist enclave – as the agent of positive change. "The next generation of Russian citizens will be living in a situation of permanent confrontation between 'internal Donbas' and 'internal West,'" contends the nationalist commentator Yegor Kholmogorov (Kholmogorov 2014).

Conclusion

In conclusion, several remarks on the relationship between Tsymburskii's geopolitical ideas and the evolution of Russian nationalism will be in order. Tsymburskii was eagerly taken on board by the so called "new wave" of Russian nationalists (in particular, by the group that styled itself as the Young Conservatives led by Mikhail Remizov and Boris Mezhuyev in the mid-2000s) with whom he rubbed shoulders until his untimely death in 2009. His geopolitical thinking has had a significant influence on their discourse of Russian nationalism (Torbakov 2015b).

As the Young Conservatives' leading ideologues see it, contemporary Russian nationalism finds itself in a difficult situation: it has to wage war on "two fronts" – against the advancing "empire" of the global world order *and* against the phantom of Russia's defunct empire (Remizov 2012). The thing is that the antinomy of "national idea vs. empire" (as basically constituting two different principles of legitimating power) has long defined the very content of Russian historical consciousness and until very recently appeared irreconcilable. It seemed intractable not only as a subject of controversy within the Russian conservative nobility who were keen on preserving both the empire and the social hierarchy of the Russian *Ständegesellschaft*, but also as an internal dilemma of early modern Russian nationalism itself. All Russian discourse on nationalism from the Decembrists to Petr Struve to Alexander Solzhenitsyn testified to this (Wortman 2001; Wortman 2013).

Yet history itself resolved this dilemma for Russian nationalists. First, the empire has disintegrated. Second, Russia simply lacks resources for the legitimation of imperial/supranational power – as both dynastic and "ideocratic" principles are missing. Finally, following the Soviet Union's implosion, Russia has been profoundly reconfigured geographically: having shed its imperial dominions, Russia has shrunk down to what Tsymburskii called "its pre-imperial cultural and geographical core with solid and absolute Russian [ethnic] majority" (Tsymburskii 2007a).

These developments have radically changed the correlation between "national" and "imperial" projects in Russian history. In the past, argues Mikhail Remizov, Russian nationalism has served as a kind of "reserve historical project" for Russia and Russian people: it coyly manifested itself at some turning points of the country's history but was in no position to seriously challenge the imperial mainstream. But now there is no imperial project that could be an alternative to the national project. What remained are only the imperial phantom pains (Remizov 2012).

Like Tsymburskii, the Young Conservatives believe that the main obstacle that prevents Russian nationalism from becoming triumphant is the lack of national-minded elites who would uphold common good and true national interest (Est li u Rossii natsionalnaia elita 2010). At best, present-day Russia is run by a tiny clique, which, driven by the instinct of self-preservation, understand that to perpetuate their elite status they have, at a minimum, to "preserve the state within its current borders." But as for the "big ideas," there are none. It is not surprising, however. Tsymburskii himself once labeled the current political regime as the "Great Russia Utilization Inc."[21] Yet the new elites that would supplant today's "anti-national" ruling group are likely to emerge in the process of political struggle between Russian nationalists of various political leanings. "Nationalism," Stanislav Belkovskii notes, "is the greatest hidden and suppressed energy in Russia" (Quoted in Galimova 2014). Nationalist paradigm, some of Russia's most astute analysts contend, has become the main framework within which the country's political development will be taking place. From now on, political battles will be fought not between liberals and *derzhavniki* but between nationalist liberals and nationalist *derzhavniki*, between Russian right-wing nationalists and left-wing nationalists (Pain 2013).

Whatever the differences between these two camps, both share a rather dim view of "Eurasian integration." True, the ongoing Ukraine crisis and Moscow's aggressive response to it produced multiple and contradictory reactions on the part of Russia's nationalist milieu (Kolstø 2016b). Some segments of ethnic and civic nationalists appear to be greatly impressed by the manifestation of "people's power" in Ukraine and seek to distance themselves from the Kremlin's vicious anti-Ukrainian propaganda campaign and its reckless military adventures. While supporting the need to safeguard political and cultural rights for the Russians in Ukraine, some Russian nationalists note Putin's hypocrisy: the Kremlin leader's sudden concern with the issue of self-determination of the Russian-speakers in Ukraine seems to contradict his intent to suppress any genuine political competition within Russia itself. At the same time, the annexation of Crimea was enthusiastically supported by both "imperialists" and the bulk of ethnonationalists – albeit for different reasons: while the former see the move as a step towards the rebuilding of the empire, the latter back it as an example of the successful Russian ethnic irredentism.[22] However, most

21 "What kind of political regime do we have? What are its main characteristics?" Tsymburskii asked. He suggested that it resembled a closed join-stock company. "The administrative bodies of this closed join-stock company are busy utilizing imperial assets within the borders of the Russian Federation" (Tsymburskii 2002).

22 Although the seizure of Crimea did cause a steep spike in nationalist sentiment, most analysts argue that "patriotic euphoria" will not last long. According to Belkovsky, "the

Russian ethnic and civic nationalists seem to agree that to try to prevent further social degradation of Central Asian societies is senseless, to seek alliance with them against the backdrop of the deepening of negative social trends in those countries is counter-productive, and that to pursue integration and form association with what are in essence "nationalizing states" pushing against all things Russian is simply immoral (Inozemtsev 2013). Such a stance prescribing restraint and disengagement appears to be in full agreement with an early warning uttered by Tsymburskii more than two decades ago. "Of all possible temptations that Russia may face today," he wrote presciently in 1994, "the most dangerous ones, I believe, are the lures of the "Third Rome" idea,[23] of the "gathering of the [Russian] lands," and of the "integration of [post] Soviet space" (Tsymburskii 2007d, 33).

Although Tsymburskii was not a liberal thinker, his geopolitics helped shape the views also of some of Russia's prominent liberal-minded analysts such as Dmitri Trenin. In his *Postimperium*, Trenin characterized Tsymburskii as "one of the most original and deep contemporary Russian thinkers" and appeared to agree with him that Russia is indeed a kind of "island in the Eurasian ocean." He also shares Tsymburskii's idea that the territorial contraction of "historic Russia" could be a good thing after all as it would stimulate an alternative to the country's traditional imperial path of development. The emergence of the post-imperial rather than the neo-imperial Russia – a Russia "which the world has never seen before," notes Trenin, – would mark a radical change in the country's conduct: it would stop expanding outwards and start focusing its gaze inwards (Trenin 2012, 67; Trenin 2011). As Russia is facing isolation due to growing tensions with the West, this inward-looking trend is likely to strengthen and can even prove to be a blessing in disguise. "Russia may use the growing isolation from the West as a stimulus to address its glaring weaknesses, starting with education, science and technology," Trenin argues. "If it manages to survive the isolation, stand its ground and improve its ways, it will gain enough self-confidence to back up its great-power ambitions" (Trenin 2014b).

Being sharply critical of the Kremlin concept of the "Russian World" – an ideological construct with an obvious neo-imperial strand – liberal nationalists suggest a new bold "Russian" policy that appears to be in tune with Tsymburskii's thinking. Russian interests will be much better served, they argue, if

Crimean events channeled it [nationalist energy] into the pro-Kremlin direction, but this cannot continue ad infinitum" (Quoted in Galimova 2014).

23 While Tsymburskii very much sympathized with monk Filofei's 17th-century vision of Russia as the Third Rome, which was essentially defensive and isolationist – an Orthodox Island in the Sea of apostasy – he was very critical of 19th-century interpretations of this idea that were largely messianic and expansionist.

instead of trying to "integrate" former Soviet borderlands or seeking to establish control over them through maintaining "managed instability" on their territory, Moscow will craft a smart repatriation policy. Mass resettlement from ex-Soviet republics into Russia of Russians, Russian-speakers and whoever associate themselves with Russian culture, the argument goes, will be hugely beneficial both economically and politically. National economy will receive a badly needed dynamic and high-skilled workforce, while simultaneously diminishing its reliance on the millions of semi-literate Central Asian migrants who are deemed by many Russians to be culturally alien. So the guiding principle of the liberal-nationalist version of *Russkii Mir* is this: "rather than gathering further lands, Moscow needs to gather people" (Trenin 2014a; Inozemtsev 2014).

On balance, for the majority of Russians today, "Island Russia" appears to be a more appealing image as well as a more effective geopolitical metaphor than that of "Middle Continent-Eurasia."[24] Yet the very production of these diverse images seems to involve an intense engagement with the Eurasianist canon. This should come as no surprise: like the 1920s émigré intellectuals, contemporary Russian thinkers are confronted with the same formidable task – how to forge a Russian identity that would be both culturally inclusive *and* non-imperial. Ultimately, Russia's international conduct will be influenced by how this dilemma is eventually resolved.

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24 These preferences seem to be reflected in the recent publication in Russia's leading foreign policy journal of an article penned by one Russian senior diplomat. The piece is entitled "Island Russia." Curiously, the author didn't refer to Tsymburskii and his geopolitical ideas even once (although he mentions the novel "Island Crimea" by Vasily Aksyonov), but the article's arguments are quite similar to Tsymburskii's. The most important common feature is the "idea of an 'Island' as a solid monolithic structure in the midst of the tempestuous ocean of [global] changes" (Spassky 2011).

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CHAPTER 3

Eduard Limonov's National Bolshevik Party and the Nazi Legacy: Titular Nations vs Ethnic Minorities

Andrei Rogatchevski

Background

The National Bolshevik Party (Natsional-bol'shevistskaia partiia, or NBP), founded by the writers Aleksandr Dugin and Eduard Limonov as 'the most left-wing among the right-wing parties and the most right-wing among the left-wing parties' (Limonov 1996a),[1] is one of the most interesting (although highly controversial) phenomena in Russia's recent political history. The NBP burst onto the Russian political scene in the early 1990s with self-styled 'legislative initiatives', such as establishing an institute of Russian sheriffs (empowered to shoot first, without warning, and to deliver the culprit dead or alive) and broadcasting executions of Russian criminals on television.[2] The party members threw tomatoes at the NATO Secretary General in 2002 (in protest against the NATO expansion), and mayonnaise at the Chairman of Russia's Central Electoral Commission in 2003 (to attract public attention to the issue of unfair general elections). They also attacked and unlawfully occupied the premises of various Russian ministries and major companies in 2004-06, as a sign of opposition to their unpopular policies. This led to harassment by the police and security services, a number of high-profile court trials, and ultimately the party's ban in 2007, at a point when it reportedly had some 57 000 members, many of them very young, in more than 50 regional party branches in Russia and abroad (including Belarus, the Czech Republic and Canada). Yet Limonov and many of his associates have remained active in politics. Now that Limonovites are successfully forming the so-called InterBrigades to supply military and humanitarian aid to the breakaway republics in Eastern Ukraine,[3] it is perhaps an

1 Translations are mine, unless indicated otherwise.

2 For a detailed account of the NBP's activities on the verge of the new millennium, see Rogatchevski (2007).

3 Between May 2014 and April 2015, over 1,500 people joined the republics' armed forces with the InterBrigades' assistance. The Brigades' title is obviously meant to suggest parallels with the Spanish Civil War. For more details, see <https://vk.com/interbrigada> (accessed April 29, 2017).

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opportune time to engage in an in-depth study of various aspects of the NBP's activities, as its influence on the Russian (and Russia's neighbours') affairs is likely to grow.

Is the NBP a Neo-Nazi Party?

These days, the NBP (or rather its successor, the Other Russia <Drugaia Rossiia> party[4]) often positions itself as an organization that puts human rights and care for the socially and economically disadvantaged segments of the population at the very core of its political platform. On the other hand, the media often portray the NBP as a party of nationalist extremists who would stop at nothing to promote their racially discriminatory agenda. Ever since its inception, the NBP has been linked to an ideology forged and promoted by the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) in 1919-45. Is the NBP really a new face of Russian Fascism?[5]

There are similarities between the NSDAP's and the NBP's (early) party insignia (cf. their party flags:),

4 For the party's website, see <http://www.drugros.ru/> (accessed April 29, 2017).

5 Hereafter, to follow a common Russian practice of substituting *fashizm* as a generic term for Nazism, both terms will be used synonymously.

anthems (at least one of several NBP anthems was reportedly in part inspired by the Horst Wessel Lied, see Limonov 1998, 450) and vocabulary (e.g. the use of *Parteigenosse* and *Gauleiter*, when addressing fellow NBP members and regional party leaders).[6] These similarities are not coincidental. The NBP leaders consciously and constantly invoked Nazism, because, according to Limonov's 1996 article:

> what the insensitive Russian citizens, who react only to extremely brutal, horrifiying and shocking events, really want is the arrival of Fascists. Fascists are fearsome, able-bodied and young. They would solve all the problems. Russian Philistines (*obyvateli*), who vote against Fascists out of fear, dream of them at night and want them to come at long last and sort things out. The Philistines want to be arisen from slumber by lively heroic music and bright flags. They dream of their sons joining the Fascist movement, and of their daughters marrying the movement's members. [...] Fascism is needed by everyone and suits everyone. Russia is waiting for it with fear and trepidation, just like a broken household is expecting the one and only, powerful and beautiful if somewhat dangerous, husband-to-be. He will destroy the enemy and restore the household with his fresh pair of hands, while singing feisty songs. And the household will be full of children, strength and happiness [once again]. No other husband-to-be will be able to succeed in this enterprise (Limonov 1996b).

In this context, it is hardly surprising that Dugin's 1996 poem 'An Unexpected Avatar' links the world's future with the resurrection of Himmler (Из замшелой могилы восстанет сияющий Гиммлер/И туманом глазниц обоймет Абсолютный Рассвет (Shternberg 1996),[7] while the first party programme encouraged NBP members to aspire to become someone like Goebbels and Goering, among others (see point 24 of Programma NBP-1994).

And yet, with Dugin's departure from the NBP in 1998; Limonov's arrest and a four-year custodial sentence in 2001 (for more on this, see below); and the rise of the influence within the party of the journalist and businessman Vladimir Linderman (a former head of the NBP's Latvian branch, forced to relocate to Moscow in 2002-08), the neo-Nazi overtones of the NBP discourse have

6 For a longer list of parallels (some of them exaggerated), see Iakemenko (2006).

7 Translation: "Himmler's shiny body will arise from a mossy grave/and his misty eye sockets will follow the Eternal Dawn". In his youth, Dugin reportedly was a member of the clandestine esoteric "Black Order of the SS", with the self-styled *Reichsführer* Evgenii Golovin (1938-2010), a philosopher, as its head and founder (see Kaledin 2003; and Umland 2007).

gradually dissipated (Linderman is a Jew of left-wing persuasions).[8] By early 2006, even the look of the NBP flag had been altered, partly to make it more difficult to associate it with the Nazi one:[9]

The NBP's second programme (known as the 'minimum programme'), put together by Linderman in order to secure the party's registration as an all-Russia organization (which had been repeatedly denied to it by the Ministry of Justice, although at that point the NBP still retained its status as an inter-regional organization, granted in 1997), can be defined as non-controversial and moderately liberal, as, unlike the NBP's first programme (dominated by Dugin's pet concepts), it contains virtually nothing about economic protectionism and imperial-style expansionism, and is free of anti-globalist rhetoric. Moreover, its first item ('let the civic society in Russia develop freely; the state's interference in the public and private life of its citizens should be limited', see Programma-minimum NBP, 2004) directly contradicts the fourth item in the old programme, which says: 'when the NBP comes to power, <…> the nation's rights will take precedence over the rights of an individual' (Programma NBP-1994). Nevertheless, the new programme was approved at the Fifth party congress in November 2004 (Limonov, released on parole in June 2003, now apparently a reformed man, lent Linderman his full support). However, this did not help the NBP with the registration (moreover, even its inter-regional status was revoked by the Supreme Court on 15 November 2005) – but led instead to the schism of March 2006, when a number of activists, unhappy about Linderman's de-radicalization of the party agenda, either left or were expelled from the party ranks. One of those expelled explained the evolution of the party thus:

8 Nazism was not the only source that the NBP borrowed from. The NBP's ethos has been perceptively described as that of general extremism: 'one has to be an extremist to join, but <…> it does not matter what kind of extremist one is. Anarchists, fascists, Stalinists, Christian and Islamic religious extremists are all welcome' (Shenfield 2001, 209).

9 See Vladimir Linderman's e-mail to Andrei Rogatchevski of January 12, 2011.

> From the outset, the NBP was established as an ultra-rightist party. The theoretician and philosopher Dugin shaped it according to a past model, to repeat the NSDAP history. [...] During Limonov's imprisonment, it transpired that the only defense against his abuse by the special forces came from the bourgeois liberals. Appreciative of their help and support, Limonov starts leaning towards them after his release. Paradoxically, the NBP's ideology makes a shift towards left-wing liberalism. Gradually, the right-wing and even socialist slogans become overshadowed by something resembling a revolutionary democratic ideology, reflected in a struggle against the authoritarian regime of Lieutenant Colonel Putin under the banners of basic democracy and human rights (Zhurkin n.d.).

In July 2006, the NBP even formed an alliance with mainstream liberal movements in opposition to the Kremlin, such as the former World Chess champion Garry Kasparov's United Civil Front (Ob"edinennyi grazhdanskii front, or OGF) and the ex-Prime Minister Mikhail Kasianov's Russian People's Democratic Union (Rossiiskii narodno-demokraticheskii soiuz, or RNDS). Raimonds Krumgolds, a member of the NBP's Latvian branch, made the following comment in the Latvian press with regard to the alliance:

> It is not ideological but tactical, dictated by our current common goal to do away with the oligarchic regime of the RF, which has adopted patriotic rhetoric without changing its nature that is opposite to the interests of the people (*antinarodnaia*). To achieve this, we have deemed it possible to join a temporary alliance with the most decent representatives of liberalism, who did not betray their beliefs in Putin's epoch. Time will tell how long the alliance is for (Veretennikov 2008).[10]

Ethnic Russians in the Near Abroad

Against the background of the NBP's remarkable progression 'in reverse to its initial views' (Zhurkin n.d.), it is noteworthy that one particular point, repeatedly made in the first party programme, was reiterated in the second programme too, although in a more moderate form. In compliance with Ernest

10 Symptomatically, Kasianov had left the alliance in July 2007, i.e. even before Krumgold's words were published. However, he did so not because he was provoked by the NBP's radicalism, but because his wish to be nominated as the opposition's single presidential candidate did not materialize (see Tirmaste 2007).

Gellner's definition of nationalism as 'primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent' (Gellner 1983, 1) – frustrated by the disintegration of the USSR and clearly seeking solace in the founding principles of the Third Reich (which, *inter alia*, required the return of German-speaking Austria 'to the great German mother country', because 'one blood demands one Reich' (Hitler 2005, 3) – the first NBP programme threatened to:

> revise the Russian borders. All the Russians will be united in one state. The territories of the splinter [former Soviet] "republics", where Russian population exceeds 50% (such as the Crimea, Northern Kazakhstan, the Narva region, etc.) will be subsumed by Russia after local referendums, supported by Russia. The separatist aspirations of ethnic minorities will be ruthlessly suppressed (Programma NBP-1994).

According to a February 1995 all-Russia poll, conducted by the Public Opinion Foundation, in the mid-1990s similar views were shared by 33% of respondents (see Kliamkin and Lapkin 1995). It is hardly surprising that the NBP members regularly engaged in actions promoting their sympathy with the ethnic Russians in the so-called Near Abroad (*blizhnee zarubezh'e*), most notably in Ukraine, Latvia and Kazakhstan (shortly before the collapse of the USSR, in Ukraine the Russian minority comprised about a fifth of the population; in Latvia, about a third; and in Kazakhstan – with 39,7% of the Kazakhs, 37,8% of the Russians and 22,5% of other ethnic groups, such as Ukrainians and Germans – the titular nation itself was in the minority).

Thus, on 6 September 1994, Limonov attended pro-Russian separatist rallies in the Crimean cities of Sevastopol' and Simferopol' and was expelled from Ukraine several days later. In March 1996, Deputy Procurator General of Ukraine, Ol'ha Kolin'ko, instituted proceedings against Limonov for instigating attempts to damage the territorial unity of Ukraine. In accordance with the NBP's policy on the 'Near Abroad', Limonov had declared that the Ukrainian city of Sevastopol' was Russian property that had been captured by a hostile state and should be defended by force of arms, if necessary; he was liable to be prosecuted if he entered Ukraine, where his parents resided (see Limonov 1995; Odin Limonov 1996; Grim po-limonovski 1997; and Limonov 1998, 163-64).

In Latvia, in August 1998, the retired policeman Vasilii Kononov (1923-2011), a Latvian citizen, was arrested and charged with war crimes (a member of the underground resistance, in 1944 he had organized a killing of nine Latvians who were suspected of collaborating with the Nazis). The local NBP cell (in

existence since spring 1998; at this point led by Konstantin Mikhailiuk, with Vladimir Linderman among its most important members) took up Kononov's case as part of the NBP policy of protecting the interests of ethnic Russians abroad. In Riga, walls were daubed with slogans in Kononov's defence, and rallies championing his cause were organized.[11]

On 17 November 2000 (the Latvian Independence Day), three NBP activists – Sergei Solovei, Maksim Zhurkin and Dmitrii Gafarov – climbed to the observation floor of the St Peter Cathedral in Riga, barricaded themselves there and threatened to blow themselves up, together with the Cathedral, unless Russian Second World War veterans were released from Latvian jails, Latvian Russians were guaranteed equal rights with ethnic Latvians and Latvia refused to join NATO.[12] They surrendered to the authorities after a talk to the Russian ambassador in Latvia, Mr Udal'tsov. They were charged with illegal crossing of the Russian-Latvian border and terrorism (although two hand grenades that the three young men had on themselves turned out to be wooden). On 30 April 2001, Solovei and Zhurkin were sentenced to fifteen years in jail, while Gafarov got a five-year sentence as a minor.[13]

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11 Eventually, the mainstream Russian media and high-rank politicians interceded too. In January 2000, Kononov was sentenced to six years in jail by a district court in Riga, but on 25 April 2000, under a considerable pressure from the Russian Federation, the Latvian Supreme Court overturned this decision and released Kononov after a twenty-month imprisonment. Shortly after the release, President Putin issued a decree making Kononov a Russian citizen. For an update on the subsequent twists and turns in this lengthy and convoluted legal saga (which saw Kononov's case repeatedly examined by the European Court of Human Rights), see e.g. Bartul (2010).

12 This action copied an early one in Ukraine, when on 24 August 1999 (the Ukrainian Independence Day) sixteen NBP members (the future NBP caretaker leader Anatolii Tishin among them) chained themselves for two hours to the railings of the tower of the Sailors' Club in Sevastopol' in order to attract attention to the problem of the Crimean peninsula, which, according to the NBP, Ukraine should return to Russia. Later they were arrested and charged with attempt to damage the territorial unity of Ukraine (article 62 of the Ukrainian Criminal Code, with a possible imprisonment for up to ten years). In January 2000, following the pleas of several State Duma deputies, Tishin and other NBP members of the Sevastopol' fame were deported to Russia, after their charges have been amended to article 187 (part 5) of the Ukrainian Criminal Code (the capture of state or public buildings, punishable by corrective labour for a term of up to two years, or by deprivation of liberty for a term of up to five years). Once in Moscow, Tishin and Co. were set free.

13 The verdict's disproportionate harshness was accompanied by public protests, such as throwing eggs at the Latvian Minister for Agriculture Atis Slakteris during the opening of the Made in Latvia exhibition in Moscow. On appeal, in November 2001 Gafarov, Zhurkin and Solovei's actions were re-qualified as hooliganism, and their sentences were commuted to one, five and six years respectively. Gafarov was released shortly afterwards, while Zhurkin and Solovei got out on parole in 2003 (after a transfer to Russia).

As for Kazakhstan, at the end of April 1997 Limonov and seven NBP activists went there to take part in a Cossack assembly, which was expected to raise the issue of making autonomous the Kokchetav region of Kazakhstan (where the Russians outnumber the Kazakh population). On arrival they found out that the Assembly had been cancelled and the Kokchetav region had been abolished. In 2000-01, the NBP almost alone publicly championed the cause of a group of fourteen people (led by Viktor Kazimirchuk, a former employee of the Russian Book Chamber), who were arrested and imprisoned in November 1999 for an alleged attempt to establish Russian autonomy in Northern Kazakhstan by force of arms (the so-called Ust'-Kamenogorsk case, reportedly based on forced confessions; see Kazimirchuk et al. 2000; Molotova 2001; Airapetova 2000; and Starostin 2006). In April 2001, Limonov himself, as well as several of his NBP associates, were detained in the Altai region, near the Kazakhstan border, in a joint operation of the FSB and the KNB (Kazakhstan's National Security Committee), under suspicion of planning an armed invasion into the Russian-speaking regions of Kazakhstan. In the end, Limonov spent two years in custody on the spurious charges of gun running. His affair is widely believed to be an FSB fabrication.[14] In a related development, Vladimir Linderman, who gave a partially exonerating testimony as a defence witness at Limonov's trial in 2002 (Nekhoroshev 2004), had to spend the next six years on the run in Moscow under the false charges of harbouring explosives in his flat in Riga and planning to assassinate the Latvian President Vaira Vike-Freiberga (see Farber 2008a and 2008b; Savina and Mikhailova 2008).

Undeterred by the heavy-handedness of the FSU security forces, in 2004 the NBP leadership reconfirmed its commitment to the cause of the Russian minority in the Near Abroad in item 8 of its second party programme, which reads: 'using all acceptable (*dopustimye*) methods, concentrate on defending the rights of the Russian and Russian-speaking population in those FSU countries (such as Latvia, Estonia and Turkmenistan) where these rights are infringed upon' (Programma-minimum NBP).

Practical measures to highlight this agenda continued, especially with regard to Kazakhstan and Latvia. Thus, in January 2005, the NBP publicly denounced the Russo-Kazakh agreement about the border between the two states, signed in Moscow by Presidents Putin and Nazarbaev. The NBP disputed the designation of Uralsk, Aktiubinsk, Kustanai, Petropavlovsk, Pavlodar, Semipalatinsk, Ust-Kamenogorsk and other territories as Kazakh, and blamed

14 See, for example, Bondarenko (2001); and Dzhemal' (2003). For a comprehensive account of the campaign to set Limonov free, see Patrick Gofman présente (2003) .

President Putin for betraying Russia's national interests[15] (about 300 ha of Russian land had reportedly been conceded in the process of border delimitation, see Gafarly 2005). In August 2005, when picketing a Vester supermarket in Kaliningrad, members of the local NBP branch threw a Latvian national flag into mud and stomped it as part of their call to boycott foodstuffs from Latvia, Estonia, Georgia, Ukraine and other countries deemed hostile to Russia. Latvia demanded a criminal investigation, which was duly instigated but eventually produced mere accusations of an unsanctioned rally (even though only three activists took part in the picketing, see Orekhov 2005).

As for Ukraine, the NBP in Russia (but not in Ukraine where there are several autonomous NBP branches, too) virtually stopped, for a while, being vocal in its criticism of the Ukrainian power structures. The NBP's breakaway faction, the National Bolshevik Front, which had emerged after the 2006 schism, did stage a protest action, together with the Dugin-led Union of the Eurasian Youth (Evraziiskii soiuz molodezhi, or ESM),[16] in late November 2006 near the Ukrainian embassy in Moscow, objecting against a recent Ukrainian law that had defined the 1932-33 famine in Ukraine as an act of genocide (the NBF/ESM rejected the law´s apparent implication that Russia should take responsibility for this act of genocide against the Ukrainian people, see Atakovano 2006). The NBP itself, however, stayed away from the fray, partly because its new immediate objectives of free elections and free mass media, reflected in the second party programme, roughly coincided with the goals, achieved by the Ukrainian 'Orange revolution' of 2004-05 – but also perhaps partly for Limonov's personal reasons too. On 25 July 2003, on his way to visit his parents, who lived in the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, Limonov was detained for several hours by the Ukrainian security forces at the border crossing on the motorway linking Belgorod and Kharkiv, accused of an attempt to enter Ukraine illegally, and sent back. Limonov's Russian passport was adorned by a stamp forbidding him entry to Ukraine until at least 2008 (see Diurich 2006). He was not even allowed to attend his father's funeral in March 2004. However, in September 2007, after the abolition of the *persona non grata* lists as a step to improve the Russo-Ukrainian relationship – and possibly in recognition of the NBP's evident self-restraint on Ukrainian issues – Limonov did return for a short stay in Ukraine after years of absence (see Aslanov 2007). Moreover, after the NBP's 2007 ban, several NBP activists (such as Ol'ga Kudrina, Mikhail Gangan and Anna Ploskonosova), either sentenced or under investigation for their part in protest ac-

15 See <http://www.nbp-info.ru/archiv/131204/180105_kazahstan.html> (accessed November 12, 2011).

16 For more about Euroasian ideas see the chapter by Torbakov in this volume.

tions in Russia, sought refuge in Ukraine – and were granted asylum there.[17] The Russian Embassy in Kyiv is used by NBP activists from time to time as a target to express their criticism of Russian internal policies. Thus, it was picketed in February and December 2005 and in January 2009, whereas in May 2008 ten NBP members entered the Embassy demanding to meet Ambassador Chernomyrdin to hand in their demands, such as dissolving the State Duma, calling for new parliamentary elections in Russia and lifting the ban on the NBP (see, for example, Aktsiia NBP 2005; and Natsboly sobiralis', 2008).[18]

Which Nationalist Brand Does the NBP Belong to?

Defending the rights of the Russians abroad clearly remained high enough on the NBP's agenda even in their second party programme (which is otherwise dominated by concern about the lack of civil liberties in Russia).[19] Does this automatically make the NBP a nationalist party, and if yes, is it a Nazi variety of nationalism? The established patterns of relationships between the titular nation and the ethnic minorities in each particular case can help us draw a distinction.

Nazi Germany was a nation-state striving to become an empire while the USSR, with its pledge to produce a new ethnic entity (Soviet people, or *sovetskii narod*), was an empire striving to become a nation-state. The process of nation-building in Nazi Germany can be described as selective, as it singled out certain ethnic and ethno-religious groups (eg Jews and Gypsies) who could never be Germanized. By contrast, 'Soviet people' was a much more inclusive concept, which, at least in principle, was not supposed to discriminate anyone

17 In Russia, Kudrina is wanted for scaling the Rossiia hotel in the centre of Moscow and displaying the 'Putin, resign!' (*Putin, uidi sam!*) streamer (for this, she was sentenced to three and a half years in jail); Ploskonosova, for vandalism (daubing walls with NBP slogans) and beating up two policemen (she is of slender build and is not known as a martial art expert); whereas Gangan had an unspent non-custodial sentence for his part in a non-violent takeover of a Presidential Administration visitors' room in 2004. Clearly enjoying her asylum status, in May 2009 Ploskonosova was fined UAH204.00 for chanting 'Yushchenko, resign!' (*Yushchenko, het'!*) at a Labour Day demo in Kharkiv (see Khar′kovskii sud 2009).

18 Two hours later they were received by Chernomyrdin's deputy and vacated the building (see Natsboly sobiralis′ 2008).

19 Incidentally, this very item was identified as contravening Article 9 of the Federal Law 'On Political Parties' (which expressly forbids mentioning the defence of ethnic interests in party programmes and statutes), and served as a reason to deny the NBP registration in January 2006 by the Federal Service of State Registration (see Ofitsial′nyi kommentarii 2006).

along the ethnic lines (as for religious beliefs, they were expected to fade away in due course more or less by themselves).

The NBP's first programme defines the party as:

> a national party of the Russians. Russianness is not determined according to either blood or creed. A Russian person is someone who considers Russian language, culture and history his native; has shed and is ready to shed his/her and other people's blood in the name of Russia alone; and cannot imagine [belonging to] any other nation and Motherland (Programma NBP-1994).

Lofty rhetoric aside, this definition of Russianness has evidently more in common with the inclusive declarations of the late Soviet nationalities policy than with the discriminatory practices of Nazi Germany. There have been Jews (eg Arkadii Maler), Gypsies (eg Artur Petrov) and even Blacks (eg Aijo Beness) among the NBP members, and there is an NBP branch in Israel[20] – something hardly imaginable, had the party really been following in the Nazi footsteps. The problem for any supporter of the master race notion is, of course, that after hundreds of years of co-habitation and inter-marriages on the territory of the Russian empire, past and present, it is not easy to find a pure Russian bloodstock.[21] That is presumably why the NBP's second programme openly recognizes the rights of not merely the Russian but also the Russian-speaking (i.e. ethnically non-Russian) population in the Near Abroad.[22] Also, given the authorities' attitude to the NBP, its activists have to be ready to withstand harassment. Therefore, when recruiting its members, the NBP could not afford to be too choosy about their ethnic origin. Unsurprisingly, it is hard to hold the party together when it is based on such an eclectic foundation, just as it was difficult to eliminate ethnic tensions in the USSR (let alone in post-Soviet Russia). Ethnic slurs are not unheard of among the NBP associates and sympathisers, especially when it comes to verbal internet attacks on Linderman, whom the ex- (usually more radical) members of the party blame for altering the NBP's course almost beyond recognition.[23]

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20 See, for instance, NBP-Izrail′, 2003; NBP-Izrail′ 2005; and Demonstratsiia solidarnosti 2010.

21 Limonov himself claims that there are Tartars and Ossetians among his ancestors (see Zarifullin 1998).

22 Cf. Limonov's 2012 presidential election pledge that, if elected, in his foreign policy he would concentrate first and foremost on defending the interests of the 'Russophone diaspora' in the Near Abroad (see Limonov 2008a).

23 See, for example, the blog posts "Narkobarygi" (of December 10, 2006, by istukov), <http://istukov.livejournal.com/18844.html> (April 29, 2017); and "Lindermonoliuby" (April 9,

Building a New Nation?

Most importantly, however, it is open to question, what the NBP members really mean when they refer to Russianness and the Russian nation and what kind of strategy they adopt in their nation-building efforts. The NBP leadership is well familiar with a theory of the Soviet neo-Eurasianist ethnologist Lev Gumilev (1912-92),[24] according to whom nations (or rather ethnic entities, big and small, whose development is similar to a lifecycle, when birth is followed by maturity and then by death) are formed by the so-called 'passionarity' (*passionarnost'*) bearers, i.e. those people, whose extraordinary vitality overpowers their self-preservation instincts, so that they selflessly devote themselves to a cause which is expected to result in a greater common good, even though they are likely to lose their lives in the process of advancing it (see, for instance, Gumilev 1990). There are indications that the NBP has been acting under impression that their party is a consortium (Gumilev's term describing proto-ethnic alliances that may or may not turn into stable, durable and easily identifiable ethnic groups) which consists primarily of such passionarity bearers, whose activities ultimately contribute to the formation of a new nation in place of an old one that used to populate the same territory but has come to the end of its lifecycle (on this occasion coinciding with the demise of the USSR). An article published in 1998 in *General'naia liniia* (an NBP-related Latvian newspaper) says when summarizing Gumilev's concept of ethnogenesis:

> [Old] ethnicity does not disappear without a trace. In its place emerges a small group of like-minded people, united by the same goal, wanting nothing for themselves, ready to sacrifice everything for a common cause. These people become the core of a new nation while gathering together the remnants of the old one. […] Our party has to become such a group. The NBP should become the centre of a new Eurasian unity and weld the peoples of Russia together. This is our goal. We should strive not for an ethnic purity, as primitive nationalists do, but for a creation of a new ethnic entity on the territory of Eurasia (Eti liudi 1998).[25]

Paradoxically, the police, security forces and courts' violent overreaction to the NBP's relatively mild forms of protest seems to be assisting the party in its

2008, by general_ivanov), <http://general-ivanov.livejournal.com/155003.html> (April 16 2017).

24 On Limonov's knowledge of Lev Gumilev's work, see, for example, Zarifullin (1998).

25 See also Terskoi (2004).

ambitious task of forging a new national identity for the people, irrespective of their actual ethnic background. Over a hundred NBP members (some of them, several times) have gone through jail stints of various lengths,[26] and criminal brotherhood reportedly knows no ethnic distinctions (see Demin 1981, 312).[27]

Only time will tell if the NBP's rather Utopian grass-root nation-building project yields any results.[28] Given that the party is working with roughly the same multi-ethnic material that the USSR used to have at its disposal, and employs methods of creating a supra-ethnic identity similar to those favoured by Stalin (i.e. tossing this material into the melting pot of GULAG to obtain a Homo Sovieticus as a final product), a certain amount of pessimism about the NBP's possible success would be understandable and perhaps even forgivable, if only because the number of NBP convicts is too small to reach a critical mass.

From Neo-Nazism to Human Rights Activism – and Back?

What seems much more certain, though, is that the NBP is indeed a nationalist movement which did have Nazi (or Fascist) roots, but, judging by appearances, has largely distanced themselves from it since the early 2000s, perhaps temporarily. The programme of the Other Russia party (the NBP's successor) states that its nationalism is 'merely a healthy manifestation of a national identity' (Programma politicheskoi partii 2013), which is difficult to contest until proven otherwise. How did the party manage to evolve from neo-Nazism to human rights activism, and what are the chances of a relapse?

Limonov's countercultural past has a great deal to answer for when an explanation of his toying with Nazism is sought. A self-employed autodidact without a higher degree (it is not even clear if he completed his secondary education), throughout his life he has had to rely on staying in pronounced opposition to the powers-that-be, as well as popular taste and/or consensus, whatever

26 For a full list, see Politzakliuchennye natsboly (2013).

27 In his 2012 presidential election pledge, Limonov suggests moving the Russian capital to the 'geographical centre' of the RF in Southern Siberia, to strengthen the bond between European Russia and Siberia and to create an impetus for the development of Siberia and the Russian Far East. This idea can also be linked to the formation of a new national identity, as the acquisition of Siberian identity normally involves a transgression of ethnic distinctions (see e.g. Galetkina 2002). It is not accidental that Limonov is planning to use ex-convicts in settlement construction along the border with China, to put an end to what the NBP sees as Chinese encroachment on the Russian territory (see Limonov 2008a).

28 The programme of the NBP's successor, the Other Russia party, reveals that one of its long-term objectives is a recreation of a 'formerly strong union of the peoples that once formed the USSR' (see *Programma politicheskoi partii* 2013).

they are, as a means of self-promotion. A dissident under Communism, he could only be a Bolshevik after the fall of Communism, when virtually everyone, even Vladimir Zhirinovsky's Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia (which has hardly ever been either liberal or democratic), shared a broadly liberal and democratic platform. The nationalist component in the NBP moniker was required, however, to separate the NBP from Gennady Zyuganov's Communist Party of the RF (the direct and undisputed heirs of the CPSU with its traditionally internationalist agenda). In the permissive atmosphere of the Yeltsin era, leading a small party with severely limited financial resources meant actively courting notoriety. Associating the NBP with the Nazi legacy in the country which lost tens of millions of lives fighting Nazism would guarantee media headlines and the authorities' attempts at a crackdown, which in turn would breed more headlines. However, with an assault on the basic freedoms under Putin, there was no need for the NBP anymore to be bracketed together with the morally reprehensible (neo-)-Nazis, when a mere demand for fair and free elections, or an attempt to exercise a constitutional right to a free assembly, could set forth the charges of extremism.[29]

What is Fascism, Anyway?

'Fascism' is an emotionally loaded term in Russia (and elsewhere), and is therefore often imprecise. On the one hand, the Federation of Jewish Communities in Russia (Federatsiia evreiskikh obshchin Rossii, or FEOR) branded the NBP a 'neo-Fascist' organization in their 2006 letter to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, dispatched when they found out that Limonov had appealed there against the repeated refusals of the Russian Ministry of Justice to register his party.[30] On the other, Limonov calls his December 2010 – January 2011 fifteen-day detention for swearing, based on the false testimonies of two policemen, a sign of 'state-sponsored Fascism' (*gosudarstvennyi fashizm*), too

29 Before the 2006 amendments to the 2002 Anti-Extremist Law came into force, it had been very difficult to prove in courts that this or that activity should be deemed extremist, i.e. inciting national, religious and/or social hatred. After the amendments, it has become so easy to do so that the NBP has been banned largely on the strength of two counts of disrupting, by leaflet throwing, a session of the St Petersburg Legislative Assembly, as well as the voting process at a Moscow regional polling station (see Reshenie Mosgorsuda 2007). The leaflets did not seem to contain anything beyond criticism of the poor work of the Assembly and the unfair electoral practices, and the court verdict does not mention either Nazism or Fascism even once.

30 Limonov tried to challenge the content of the FEOR letter in Moscow courts but did not succeed, see Voronov and Savina 2006; as well as Presnenskii sud Moskvy 2006.

(the detention was actually imposed to prevent him from attending an unsanctioned meeting on the Triumfal'naya Square in Moscow, see Limonov 2011). Who is right, FEOR or Limonov – or, perhaps, both are, in their own way?

As Umberto Eco explains, Fascism has become 'an all-purpose term because one can eliminate from a fascist regime one or more features, and it will still be recognizable as fascist. <…> These features cannot be organized into a system; many of them contradict each other <…>. But it is enough that one of them be present to allow fascism to coagulate around it' (Eco 1995). According to Eco, among such features are irrationalism, the cult of action for action's sake, the concepts of life as a permanent warfare and heroism as an everyday norm, the cult of death, the cult of tradition and a rejection of modernism. The first five features are easily identifiable as typically Limonovian: self-contradictory behaviour bordering on a personality split,[31] direct actions as a principal manifestation of the NBP's policies, self-identification with soldiers and heroes,[32] active participation in armed conflicts on the territories of former Yugoslavia and Soviet Russia (see Limonov 1993 and 2008b) – and the official NBP greeting *Da, smert'!* (Long Live Death!), borrowed from the Falangists' Viva La Muerte. Eco's last two features (as well as the first one) are mostly characteristic of Dugin, whose 'sensibility leads him backward into deep history, which can mean either the archaic past "outside of time" or merely the past before recent centuries dominated by the European Enlightenment and modernity, which he wholly rejects for its universalist view of the human condition' (Clowes 2011, 57).

In addition, Eco lists social frustrations, leading towards an obsession with (international) plots by perceived public enemies (who provide a sense of common identity for a nation that feels besieged); a Leader who interprets/construes the Voice of the Nation (via mass media); and a very low tolerance to dissent. These are precisely the attributes redolent of post-Soviet Russian disenchantment with the West and the promises of capitalist prosperity after the Communist collapse, as well as the Kremlin's populist strategies and public messages that became patently obvious since the annexation of the Crimean peninsula in March 2014, under the pretext of defending the rights and inter-

31 Cf.: 'In fact, there isn't one Limonov but two, or two personalities coexisting within the same individual. One Limonov dreams of becoming a stern despot of Kazakh steppes. Another, to occupy a cosy Duma seat as head of a five-strong faction. One welcomes Russian troops entering Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Another scribbles articles full of anarchist hatred towards the Russian state and Putin as evil personified" (Eresiolog 2008).

32 On a number of occasions, Limonov has claimed that his ideal housing is probably barracks; his 1998 book chronicling a period in his own life and cited several times in this article, is called *The Anatomy of a Hero* (see Limonov 1998).

ests of the ethnic Russians / native Russian speakers there. Curiously, the annexation has been carried out in accordance with the scenario laid out in the 1994 NBP party programme, i.e. border expansion after local referendums on the FSU territories where the number of ethnic Russians exceeds 50%. While the NBP has been moving away from its radical 1994 platform, the Russian authorities have been moving in the opposite direction![33] This may be partially explained by Dugin's latter-day considerable influence as a lecturer at the Military Academy of the General Staff and a Kremlin advisor (he may have abandoned the NBP but not some of its ideas, it seems). Also, the sudden affinity between the Kremlin and their hitherto most implacable opposition may have something to do with yet another general attribute of Fascism, identified by Roger Griffin, namely the ideology's dependence on the myth of national rebirth, or palingenesis (see Griffin 1991, XI). In the palingenetic context, the results of the 1991 Soviet referendum, at which almost 78% of the electorate voted in favour of keeping the USSR – a wish subsequently ignored by the Belavezha Accords – provide a weighty if somewhat outdated argument in support of the drive for empire restoration, along the lines of a national rebirth, for many Russians involved, establishment and non-parliamentary opposition alike.[34]

In such an atmosphere, it is hardly surprising that the NBP/Other Russia leadership has chosen to side with the government.[35] The benefits have been almost immediate. When in summer 2009 the NBP/Other Russia launched the so-called Strategy 31, which sought to promote Article 31 of the RF Constitution guaranteeing the right to a free assembly, by gathering on the Triumfal'naya Square in Moscow for a rally on the 31st day of every relevant month (for more detail, see Horvath 2015), the authorities tried every trick in the book to deny the demonstrators access to the Triumfal'naya. However, once the NBP changed their tack and started using Strategy 31 meetings to support separatists in Eastern Ukraine, access to the square has been restored (see Ragulin 2014). This brings to mind yet another definition of Fascism, by Robert Paxton, which highlights an 'uneasy but effective collaboration' between a 'party of

33 In Limonov's own words, 'It is Putin who has turned into a Limonov supporter, <not the other way round>' (Limonov 2014).

34 In his 2005 address to the Federation Council, roughly timed for the fifteenth anniversary of the Belavezha Accords, Putin called the demise of the USSR 'the largest geopolitical disaster of the XX century' (Putin 2005). For Limonov's attitude to the Accords, see, for example, Limonov (2014).

35 This has brought about yet another schism, with the Other Russia branches in Novosibirsk, Murmansk, Khanty-Mansiisk, Tver' and Volgodonsk, as well as up to fifteen members of the Moscow branch, leaving the party in February-March 2014, under the slogan 'Yes to revolution in Russia – no to war in Ukraine!' (see Pashkova 2014).

committed nationalist militants' and 'traditional elites', over the pursuit of 'external expansion', while dispensing with 'legal restraints' and 'democratic liberties' (Paxton 2004, 218). The NBP/Other Russia, known for its policy reversals, has delivered yet another U-turn, by revealing that it has more in common with the authorities than had previously been assumed. For one, both sides have opted for prioritising nation-building over international agreements and civil liberties.[36]

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36 Obviously, the Kremlin's and the NBP/Other Russia's visions of further action in Ukraine overlap only partially. The Kremlin is reportedly interested in fostering an ongoing localised conflict, to limit Ukraine's chances for an EU and NATO integration. For the NBP, the more Ukrainian territory is taken under Russian control, the better (see Linderman 2015). While NBP members are welcome in Eastern Ukraine as potential cannon fodder, their concentration and political activity there are actively discouraged by both the separatists in charge and their Moscow minders (see Azar 2017).

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PART 2

Memory Politics

CHAPTER 4

Constructing the "Usable Past": the Evolution of the Official Historical Narrative in Post-Soviet Russia[1]

Olga Malinova

Conventional conceptions of the past are major pillars of the collective identities of modern political communities. Public history, as distinct from professional history, i.e. the former as a set of representations and interpretations of the past that are addressed to the broad audience of non-specialists, is an indispensable element of any identity politics aimed at shaping particular ideas of "us" and mobilizing group solidarity. Of course, the temporal dimension is particularly essential for the nations; it is no coincidence that modern historiography is mainly focused on writing the history of peoples/nations/states. Practices surrounding the political uses of the past are also closely connected with the construction and representation of national identities.

After the collapse of the USSR, all the new independent states in the region faced the problem of constructing their national identities within the new geographical and symbolic borders. In the case of Russia, this task was hampered from the very beginning by many obstacles, among which the problem of adapting established visions of the collective past to the new context was one of the most complicated. Three key obstacles of this kind should be highlighted here.

First, as the successor to the historical centre of the former tsarist empire, the Soviet Russian Federal Republic lacked both the incentive and the resources for developing a specific "national" identity within the framework of the USSR. Russian identity had historically tended to be associated with the core of empire, and dominant historical narratives confirmed this vision. This situation was further compounded after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, when the Russian Federation had to create a substantially new identity. Of course, there was a large stock of symbolic resources that could potentially be used as building material, but this legacy carried heavy ideological baggage and was hence highly contested. There was no "ready-made" historical grand narrative

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available to be taken up and revived wholesale. All of the candidates for such a narrative, whether the pre-revolutionary or Soviet versions of the imperial narrative, or the dissident counter-cultural Soviet variants developed in tamizdat and samizdat, were too controversial and divisive to serve as a solid basis for a new national identity. Any attempt to reinterpret the collective past immediately sparked fierce political conflicts and debates, and this fact had to be taken into account by policy-makers.

Second, the legal succession to the USSR made the demarcation between "the Russian" and "the Soviet" a difficult challenge for political elites (Morozov 2009; Kaspe 2012). Ultimately, after a series of unsuccessful attempts of creating a new Russian identity[2] defined in contrast to the Soviet "totalitarian" past, the ruling political elite finally placed its stake on a selective adoption of the Soviet symbolic legacy, which made the discussed demarcation rather vague.

Third, for Russia, unlike for the other post-communist countries, it was difficult to find a Significant Other who could be blamed for its troubles and difficulties (at least beyond the frame of conspiracy theory). This made development of a positive collective self-concept more problematic.

Because of these and other factors, the building of the new macro-political identity in post-Soviet Russia took rather contradictory and uncertain forms.

This chapter contributes to better understanding this process by exploring the main stages of evolution in the official memory policy over twenty five years. As its scope does not allow all relevant aspects to be covered, I shall focus on the evolution of the *official historical narrative*, i.e. a semantic scheme that describes the genealogy of the macro political community constituting the Russian state[3], which "explains" how its past "determines" its present and future. According to my interpretation, such a scheme should be considered official if it is articulated in texts and practices that are performed on behalf of the state. The construction of the new official narrative suggests a reinterpretation of the historical events that were the key moments of the former, Soviet narrative, but also the "nomination" of some new events and figures for political usage, and a development of the new connections between the major episodes of Russian history. It takes place in official speeches, but also brings into play other instruments of memory politics, such as state symbols, national holidays, official and unofficial rituals, memory laws (i.e. legislation that

2 For more about it, see the chapter by Torbakov in this volume.

3 It is still a matter of unfinished public discussion whether this community could be described as a nation and how it should be named – *rossiiskii* (i.e. including all citizens of the state) or *russkii* (i.e. having a connotation with ethnic Russians).

restricts particular ways of public representation of some historical events or processes), and so on.

From the late 1980s on, the national past was a matter of fierce debate, and the elaboration of the official narrative was unavoidably a matter of choice between competing interpretations presented in public discourse. This makes the process a part of the field of *symbolic politics*. My understanding of the term follows Pierre Bourdieu's conception, which considers the production of meanings as well as the struggle for consolidation of the legitimate vision of the social world as an integral part of the political subfield (Bourdieu 1992). In this sense, symbolic politics is understood as the set of public activities aimed at the production and promotion/intrusion of certain modes of interpretation of social reality and the struggle for their domination. It should not be considered a counterpart of "real" politics but rather a specific aspect of it.

The state is not the only actor in the field of symbolic politics, but it holds an exclusive position in this field because it can support its interpretations of social reality through the powerful allocation of resources (with the education system, for example), legal categorization (as in matters of citizenship), attaching a special status to particular symbols (public holidays, official symbols, government awards, etc.), through speaking on behalf of the political community in the international arena, etc. As a consequence, the public rhetoric and symbolic gestures of the official actors who speak "in the name of the state" gain a special significance and become an important frame of reference for the other participants of public discourse. It should be mentioned that the official symbolic policy may be inconsistent and is quite often context-driven: those who speak "in the name of the state" do not always rely on systematic interpretations of social reality and inevitably react to current conflicts. In spite of the exclusive resources that are at the disposal of the state, the domination of the interpretations of social reality it supports is not predetermined: even in totalitarian and authoritarian societies where certain normative principles are imposed by force, some opportunities for escape still remain in the form of "roguish adaptation" (Levada 2000) and "double thinking".

Various aspects of practices of using the past in the context of symbolic politics aimed at the construction of national identities are studied under different labels: history politics, politics of memory, regimes of memory, cultures of memory, politics of the past, and so on. There are different approaches to the conceptualization of practices of political usage of the past (e.g. Halbwachs 1980; Evans 2003; Müller [ed.] 2004; Art 2006; Heisler 2008; Parvikko 2008; Pakier, Stråth [eds.] 2010), but there is no consistent theory based on shared methodological assumptions. Studies of history politics form a broad interdisciplinary field, united by a common object rather than a consistent research

programme. The Russian case has also been described and analysed in this context (e.g. Smith 2002; Merridale 2003; Sherlock 2007; Wertsch 2008; Miller 2009; Koposov 2011; Etkind 2013;Torbakov 2014; Malinova 2015; Koposov 2018).

This chapter takes a special turn by focusing on the ruling political elites as actors who not only promote a particular interpretation of a collective past representing certain political interests, but who also depend on the available repertoire of the "usable past" in achieving various political aims – the legitimization of power, the justification of political decisions, the search of electoral support, the mobilization of solidarity, etc. Because of their access to exclusive political resources, the ruling elites are important actors of symbolic politics aimed at the construction of national identity. At the same time, the results of their activity in this field depend on how their symbolic politics fit into an already existing repertoire of notions, narratives, images, and symbols, and how these politics compare to interpretations articulated by other actors.

It is particularly important for the Russian case to note that the struggle of different interpretations of national history is not only a matter of ideological controversy, but also a consequence of the co-existence of two different models of memory politics that are at odds with one another (for more see Malinova 2016).

On the one hand, there is an ongoing process of reconsideration of the traumatic past focused on the political repressions of the Soviet regime, the Civil War, ethnic deportations, and the negative aspects of the Soviet regime in general. It started in the late 1980s with "an opening of the blind spots" of Russian history that previously had been concealed for ideological reasons, and evidently contributed to the delegitimization and collapse of the Soviet regime. This kind of memory politics fits into the model of *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* – the critical reconsideration of history focused on ideas of recognizing moral guilt and commemorating victims.

On the other hand, the new Russian state faces the problem of identity construction that falls into a pattern typical of nation-building. This kind of memory politics is subjected to the development of a historical narrative that shapes the images of the national "self" and its "others".

These patterns of memory politics have different logics that were described well by Aleida Assman (2014 [2006]). The memory politics of critical "working-off" seeks to compensate for the "asymmetry" between the memory of victims and perpetrators, to denunciate the latter and to recognize collective moral guilt for past disasters. It might be successful and result in merging competing stories of the different "sides" of a historical process into a "reconciling" meta-narrative of a higher level. However, it might fail and split society rather than unite it. The memory politics of nation-building seeks to mobilize solidarity

around a positive image of "us", and it typically focuses on historical events and figures that could be interpreted in terms of glory, heroism, and recognized cultural accomplishments. These patterns of memory politics rely on different symbolic resources (though quite often narrate the same historical events) and suggest different political strategies. In Russia they co-exist and are supported by different coalitions of actors. This makes the construction of the official historical narrative a particularly complicated political task.

In what follows, I try to describe how the Russian ruling elite dealt with this task for twenty five years (1991-2016). On the basis of the official rhetoric and broader political discourse, I outline the evolution of the official historical narrative and assess its consequences for national identity construction. The next sections describe the principal shifts in political uses of national history in the 1990s, in the 2000s and after 2012. The concluding section summarizes the detected trends and analyses the problems and perspectives of symbolic policy while taking into account the current shifts in Russian politics.

The "Critical Narrative" of the 1990s: The Concept of the "New" Russia

The first Russian president, Boric Yeltsin, legitimized his political course through a historical narrative that sought to merge the two models described above. He and his team relied on the discourse about "the crimes of the Soviet regime" to establish the historical narrative that emphasized the contrast between the "new" and "old" Russia. The post-Soviet Russia was represented as a European country building democracy and a market economy, in contrast to the "totalitarian" USSR or "autocratic" Romanov empire. The representation of the national past in the discourse of the ruling elite was clearly subjected to the task of legitimizing a radical transformation of the Soviet "totalitarian" order. The aims of reforms that started in early 1992 were formulated in clearly "Westernist" terms. It seemed that the triumph of "the Democratic" forces in August of 1991 opened an opportunity to make Russia a prosperous democratic country with a market economy. In the words of Andrey Kozyrev, the minister for foreign affairs in 1990-1996:

> our 'super-task' is literally to pull ourselves up by the hair… to the club of the most developed democratic countries. Only in this way can Russia obtain the national self-consciousness and self-respect that it needs so much […] (Kozyrev 1994, 22).

The post-Soviet transition was perceived as a radical change in the country's historical trajectory[4]. Based on grand-narratives inherited from both Marxism and Cold War discourse, the ruling elite represented the transition away from the Soviet regime in terms of rough historicist schemes that urged for the total rejection of Soviet principles.

The perception of a pre-revolutionary historical legacy was less straightforward. On the one hand, the post-Soviet transition was often represented as the restoration of continuity in national history that had been interrupted by Soviet rule. As president Boris Yeltsin declared in his first address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, the totalitarian ideology expressed by the CPSU that has dominated for decades has collapsed. Instead of it comes an awareness of natural historical and cultural continuity (Yeltsin 1994). Cf.: "The decade that was marked by Russia's coming back to the main track of world development comes to the end" (Yeltsin 1999). So, it was the contemporary, "new" Russia that restored the broken links with the national past.

Following in this line, post-Soviet officials paid special attention to the commemoration of previously "restricted" moments of the past – people, events, and symbols that were silenced or had not received enough justice in Soviet narratives. A good example is the deliberate celebration of marshal Georgy Zhukov, one of the military leaders of the Great Patriotic War, who fell into disgrace in 1946 and later, in 1957, was blamed at the October Central Committee of the SPSU Plenum for "misconduct" in terms of Lenin's principles of management of the army and "exorbitant glorification" of his role in the war. In 1994, president Yeltsin issued decrees prescribing the construction of a memorial to Zhukov in the centre of Moscow and the establishment of an order and medal in his honour. Taking into consideration the importance of collective memory about the Great Patriotic War, these symbolic acts might be interpreted as attempts to make shifts in the repertoire of meanings connected with this event, so as to be able to distance it from the ominous figure of Joseph Stalin. The fact that Zhukov, in spite of his great popularity, was officially disgraced made him a good alternative (though as a member of the Soviet ruling body he could not escape involvement in the morally dubious practices of the regime).

4 It is not accidental that later the Prime Minister, Egor Gaidar, described the mission of his "government of reforms" in terms of a "final decision" between two ways of modernization, the first of which supposes a development of the Western type of institutions while the second one is aimed at extensive growth under the pressure of the state. According to his interpretation, for a long time Russia was unable to choose between these two different paths, but now the time had come – Russia should put its future on the road to "civilized", "liberal capitalism" (Gaidar 1995, 47-75; 143-144).

However, the roots of many contemporary problems were to be seen in pre-Soviet history. In 1996, Yeltsin stated that tsarist Russia, being overwhelmed by the burden of its own historical problems, could not get onto the road to democracy. This fact determined "the radicalism of the Russian revolutionary process, its impetuous derangement from February to October", and finally resulted in the break of historical tradition. According to Yeltsin:

> this destructive radicalism – 'to the very grounds,[5] and then' – explains the loss of many of Russia's former achievements in the spheres of culture, economics, law, and public development in the course of the break of the old order (Yeltsin 1996[6], my translation).

The bourgeois revolution of February 1917 was considered to be the highest point of Russia's development along "the normal", i.e. "European" way.[7] The tendency for critical interpretation of the October Revolution and pre-revolutionary history became especially salient in 1996 in the context of the presidential elections. Representing the choice between the acting president, Yeltsin, and the communist candidate, Gennady Ziuganov, as a matter of life and death for the new Russia, proponents of the former appealed to the horrors of the revolution. As Nikolai Yegorov, head of the President's Administration, put it during the campaign:

> [...] the forthcoming election will be not be a matter of choice between the good and the best programmes of the candidates. We shall have to choose again between a continuation of the democratic reforms and a turn back. But there is no way back, there is a precipice behind us. Russia will not get through one more destructive revolution (Yegorov 1996).

This statement can be compared with the arguments of the mayor of St. Petersburg, Anatoly Sobchak, who said: "After all the sufferings Russia has had during

5 Here Yeltsin refers to "The International", the anthem of the Communist Party of the USSR.

6 All translations are mine unless otherwise stated.

7 Articulations of this discourse can be found in many texts from this period. Here is an example taken from the official *Rossiiskaia gazeta*: "The results of the February revolution that brought the country into the worldwide channel of historically progressive changes were cancelled by the emotional rejection of the power of 'capitalist ministers' in favour of the false promises of the Bolsheviks...". Remarkably, this reference to history was used as an argument in support of the acting government that, in spite of all its mistakes, aimed at the "creation of a social and economic basis for a principally new... state" that should "provide us the quality of life that citizens [of the countries] with a more developed market economy and democratic system enjoy" (Kiva 1997).

the terminating century, it definitely will not endure one more dictator, one more revolution, that could become the most bloody in its history" (Sobchak 1996).

Even after Yeltsin had won the elections, the most persistent opponents of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) continued to present the situation in terms of "the hundred-year-long civil war", blaming contemporary "Bolsheviks" for the escalation of aggression. On the eve of the 59th anniversary of October Revolution, Alexander Yakovlev, a prominent Soviet leader of the perestroika period, published an article in which he argued that "Russia's movement to the triumph of freedom can be interrupted any day if we do not proclaim the misanthropic Bolshevist ideology illegal […]" (Yakovlev 1996).

But the official symbolic politics switched in a different direction. Soon after re-election, Boris Yeltsin declared the need for a "national consensus". Even if this declaration was never fulfilled, it brought some changes in the official memory policy. On 7 November, 1996, a year before the 80th anniversary of the October Revolution, president Yeltsin issued a decree that officially reinterpreted the meaning of this day: 7 October was declared to be "the Day of conciliation and consent". The renaming of the holiday was not followed by an elaboration of the new rituals of commemoration, and in 1997, on the 80th anniversary of the October Revolution, there was no official programme of celebration. In 2004, as a result of Vladimir Putin's reform of the holiday calendar, 7 November ceased to be a public holiday and lost the name of "the Day of conciliation and consent".

The transformation of the other core cornerstone of the Soviet historical narrative –victory in the Great Patriotic War – was much more successful. Being widely perceived as the most important moment of national solidarity, the Great Patriotic War had great symbolical potential for political use. So, since the first half of the 1990s, the new Russian ruling elite sought to reframe the memory of the war according to the new vision of Russia. The victory over Nazism was represented as a heroic achievement carried out by the people (*narod*) in contrast to the official Soviet narrative, which had emphasized the role of the state and the Communist Party. The recognition of the inhumane character of the Soviet regime gave a new inflection to the theme of heroism: the feat of the Soviet people was even greater in light of the fact that victory was achieved not *due* to the Communist leadership, but *in spite* of the Stalinist repressions. Such a narrative allowed the combination of two models of memory policy, as it emphasized the glory of the Soviet/Russian people and, at the same time, recognized the crimes of Stalin's regime. It was flexible enough to even allow a partial "rehabilitation" of Soviet symbols, which was a kind of compromise for the sake of "national consensus": since 1995 the Red Banner of

Victory (definitely a Soviet symbol) became an important part of the official ceremony of celebration for Victory Day. Actually, it was Yeltsin who established the contemporary canon of commemoration for Victory Day,[8] with the military parade at Red Square and the Red Banner of Victory.

In spite of the declarations about "national consensus", the official historical narrative of the 1990s remained critical towards the Soviet and even imperial periods. The efforts for "conciliation" could not be very consistent so long as the ruling elites of the 1990s had to legitimize the unpopular decisions that had been made earlier under the label of "the fight with totalitarianism", which provoked interpretation of the past in terms of "interruption". The model of national identity constructed by "the Democrats" (*demokraty*) was strictly opposed by "the Popular-Patriotic Opposition" (*narodno-patrioticheskaya oppozitsiia*). The former expected that the communists should confess to the crimes of the Soviet regime. The idea of "a confession" (*pokaianie*) was addressed to the whole nation, but as far as it was insistently opposed by the left and "patriotic" forces, they became the main target of this discourse. Meanwhile, the Popular-Patriotic Opposition, who was indignant with the policy of Yeltsin's "antinational" (*antinarodnyi*) and "criminal" regime, saw the attempts to reconsider the Soviet narrative of national history as a "humiliation of the Russian people". So, it was actually impossible to reach a consensus on the basis of the "critical" official narrative.

The "Eclectic Narrative" of the 2000s: the Concept of the "Thousand-Year-Old Russian State"

For various reasons, the political transformations of the 1990s did not result in the creation of institutions that could become effective channels of public dialogue. In the 2000s, the ruling elite had staked on the establishment of "consent from above" by putting the most popular media under state control – first and foremost the central TV channels – which were used for pushing forward more "comprehensive" models of collective identity (see Malinova 2009). Being free of Yeltsin's burden of taking a certain side in the conflicts of the 1990s, Putin was able to give way to some ideas from the repertoire of "the Popular-Patriotic Opposition" that were taboo for "the Democrats". He could in this way mobilize "consent" by appealing to values and symbols of the Soviet past.

8 In the USSR, Victory Day became a public holiday only after Stalin's death, in 1965. Military parades in Red Square were held only in jubilee years.

The first and the most remarkable step in this direction was the adoption of the law about official state symbols in 2000. It established the three-color state flag that appealed to the legacy of the Romanov empire and was used by "the democratic forces" as a symbol of their victory during the failed "putsch" in August of 1991, the national anthem based on the "old" melody of the Soviet anthem, and the red flag for the Russian army. Explaining this compromise, Putin proposed to abandon the logic focused on "the dark sides of the history of our country":

> [...] if we follow this logic only, we should also forget about the achievements of our people throughout the centuries. Then where do we place the achievements of Russian culture? Where do we place Pushkin, Dostoevskii, Tolstoy, Tchaikovskiii? Where do we place the achievements of Russian science – Mendeleev, Lobachevskii, and many, many others? As far as their names, the achievements were also connected with these symbols. Do we really have nothing to remember from the Soviet period except Stalin's camps and repressions? Then where do we place Dunaevskii, Sholokhov, Shostakovich, Korolev and the achievements in the cosmos? Where do we place Yury Gagarin's flight? And what about the brilliant victories of the Russian army since the time of Rumiantsev, Suvorov, and Kutuzov? What about the victory of 1945? I think that if we take all of this into consideration, we will confirm that we not only can, but even should use all the principle symbols of our state (Putin 2000a).

It is remarkable that "the achievements" that should not be forgotten clearly fall to two categories: the heritage of the native culture and science, connected with the names of outstanding countrymen who were recognized all over the world, and the victories of the Russian military. In this list there are no recognizable institutions or practices that could be contrasted to "Stalin's camps and repressions". It points to the fact that in 2000, the repertoire of negative moments in national history that could be used as "lessons and warnings" was much more limited than that of the positive symbols, which could work as "pillars" of collective identity. However, very soon the list was completed by the idea of "great-powerness", which was projected on the whole "thousand-year-long history" of Russia. The new official discourse represented the Russian state (regardless of evaluations of its actual policy in different periods) as the central element of national identity. The idea of "the strong state" as the basis of the past and future greatness of Russia was expressed most saliently in the President's address to the Federal Assembly in 2003, where Putin argued that:

> maintaining the state (*podderzhanie gosudarstva*) as an extensive geographical space, keeping a unique community of peoples united, and, at the same time, the powerful position of the country in the world were the great historical deeds [of the Russian people] (Putin 2003).

It should be mentioned that in public discourse, particularly in the 1990s, Russia's extensive territory was often interpreted not only as a sign of greatness, but also as a source of problems, in particular, as a factor that determined the "mobilization" type of development that involves many negative aspects. Identifying Russia with the space that it "maintains", and with "Russia's thousand-year-long historical path [...] [which is how] it reproduces a strong state" (Putin 2003), Putin took a clear side in this controversy, thus legitimizing his course of "strengthening the state" by following a historical, national tradition.

This led to the reassessment of the Soviet legacy and of the collapse of the USSR (which was simultaneously the "foundational act" of the new Russian state). Actually, Putin first expressed his opinion concerning the problem of reassessment of the Soviet past in 1999, on the eve of his first presidential campaign. In the programmatic article "Russia at the Turn of Millenniums", he argued that "it would be a mistake not to see and, moreover, to reject the undoubted achievements of that time". But at the same time, he supported the main thesis of "the Democratic" narrative: "For almost seventy years, we moved along the dead-end route that lay aside the main road of civilization" (Putin 1999).

The decisive turn in re-interpreting the Soviet period took place in 2005 when, in his presidential address, Putin made the sensational statement that the collapse of the USSR "was the largest geopolitical catastrophe of the century" (Putin 2005). This sharply contrasted with Yeltsin's insistent desire to represent the collapse of the USSR as consistent with historical laws,[9] hence as "progressive" even if difficult. As soon as the ideas of "the great power" and "the thousand-year-long Russian state" were put at the centre of the official narrative, this interpretation would give way to the conception of the contingent "catastrophe" caused by the actions of "bad" politicians.

However, the Soviet legacy was "rehabilitated" in the official symbolic policy in a converted form: the most dubious moments were obscured. It is remarkable that in 2004 the most controversial public holiday – the anniversary of the October Revolution on 7 November – was abolished by federal law (it remained in the list of festive days as the Day of the October Revolution, but ceased to be a day off). In Putin's speeches, there were many critical statements about

9 Cf.: "The Soviet Union had fallen under the weight of total economic crisis, being torn by economic, political and social contradictions" (Yeltsin 1996).

Soviet practices; the "rehabilitation" of the Soviet symbols in no way meant a total apology to the Communist regime. The main aspect of the cherished legacy was the idea of the "great" and powerful state that was able to overcome many difficulties, to succeed in modernizing (even if imperfectly), and to become a leading player in world politics. Totalitarian features, such as state violence and political repressions, were bracketed out of this picture. As a result, the official narrative became totally focused on the glorification of the Russian nation, and the themes of the "dark pages" of history and collective trauma turned out to be virtually neglected. The unwillingness of the ruling elite to take a side in the public discussions about the most "problematic" aspects of the national past made the official narrative rather fragmented and eclectic.

It is hardly a surprise that in the context of this shift from "self-criticism" to "self-glorification", the most "usable" element of the "thousand-year-long history" of the Russian state is the Great Patriotic War. Comparable in its significance to certain other meta-events of Russian history (such as the victory over Napoleon), the war is still present in the "live" memory of older generations. Besides, it is well established in the "commemorative infrastructure" (i.e. holidays, monuments, museums, novels, films, etc.) inherited from the USSR. Politicians addressing it can still count on a strong emotional resonance in society. And, unlike many other Soviet symbols and narratives, the war memory has not been an object of zero-sum political games until recently. Despite competing interpretations of this event, virtually all political actors – nationalists, liberals and "statists" (*gosudarstvenniki*) alike – agree on the significance of the victory in WWII in Russian and world history. According to my calculation, speeches on the occasion of various war anniversaries and memorial dates make up for around 30 per cent of all commemorative addresses by Russian presidents between 2000 and 2014 (Malinova 2015, 168-169).

The victory in WWII and the post-war success of the USSR as a world superpower became the central elements of the new official historical narrative. The theme of the Great Patriotic War was reframed in terms of triumphalism and cleansed of any negative aspects associated with the totalitarian regime (Stalinist repressions, the failures and incompetence of the Soviet military leadership, and its indifference to the human cost of military success). Instead of double victimhood at the hands of the Nazi and Soviet regimes alike, the theme of mass heroism and suffering as the "enormous price" that was paid for victory took up a central position in the official canon of commemoration. The topic of mass repression was virtually eliminated from the official discourse about WWII: presidents Vladimir Putin and Dmitrii Medvedev touched on it rather rarely and unwillingly. This made the figure of Stalin particularly ambiguous. On the one hand, he led the country to the "Great Victory", which

eventually made the USSR one of the world super powers. On the other hand, as the "criminal" historical figure, he could not be explicitly supported by the Russian presidents.

In today's Russia, the myth of the Great Patriotic War is loaded with multiple meanings, some of them originating from the Soviet era, others reflecting Russia's new status and the geopolitical situation. Drawing on my analysis of themes used by Putin and Medvedev in the official speeches they delivered in 2000-2014 on the occasion of Victory Day, I argue that attempts to tailor the discourse about the war to the purposes of constructing a new Russian identity, boosting intergenerational solidarity, and promoting national unity over political, ideological and ethnic cleavages were especially prominent in this period (Malinova 2015, 112-113). Some scholars have argued that the Great Patriotic War has become a foundational myth for post-Soviet Russia (Koposov 2011, 163). This was at least in part a consequence of the failure of attempts to create alternative foundational myths based on the birth of the new Russian state on the ruins of the USSR (Smith 2002; Malinova 2015).

The historical narrative developed by Putin's successor, President Dmitrii Medvedev, in 2007-2012 generally followed the same line of deliberate eclecticism, though with some additional nuances. Like his forerunner, Medvedev appealed to the "thousand-year-long history" to legitimatize his most difficult and important decisions. It was during his presidency that the official memory policy became significantly influenced by the international environment, though "the wars of memory" started earlier, in mid-2000s. Reacting to the OBSE Assembly Resolution named "Divided Europe Reunited: Promoting Human Rights and Civil Liberties in the OSCE Region in the 21st Century", which considered Stalinism on the same grounds as Nazism, Medvedev launched the "Presidential Commission of the Russian Federation to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia's Interests".[10] This decision was widely perceived as a symbolic sign of the state's intention to control the public discourse about history. However, actually the commission did nothing significant and was cancelled without much stir in February 2012, before Vladimir Putin's re-election.

10 For ambiguous memory politics in regard to Stalin, see the chapter by Morenkova in this book.

The 2010s: Memory Policy as a Remedy Against "the Apparent Deficit of Spiritual Values"

As a result of the eclectic approach to constructing the official historical narrative in the 2000s, the repertoire of "usable" events, figures, and symbols from the past turned out to be rather scant. The main object of reference (and contestation) was the history of the 20th century, with particular emphasis on the October Revolution, the Great Patriotic War, Gagarin's flight to the cosmos, perestroika, and the "hard" 1990s. These events/symbols are the most obvious focal points for the legitimization of current decision-making. The establishment of a new holiday in 2004 – the Day of People's Unity (*Den' narodnogo edinstva*) on 4 November – "instead of" the Day of the October Revolution on 7 November, was the only major "symbolic investment" to the "commemorative infrastructure" of the concept of "the thousand-year-old Russian state". However, it was hardly successful, as from the very beginning it was appropriated by the Russian nationalists: 4 October became a day of "the Russian rally" (*Russkii marsh*), the political demonstrations under nationalists slogans. At the same time, for the majority of society the meaning of the new holiday appeared rather vague.

Even more importantly, general references to "the thousand-year-long history" of Russia could not compensate for a lack of more detailed narrative(s) connecting the diverse and sometimes contradictory episodes into a consistent picture. Development of a more detailed narrative was impeded by the unwillingness of the ruling elite to take more definite positions in the public discussions about the "difficult historical issues".

The situation has begun to change after Vladimir Putin's re-election in 2012. His election campaign took place in the context of the protest movement in major Russian cities against fraud during the December 2011 elections to the State Duma. The inarticulate yet clearly visible street opposition undermined the hegemony of government discourse. So, at the beginning of his third term in office, Putin found it necessary to design a more consistent "ideology" to mobilize the loyal "majority" against the protesting "minority". The issues of ideology became a priority for the new Kremlin administration. As Putin stated in his 2012 Annual Address to the Federal Government, "today, Russian society suffers from an apparent deficit of spiritual values, such as charity, empathy, compassion, support, and mutual assistance" (Putin 2016). The development of a more detailed and consistent official narrative was evidently considered a major "remedy" to this problem.

In his talk at the meeting of the Council for Interethnic Relations in February 2013, Putin suggested that "we should think about introducing common

history textbooks for Russian secondary schools, designed for different ages, but built into a single concept and following a single logic of continuous Russian history, the relations between all its stages and respect towards all the episodes of our past" (Putin 2013). It should be noted that this was not the first attempt by the state to impose a particular vision of Russian history via the school textbook. In 2006-2007, the Kremlin administration was suspected of sponsoring the infamous textbook *A History of Russia 1945-2006* edited by Alexander Filippov, which disclaimed the concept of totalitarianism as a product of the Cold War and rehabilitated Stalinism by describing it as a kind of "accelerated modernization" that took place in the context of a hostile environment. It caused a scandal (see Miller 2009; Zaida 2015), but was still sent to hundreds of schools. However, the elaboration of "a single logic of continuous Russian history" was a much more complex task that supposed a further consolidation of the official narrative of "the thousand-year-old Russian state" through a search for "proper interpretations" of many historical events, which caused much public discussion.

This task was assigned to a special working group that combined state officials, historians, several teachers, and other specialists. Its activity was widely covered by the media and passionately discussed in society. It brought about not the single "common history textbook" but the concept of how to teach history at secondary schools that later became a template for several new textbooks. In spite of the fear that the project of "the common history textbook" will lead to a narrow unification of the teaching process on a basis of some ideologically driven narrative, the activity of the working group actually contributed to public discussion of the concept of the historical narrative. It revealed the list of "difficult issues" of Russian history that should be considered in school lessons from different points of view. However, the suspicions concerning the threat of unification were not quite unsubstantiated when taking into account the inescapable influence of the general focus on the consolidation of the official narrative on the actual teaching process.

Another result of the new policy of struggle for "spiritual values" was a further diversification of the repertoire of the "usable past". One of its indicators was a rise in the share of the president's commemorative speeches devoted to pre-Revolution history, from 28 per cent in 2008-2011 to 36 per cent in 2012-2014. Another example is the construction of memorials to Tsar Ivan the Terrible in the city of Oriol and to Prince Vladimir, the Baptizer of Rus in Moscow. Both monuments raised heavy debates, which demonstrated that "the thousand-year-long history" is no less a matter of controversy than the Soviet period.

These recent developments have brought rather ambivalent results. On the one hand, the ruling elite evidently wants to keep control over the field of

memory politics. It invests resources into the consolidation and promotion of the state-centred historical narrative focused on the theme of national glory. What is even more troublesome, in the context of the international crisis caused by annexation of the Crimea, the war in Ukraine, and mutual economic sanctions, is that the concept of Russian identity supported by the state becomes securitized. First of all, this refers to the case of the Great Patriotic War as a main pillar of contemporary Russian identity. In April 2014, the State Duma adopted a law to counter attempts of infringing on historical memory in relation to events of World War II. There are several cases of persecution of scholars and journalists who expressed ideas that were at odds with the official interpretation of the national past (see Miller 2014).

On the other hand, there is certain (even if small) progress in the promotion of the "coping with the dark past" agenda. In August 2015, the Russian Government adopted the concept of State Policy on Commemorating the Memory of Victims of Political Repression (basically drafted by Russia's Human Rights Council and "Memorial"). Even if the governmental directive has passed with some restrictions added, it opens certain opportunities for the local actors of memory politics who aim at commemorating the victims of political repression. In October 2015, Vladimir Putin ordered a memorial to the victims of political repressions. In the same month the Museum of the Gulag was opened in the centre of Moscow. These changes demonstrate that the state's more active policy in the field of the political use of the past opened certain "windows of opportunities" for the actors who strove to "cope with a difficult and traumatic past". On the 30th of October 2017, Putin took part in the opening ceremony of Wall of Sorrow memorial to victims of political repression on a Moscow street named after the famous dissident Andrey Sakharov. In his speech, he particularly emphasized that "this terrifying past cannot be deleted from national memory" but avoided any mentions about those who were guilty in this tragedy (Putin, 2018). However, it did not significantly changed the situation. A couple of weeks later Director of the Federal Security Service Alexander Bortnikov in his interview on the occasion of centenary of All-Russian Extraordinary Commission (*Cheka*) raised his voice for the executors by arguing that "the extraordinary situation called for extraordinary actions" and that "archive materials give evidence that in the large part of criminal cases there was objective reasons for criminal prosecution" (Bortnikov 2017). It well illustrates the lack of unity among the ruling elite about "coping with the traumatic past".

Conclusion

The evolution of the official memory policy followed the trajectory of the Russian political regime. It is clearly divided into two large periods that are characterized by different conceptions of the official historical narrative – that of "the new Russia" and of "the thousand-year-long Russia". These periods roughly coincide with the presidencies of Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin/Dmitrii Medvedev. In spite of the fact that the vectors of symbolic politics changed, the ruling elites in both periods subordinated their practices of political use of the national past to the task of legitimizing their own political course. At the same time, they could not but take into consideration the public debates over the national past that resulted from the uneasy co-presence in the agenda of two distinct tasks – that of nation-building and that of coping with the "difficult" and traumatic past.

In the 1990s, the official narrative had integrated the discourse on "trauma and crime" as a part of the legitimization of the post-Soviet transformation, but it could not manage to consolidate the nation. In the 2000s the choice was made for the apologetic principle of working with the collective past, which resulted in an eclectic construction that marginalizes the topic of "trauma and crime". In the 2010s, we can see some attempts of making the official narrative more consistent, with ambivalent results. On the one hand, in the context of the current international conflict, the apologetic conception of the national past is securitized as a "weapon" against the alleged foreign and domestic enemies. On the other hand, a new round of discussions about national history evidently opened some windows of opportunities for actors struggling to "cope with the difficult past" agenda, even if for a short time.

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CHAPTER 5

Dying in the Soviet Gulag for the Future Glory of Mother Russia? Making "Patriotic" Sense of the Gulag in Present-Day Russia

Tomas Sniegon

In August 2015, the government of the Russian Federation adopted the *Concept of State Policy to Perpetuate the Memory of Victims of Political Repressions*. "The decisions to perpetuate the memory of victims of political repression aimed to facilitate the development of partnerships between the state and civil society, the strengthening of intergenerational relationships, the continuity of cultural experience, and the patriotic education of youth," the document says. In this document, the government in fact suggests a centralized concept of memory in regard to somewhat unspecified "political repressions", which should first of all be understood as Stalinist terror or the Gulag. Here, the governmental policy is supposed to be coordinated with similarly oriented efforts of religious and other public organizations, in order to "strengthen the moral health of Russian society" (Russian Government 2015). The concept evolves a previous governmental plan from 2008 concerning the "development of human capital" in Russia, according to which a new Russian national identity is supposed to be based on "active patriotism" (деятельный патриотизм) (Russian Government 2008). Both these documents indicate that the Russian state wants to increase its influence on the construction of memory of political repressions and the development of active patriotism – based on a closer feeling of connection between Russian people and Russian history – more actively than before.

The quest for officially defined and centrally coordinated development of Russian patriotism is not new in post-communist and post-Soviet Russia. As the political scientist Graeme Gill (2013, 214-215) has pointed out, the stress on patriotism, seen as loyalty to the state rather than society, has been characteristic for the entire Putin period since 2000. Under Putin, Russia has been positioning itself as a country with its own specific means of democracy that must be based on its own historical and geopolitical foundation, taking into consideration its specifics; only in this way can Russia head towards a better future (Малинова 2015, 146). Putin's predecessor, Boris Yeltsin, had already begun using patriotism as a political tool in order to fill a vacuum around the new regime created by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Soviet metanarrative.

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Yeltsin had started to do so when the lack of constructive values posed a potential threat to the regime's long-term legitimacy. In the mid-1990s, Russian authorities began to change their previous democratic course by seeking an alternative system of values that could unite the Russian society (McGann 1999, 12-27).

What was new in the Russian government document from 2015, however, was the effort to officially connect the newly imposed Russian patriotism with the memory of the Soviet communist terror and repressions. Such a connection, in its very nature, is highly controversial. On the one hand, current Russian patriotism is supposed to express love for Russia and a feeling of "organic belongingness" to the Russian fatherland and its people, which, according to some interpretations, distinguishes it from "anti-patriotic" tendencies, such as support of both Western liberalism and to some extent even communism in Russia (Shapovalov 2008, 124-132). On the other hand, Russian people were set against each other during the Gulag period and Russian society was divided in a way that does not seem to allow the aforementioned concept of Russian patriotism to work from any point of view. The victims, in fact, possessed very few, if any, "patriotic" features, since they died mainly as a result of senseless terror and not because of committing any specific act that would unite various groups of them into one ethnically, ideologically, politically, or religiously homogeneous group that could be ascribed "patriotic" intentions. Another example of the paradox is Joseph Stalin himself; while he was the main perpetrator of "anti-patriotic" political repressions and state-dictated crimes, he has been viewed at the same time as the main force and symbol of the victory in the Great *Patriotic* War.

The main goal of this study is to analyze how this rather new effort to frame the Gulag memory in Russian post-Soviet patriotic discourse has influenced some crucial sites of memory of "political repressions" in Russia. The focus lies especially on the former firing range of Soviet oppressive forces and execution site in Butovo, one of Moscow's suburb districts; the State Museum of Gulag History in Moscow, the first state museum of this kind in Russia since 1991; and finally the museum and former labor camp Perm-36 in the Ural region, approximately 1,500 kilometers east of Moscow. These sites of memory have been essential to the memory culture in present-day Russia that has the Gulag as its central point: Butovo and the State Museum of Gulag History are, together with the Solovetskii Stone in front of the former KGB headquarters Lubyanka, the most important sites of memory within the territory of the Russian capital Moscow, while Perm-36 is the only museum of its kind situated in a former labor camp and representing the repressive character of both Stalinist and post-Stalinist development in the Soviet Union. All three of these sites have

represented widely discussed cases connected with the memory of the Gulag in both Russian and international media during recent years. As far as I have been able to determine, they represent the "patriotization" of the Gulag memory in a more illustrative and overt way than other Russian places of similar character, including, for example, the Solovetsky Islands, Magadan, Levashovo near St. Petersburg, or the "12th kilometer" near Iekaterinburg.

In her extensive research, conducted during the years 2006-2008, the Polish sociologist and cultural anthropologist Zuzanna Bogumil (2012a, 312-313) has concluded that the places of the Gulag memory have lacked a common meaning in various regions of post-Soviet Russia. As her research indicates, the main actors influencing the meanings of these places between the late 1980s and 2008 were the Memorial society and the Russian Orthodox Church, the latter with constantly increasing influence (Bogumil 2012b; 2012c, and Bogumil et al. 2015). Nonetheless, her study also suggests that, in recent years, a new common "patriotic" narrative of the Gulag may indeed be developing under the control of the state. This is a narrative in which, however, the new nationalist perception of the Gulag memory at the sites in question converges with the Orthodox and Soviet-sentimental way of viewing the traumatic past in order to define Russia's future: the Gulag is not necessarily denied, but the memory of communist terror and crimes is deliberately given meanings other than liberal.

Uneven Past

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the central symbol used for the development of Russian state patriotism has been the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945. The memory of this war has been constructed in order to incite patriotic feelings and emotions in favor of the Russian state and its top leaders. As mentioned, this trend has been rapidly intensified since Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000. Putin has used this memory in order both to strengthen the power of the state under his leadership and to present himself as a true patriot (Wood 2011, 172-200).

On the other hand, during the same time, the places dedicated to the memory of crimes of the Stalinist period, and which focus primarily on the victims, are gradually being deprived of their ability to incite or awaken traumatic and critical emotions that could question the centralized control of the state. In other words, while the first kind of memory means that history is nationalized (Russianized after decades of Sovietization) and traumatized, the second is, on the contrary, systematically de-traumatized and marginalized.

In this process of traumatization, trauma is seen as cultural trauma, i.e. constructed and not natural or given (Smelser 2004, 35). From this point of view, such collective traumas are, according to the cultural sociologist Jeffrey Alexander (2012, 4), "reflections of neither individual suffering nor actual events, but symbolic renderings that reconstruct and imagine them." Therefore, Alexander (2004, 1) defines cultural trauma as a trauma that occurs "when members of a collectivity feel that they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways." As cultural scripts, the truth of these traumas depends not on their empirical accuracy, but on symbolic power and enactment. The trauma process, Alexander (2012, 4) also points out, is not rational, but it is intentional. It is people who make traumatic meanings, in circumstances they have not themselves created and which they do not fully comprehend.

This, of course, does not mean that every historical event can become a trauma. However, the crimes of Stalinism, like the Great Patriotic War, undoubtedly fit into what another cultural sociologist, Piotr Sztompka (2004, 159), describes as events with "traumatogenic potential" that can develop into collective/national cultural traumas. Paradoxically, while both the Great Patriotic War and the crimes of Stalinism brought unprecedented terror and suffering to tens of millions of Russian people, the traumatogenic potential of these events has differed substantially in post-communist Russia (Satter 2012). While the memory of the Great Patriotic War continues to be seen as the biggest ordeal of Soviet and Russian history by both the ruling authorities and the society as a whole, the memory of Stalinist crimes has undergone a much more complicated development. This has also been the case among the survivors; their memory of the Gulag has been very problematic, especially with regard to the fact that a number of the Gulag survivors became anti-Stalinist, but not anti-communist or anti-Soviet when Stalin's mass violence ended (Adler 2012).

The memory focusing on Russian patriotic heroism that glorifies the Soviet state, and the memory concentrating on the crimes of the Soviet communist regime, have developed into two different memory cultures of ambivalent character, often contesting each other. Those who have supported the narrative of Russian glory have marginalized the memory of the Gulag, and those who have held the latter memory central have found it very problematic, if not impossible, to celebrate the heroism of the state that was based on Stalinist terror. Thus, the question of how the main actors of these memory processes – current Russian authorities, institutions, and some non-governmental organizations – deal with these contrasting memories is in focus in the present study.

It is necessary to stress that the study cannot be seen as a comprehensive study of the entire process of memorialization of the worst crimes of the Soviet communist regime. The findings are primarily based on my own visits to the sites of memory in question and other relevant places in Russia, on my interviews with current and former personnel, and on relevant books, articles, and documents.

Russian Heroes versus Soviet Victims

Since the study deals with "patriotic" memory as expressed through concrete places, it is also relevant to include the main site that symbolizes Russian patriotic memory after the collapse of the Soviet Union: the memorial complex on Poklonnaia Hill in Moscow. Of all places in the former Soviet Union, it is precisely Kutuzov Avenue (Кутузовский проспект) in Moscow and its central part, Poklonnaia Hill (Поклонная гора), that offer the most illustrative example of how post-Soviet Russian leaders want to promote Russian and Soviet history in order to support Russian patriotism through a specific narrative in one place.

The Poklonnaia Hill (literally Bow-Down Hill) site of memory was completed in the first half of the 1990s in a part of the Russian capital that is known from the Napoleonic wars of the early 19th century. In May 1995, the first post-Soviet victory parade commemorating the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany 50 years earlier was held there. Thus, the new exploitation of the place can be seen as one of the first attempts of the new Russian ruling elite of the 1990s to overrule the general disillusionment of the Russian society with the period of "transition" from communism to market economy and political pluralism, turning negative feelings into a new form of patriotism. Within the Russian society, the disillusionment led to what the social anthropologist Sergei Oushakine (2009, 5) has called "the patriotism of despair", in which various "communities of loss" produced pessimistic narratives about their suffering within the discourse on the Russian tragedy. Since, as Oushakine has pointed out, the patriotism of despair did not turn these communities of loss against their own country, the memory of patriotic heroism in the most extreme times, for example times of war, could serve as a tool for Russian politicians in their attempts to overcome the contrasts within the demoralized Russian society and at the same time increase their own legitimacy.

The setting of Poklonnaia Hill as it appeared in May 1995, was, as the Swedish historian Kristian Gerner (2011, 307-309) has pointed out, supposed to stress the importance of great people from Russian history. Two war heroes from the

pre-Soviet and the Soviet past respectively, Mikhail Kutuzov and Georgy Zhukov, were being connected with the first president of post-communist Russia, Boris Yeltsin, the ruler under whose presidency the main memorial and the museum were built. (As a part of commemorative activities in May 1995, a new statue of Georgy Zhukov appeared in Manezhnaia Square, near Red Square.) This connection also emphasized the heroic continuity between the pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet eras in Russian history.

The historical narrative of Kutuzov Avenue starts with the building of the *Museum-Panorama The Battle of Borodino* and the nearby *Triumphal Arch of Moscow*. These structures were built during the pre-Soviet and Soviet eras respectively, in order to commemorate Russia's victory over Napoleon's Grande Armée in the early 19th century. In 2012, the importance of 1812 to current Russian historical culture was once again officially stressed as Russia commemorated the bicentennial of the battle of Borodino. Borodino was declared to be one of the four most important anniversary events of 2012, which was referred to as "The Year of History".[1]

The text on the statue of Mikhail Kutuzov outside the museum depicts the battle of Borodino in 1812 as "The Patriotic War". This is no coincidence – in 2012, the Museum of the Patriotic War of 1812 opened in central Moscow next to Red Square in the building that used to house the Museum of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. This clearly illustrates the official stress on "patriotic" history in contemporary Russian historical culture.

Those who start walking from the Museum-Panorama and pass the Triumphal Arch will see the Kutuzov Avenue narrative culminate in the Victory Park on Poklonnaia Hill some hundred meters ahead. The central place there is the *Museum of the Great Patriotic War*. Thus, the main line of the *Kutuzovsky prospekt*, focusing on Russian greatness, runs between the Patriotic and Great Patriotic War, or, in other words, between Borodino 1812 and Berlin 1945.[2]

In summer 2014, commemorating the centenary of the beginning of WWI, a monument dedicated to Russian "Heroes of the First World War" was unveiled between the two aforementioned patriotic sites of memory. This happened only a few months after the Russian annexation of the Crimean peninsula. In

1 The other three key events of the year were anniversaries of the Expulsion of Poles from Moscow in 1612, the birth of the former Russian Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin in 1860, and the foundation of Russian statehood 1150 years earlier. For more, see: Miller <http://www.eupress.ru/uploads/files/H-151_pages>.

2 The "patriotic" battle of Moscow against Polish invaders in 1612 is also mentioned at the main museum exhibition on Poklonnaia hill. However, compared with the events that dominate the narrative in question, the place of this event is imponderable. See: *Tsentral'nyj muzei Velikoi Otechestvennoy Voiny. Karta-Putevoditel'*. Moscow: Guide-Map Media 2010, 3.

his speech during the inauguration of the monument, while stressing the courage, combat skills, and patriotism of Russian soldiers, Russian President Vladimir Putin focused on the justification of Russian imperial tendencies and the glorification of WWI, rather than on the tragedy it brought to the Russians and other people (Rutland 2014). In this way, he clearly presented the basic message of the monument.

Setting aside the context of Putin's new offensives on the international stage, the new tendency in 2014 to focus on First World War heroes can be interpreted in two other ways. First, it indicates that those who initiated this proces might have wanted to erase the Soviet communist regime from Russian history. A new focus on the First World War replaced the old one from communist times, when this war was commemorated only through the *Great October Socialist Revolution* of 1917. At that time, the imperialist war that Russia lost was omitted. According to communist propaganda, the October revolution brought a new world order and gave birth to world history's first state of workers and farmers. All this has been omitted in the present.

This interpretation, however, is only partly true. Communist leaders, especially Joseph Stalin and high-ranking Soviet military commanders from the first half of the 1940s, continue to dominate the Museum of the Great Patriotic War in a context that can only be viewed as heroic and patriotic.[3] The attention to heroes from the years 1914-1918, however, also shows the official effort to change the understanding of *revolutions* as progressive steps in Russian history. This has become especially important since the recent wave of "colorful" revolutions in some countries, especially the "Orange Revolution" and the protests in the Maidan Square in the Ukrainian capital Kiev in 2013-2014.

While there is an evident link between *patriotic* wars on Poklonnaya Hill – the Patriotic War of 1812 and the Great Patriotic War in 1941-45, there is no such symbolism linking the First and Second *World* Wars. This is a tendency that is already well known from the Soviet Union: the description of the latter conflict as the Great Patriotic War means focusing on the suffering of the Soviet state and its people in the period between the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 and the final Soviet victory in May 1945. Using the term Second World War, on the other hand, would extend the focus to include the period from September 1939 to June 1941. During this period the Soviet Union profited from its alliance with Nazi Germany, doing so in a very "non-patriotic" way through aggressions against its neighbors Poland, Finland, and the Baltic countries Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. Besides, the exclusive focus on Soviet

3 Crimes from the Stalin period are mentioned very briefly in one single sentence as "*violations of the law*", "*ungrounded repression against millions of people*" and "*rough political mistakes*".

suffering during the German invasion excludes the non-European events of the Second World War, especially the battles in China and the Pacific. This has enabled the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia to avoid sharing the status of war victim with two other great powers of the Cold War, the United States and China. Only a narrowed focus on the memory of the Soviet suffering during the period of 1941-1945 could help the leaders of both the postwar Soviet Union and post-communist Russia to stress a "patriotic" continuity and connect the Soviet and Russian patriotic identities (Hosking 2002, 162-187).

Developments after 1945 have not found any place in the historical narrative of Poklonnaia Hill either. With regard to Soviet military achievements, this includes two military invasions that, from a Soviet point of view, served to preserve the status of the Soviet Union as a global superpower: the invasion of Hungary in 1956 and of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Thus, the peak of Soviet patriotic memory, the victory in the Great Patriotic War, has not been connected with any positive follow-up or happy ending.

Nevertheless, important references to the postwar communist regime, especially the period between 1964 and 1983, are still visible in the neighborhood, especially on the house at Kutuzov Avenue nr. 26. Here, two postwar leaders of the Soviet Communist Party, Leonid Brezhnev and Iurii Andropov, had their apartments, which is acknowledged by a memorial plaque.[4]

The memorials and the local historical narrative around Kutuzov Avenue clearly show that there is no room for the memory of the victims of Stalinist violence in this historical narrative about the Great Russian state and its heroic military achievements. This is especially noteworthy with regard to the fact that the perspective of the victims is not completely missing there: the memorial sculpture Tragedy of Nations (Трагедия народов), commemorating victims of the mass murder of Jews and other prisoners in the Nazi concentration camps, is situated next to the main building of the Museum of the Great Patriotic War. In 1998, the *Moscow Memorial Synagogue,* explicitly dedicated to the memory of the Jews who were killed during the Holocaust (Московская Мемориальная синагога – мемориал «Храм памяти евреев – жертв Холокоста») was built in the Victory Park behind the museum.

Why is this kind of memory more acceptable on Poklonnaia Hill than the memory of the Gulag, when the memory of the Holocaust was once even more ignored and marginalized in the Soviet Union than the Gulag memory

4 Those who want to make the narrative of Kutuzov Avenue and Poklonnayi Hill even more complicated may notice that the avenue begins with the Hotel Ukraine, whose symbolic significance, if included into the local historical narrative in question, has become especially sensitive since the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014.

(Baranova 2015, see also Gersherson 2013)? The answer seems obvious: the memory of the Jews and other victims of Nazi concentration camps, as presented on Poklonnaia Hill, does not challenge the exposition of Russian greatness and patriotism. The postwar destiny of Soviet prisoners of war who – often side by side with the Jews – were treated extremely brutally by Nazi Germany, but who survived the war only be sent to the Gulag after their return to the Soviet Union, is missing as well. Thus, the Russians, and especially their homeland, Russia, can still be seen exclusively as victims. The perpetrators are exclusively foreign (*Tsentral'nyj muzei Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, 2015, 26-27).

In order to see how simplified such an interpretation is, however, a comparison can be made with the Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center in Moscow, opened in 2012. The permanent exhibition at this museum shows, for example, how the Holocaust and the Gulag went hand in hand in the Soviet territory during the World War II. In 1940 and 1941, thousands of Jews were deported to Siberia by Soviet authorities after being labeled as "socially dangerous elements". Paradoxically, these deportations saved the lives of many of the Jews who were affected by them; if left in occupied territories, they would most probably have met the fate of other Soviet Jews who perished during the years of German occupation. The exhibition also pays tribute to active Jewish participation in the Soviet Red Army and shows that among the Soviet Jews, there were not only victims but also heroes of the Great Patriotic War. The parts dealing with Soviet anti-Semitism after the war also show how complex this field actually is (Gorin 2013, 172-202 and 238-246).

However, on Poklonnaia Hill, there is no room for deeper reflections concerning domestic conflicts and tragedies in which Russian/Soviet perpetrators killed and terrorized other Russian/Soviet citizens. In the following pages, I will focus on some of the sites of the Gulag memory and analyze their situation vis-à-vis the official master narrative of current Russia that has been outlined above.

Butovo

Situated approximately 30 kilometers south of the Moscow city center, the former firing range and execution site of Butovo (Бутовский полигон) was used both as an execution site and as a place for mass burials during the period of the Great Terror in the late 1930s. Thus, *Butovskyi polygon* is today one of the central mass burial grounds for Stalin-era victims in the Moscow area, with an importance clearly exceeding regional borders. Together with the Solovetsky

Islands in Northern Russia, Butovo also belongs to the most important sites of Russian Orthodox memory of the Gulag.

Before becoming a firing range for Soviet political police, Butovo had been a horse breeding site. The situation changed when the Soviet security service and political police, the OGPU, and its successor, the NKVD, took over the control of the site and turned its area – approximately two square kilometers – into its own "special object". The main wave of killings came during the so-called Great Terror in 1937 and 1938, when the capacity of already established killing facilities and burial sites in central Moscow became insufficient.[5] At least 20,761 people were executed here between August 8, 1937 and October 19, 1938; it is possible – and even probable – that the real number is significantly higher.

Among the 20,761 documented victims of Butovo were 19,903 men and 858 women aged between 15 to 80 years. The classification of their "crimes" was based mainly on the decision of the Politburo, the highest decision-making organ within the Soviet Communist Party, from July 2, 1937 and the instruction 00447 from June 30, 1937, both of which included a call for the destruction of "anti-Soviet elements".

No matter what they were accused of, the victims never received fair trials and learned about their death sentences only shortly before the executions. The largest number of people executed in one day was recorded on February 28, 1938, when a total of 562 persons lost their lives. Most of the victims were posthumously rehabilitated; 5,595 of them, however, were sentenced for crimes that were not considered to be politically motivated and were therefore not encompassed by the laws for rehabilitations. Nevertheless, even these people, some children among them, were sentenced to death without fair trials. The corpses were buried in 13 mass graves.

By the beginning of the 1940s, Butovo had lost its crucial importance for Stalinist violence in the Moscow region. According to some evidence, it was used on a limited scale until Stalin's death in 1953. After that, it gradually fell into oblivion.

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5 In the Soviet capital, Lenin's and later Stalin's regime first killed its opponents – both real and fabricated – in various buildings belonging to security forces near the now infamous KGB headquarters, Lubianka, not far from the Kremlin. The bodies were later buried in cemeteries such as Vagan'kovo (Ваганьковское кладбище) or Donskoe (Новое Донское кладбище). As the level of the Soviet terror increased, however, it became necessary to find new killing and burial places situated outside the highly populated central areas. Therefore, three such places were established: the *Butovskii poligon*; the *Kommunarka*; and *Liuberetskie meliorativnye polia,* the Liuberetsky fields, a place that was not used for mass executions and burials in the end. For more, see Alzo 2007.

This oblivion, however, was the result of an active policy of ignorance by authorities including the reorganized Soviet secret service, the KGB, which succeeded the NKVD in 1954. Access to the territory of the Butovo firing range remained strictly limited and the site was closed to the public. When the crimes of Stalinism were condemned by new Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev at the 20th Congress of the CPSU in 1956, Butovo could have become a site of memory that could provide clear and authentic evidence of the crimes committed during the Great Terror, thus stirring the feelings of its visitors against that terror. Instead, in 1957, the Supreme Soviet issued a decision that allowed employees of the KGB to build summerhouses and establish a group of cottage owners, *Dachnyi kooperativ*, in Butovo. KGB personnel were allowed to build and own cottages only dozens of meters from the mass graves, though it was forbidden to dig deeper than 50 centimeters. The status of Butovo as a secret "special object" owned by the Soviet and later Russian security service ended first in 1995.

The Soviet attitude to the memory of victims of Stalinist terror began to change during the reform period of *Perestroika* in the late 1980s; in October 1988, the Congress of Peoples' Deputies decided that those who were unjustly killed during the terror period should be rehabilitated. This decision was confirmed by the Politburo soon thereafter. In the case of Butovo, however, the change was slow (Alzo 2007).

The KGB was indeed ordered to begin searching for mass graves. At the same time, the communist regime still existed and the findings were not supposed to undermine its legitimacy. Moreover, the amount of work connected with the aftermath of Stalinism was enormous. The lack of capacity from state organs, however, turned into an advantage for those who wanted to reveal the history of Butovo when non-governmental organizations could be included in the research for the first time. The most important of these was the Memorial society, established as an organization driven by "moral imperative" and aiming to spread knowledge about the tragic past, promote human rights, and protect the memory of the victims of the regime in Soviet and later Russian post-Soviet society. As Nanci Adler (1993, 47), a Russianist specialized on research of the Soviet empire´s oppression and terror against its own population, has pointed out, Memorial has fulfilled several functions since its establishment: it has served not only as a historical enlightenment society but also as a human rights movement, a social organization, and a political organization. As the journalist and researcher specialized on the Soviet Union David Sutter (2012, 37) has indicated, since Memorial had quickly established its branches in 110 cities, the Soviet authorities feared it could become a base for an alternative political party. For similar reasons, Memorial became unpopular among those who

opposed Russian liberal ideas (more than 25 years after its foundation, Memorial still faced similar problems from the Russian leadership headed by President Vladimir Putin).

Finally, the fall of the Soviet Union in December 1991 made a definite change in the situation. Suddenly, the communist ideology was no longer an obstacle in the process of coming to terms with the tragic past.

From State Indifference to Orthodox Custody

Butovo as a site of mass murders was first publicly revealed by journalists. The gate of the Butovo shooting range finally opened in June 1993. However, during the years following the collapse of the Soviet state, Butovo became clear proof of the inability of the Russian post-Soviet regime to establish a new coherent historical narrative about the Gulag in order to define and develop new Russian democratic values. The lack of direct, sustainable official intervention aimed at preserving various sites of the Gulag memory was obvious on the federal, regional, and local levels (Anstett 2011). Since that time, the regime has increasingly leaned on the concept of a "Russian idea" where the memory of the Gulag has not actually gained any significant position.[6]

In 1993, the first memorial stone dedicated to the memory of the victims of the crimes of Stalinism was installed near the Butovo mass graves. The stone made the history of this place more visible than before; the text briefly explained the identity of the perpetrators – as belonging to the political and secret police, the NKVD, and the forces of the Ministry of State Security, the MGB – while the victims remained unspecified, described simply as "many thousands of victims of political repressions" from the period 1937-1953. The monument was initiated by the Memorial society and placed next to the main road leading to both the former firing range and the cottage area of former employees of the KGB. At that time, the KGB successor organization, the FSB, lost interest in allowing its employees to build new cottages. It became unwilling to maintain the place any longer; therefore, the territory including the mass cemetery in Butovo came into the custody of Moscow's regional authorities. Archaeological excavations in 1997 definitively confirmed the site's tragic past.

Under the new system of market economy, some of the surrounding buildings changed owners and the authorities started to plan ways to exploit the place commercially. These plans counted on building a huge apartment block in the memorial zone, only a few dozen meters from the burial sites. Through

6 Compare with Gill (2013, 43-78).

such steps, both the new Russian state and the regional institutions proved that they did not see the former Butovo execution site as a site of memory that would be important to save and protect for the future (Alzo 2007, 173).[7] Such a disrespectful attitude provoked protests from both the Memorial and the Russian Orthodox Church, whose patriarch even intervened with the mayor of Moscow and urged him to stop the plans. When the opponents of the building plans indeed managed to stop the construction work, even the regional authorities lost their interest. Since Butovo fell into this situation at the time when the new form of patriotic memory became visible at the Poklonnaia Hill, this proved that the memory of the Gulag did not fit into the current plans for official ”patriotic mobilization”.

Thus, the Russian Orthodox church, together with the Memorial society, was in fact forced to take care of the place if it wanted to preserve the memory of Stalinist terror there at all, rather than allow the state to let the memory of the communist regime's crimes in Butovo fall into oblivion again. In the absence of a clearly defined state concept of the Gulag memory, however, the civic- and liberal-oriented concept of the Gulag memory developed by the Memorial society differed substantially from the Orthodox concept of memory of the crimes of Stalinism. These two concepts faced one another in Butovo.

The Russian Orthodox Church was given priority by the state and obtained the custody of Butovo in 1995. This custody did not yet entail an exclusive right. The church took the initiative to preserve Butovo as a site of memory due to the fact that a number of the victims were of the Orthodox faith. Of the 20,760 officially identified victims from Butovo, almost 1,000 were Russian Orthodox priests. On May 27, 2000, the first church service in Butovo was held under an open sky by Alexei II, the Patriarch of Moscow and the entire Russian Orthodox Church.

The Russian Orthodox Church was becoming more influential, but there were still other options. When the new State Museum of Gulag History was being planned and realized in Moscow in 2001, a connection between this museum and the Butovo site of memory was discussed. If such a step had been realized, the state would have kept its control over Butovo to a much greater extent than it finally did. Moreover, the Russian Orthodox Church wanted to strengthen its own way of commemorating the victims of the Gulag, in order to make it more stable and long-lasting than the changing policies of the state

7 However, it should be noted that the situation – such an ignorant attitude – was not the same in the entire territory of the Russian Federation. In 1996, for example, a huge, 15-meter high monument called *Mask of Sorrow,* made by the Russian sculptor Ernst Neizvestny, was unveiled in the city of Magadan in eastern Russia with the financial help of Russian government as well as seven Russian cities.

and at the same time less ”neutral” and ”politically correct” than the way suggested by the Memorial society. Since the majority of the visitors were Russians who belonged to the Orthodox Church, the church wanted to show that Butovo as a site of memory reflected the beliefs of these people first of all[8].

At the same time, the state authorities once again confirmed their ambiguous attitude to the place; in August 2001, the authorities of the Moscow region declared Butovo a historical and cultural memorial of *local* importance (Alzo 2007, 108). The classification of the site as a place of “local importance” recognized neither the historical significance of the site to the entire Russian society nor its importance within an international or perhaps even global context.

Finally, in 2002, the church took its decisive step by making a deliberate choice not to seek the partnership with the state and to develop the memory site quite according to its own intentions and wishes. It established its own “autonomous non-commercial organization Memorialnyi tsentr “Butovo” (Мемориальный центр «Бутово»). The center was created with the ambition to coordinate the commemorative efforts of state, religious, and public organizations; in fact, its autonomy meant that the church had the main power to decide who would be commemorated in Butovo and how[9].

The Triumph of a Martyr

The symbolic expressions of Orthodox memory in Butovo are based on four main objects: two crosses and two churches. The first cross and the first church were placed right on the territory of the former killing field already in the middle of the 1990s. The second church and second cross – both larger in scale – were added in 2007.

The first, small wooden church was built already in 1996. Since 2007, when Russia commemorated the 70th anniversary of the beginning of the Great Terror, another church, the new *Church of the Resurrection and the Holy New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia*, has dominated the place. This was moreover the very first church in Russia to be consecrated after the reunion of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian Church Abroad in the same year. Between the 1920s and 2007, the Russian Church Abroad had existed only as an émigré outside the Soviet Union.

As in the case of the first wooden church, the first and smaller cross, erected in 1994, was supposed to symbolically mark the place where the mass graves

8 Author’s interview with Igor’ Garkavyi, 13 October 2016.
9 Ibid.

had been situated. The second, larger cross, also installed in 2007, has gained a more far-reaching symbolic importance. It has created a symbolic connection between Butovo and the Solovetsky Islands, a place in the White Sea in northern Russia, approximately 1,400 km from Moscow or almost 900 km from Sankt Petersburg, where one of the very first labor camps for political opponents of the communist regime in the Soviet Union was created in 1923. The camp was established at Solovetskii Monastery (Соловецкий монастырь).[10] In 2007, a so-called Solovetskii Cross was brought by boat from the northern islands and erected next to the new Church of the Resurrection and the Holy New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia.

As political scientist and journalist Veronica Dorman (2010, 431-436) points out, the Russian Orthodox Church can be seen as an important framework for the formation of Russian post-communist identity – as an heir of the Byzantine tradition that links religious confession with national identity, as an eminent victim of the Revolution representing pre-revolutionary past, as the only institution spanning the entire territory of the former USSR, and finally as the designated guardian of mores, customs, and morals in Russia today. Nevertheless, the ambition of the church has been even higher; in fact, the church had aimed for what Dorman calls privatization of memory. From this point of view, the crosses were supposed not only to link two former sites of Stalinist terror, but also to mark the new dominance of the Orthodox interpretation of the Gulag. While the first symbolic connection between the Solovetsky Islands and the Russian capital of Moscow to concern the memory of the Gulag had been marked by the Solovetsky Stone brought from northern Russia to Lubianka (formerly Dzerzhinskii) Square and placed in front of the KGB headquarters to commemorate the *zeks*, innocent laborers tortured in the camps, this second connection predominantly – although not exclusively – focused on religious victims.

In replacing the statue of KGB founder Feliks Dzerzhinskii in central Moscow with the Solovetskii Stone, the Memorial society had used the symbolism to develop the concept of human rights for all citizens of the country, no matter their political, ethnic, or religious belonging. The Memorial had chosen the date of October 30, 1990 for the erection of the Solovetsky Stone in order to commemorate in parallel the initiative by political prisoners on October 30, 1974 to declare that specific day the Day of Political Prisoners in the Soviet Union. One year after the Solovetsky Stone was installed in Lubianka Square, the Supreme Soviet in Russia officially established October 30 as the day of

10 As the only site of the Gulag memory, the Solovetskii Monastery has been protected by UNESCO since 1992 as a part of the world's cultural heritage.

Remembrance of the Victims of Political Repressions. The Russian Orthodox Church, on the other hand, constructed a different meaning of the Gulag past. At the center of this interpretation was not a *zek* but a *martyr* (Bogumil, Z., M. and D, Harrowell, Dominique and Elly 2015, 1416-1444).

The religious connection between the Solovetsky Islands and Butovo, however, was not unproblematic. The historical character of the Solovetskii Monastery as a site of memory of the Gulag was different from that of Butovo, since the Solovetskii Monastery was owned and administered by the Russian Orthodox Church already before it became a part of the Soviet communist terror. Thus there was no need to construct a completely new Orthodox memory of the communist terror there after the fall of the Soviet Union as was the case in Butovo, which had previously been a non-Orthodox site. Nevertheless, the commemorations of the 70th anniversary of the beginning of the Great Purges in 2007 created a connection not only between these two places, the Solovetsky Islands and Butovo, but also with some canals that were built during the Soviet Gulag period.

The Solovetskii cross was namely brought from the Solovetsky Islands to Butovo in a spectacular way, by a boat on Russian rivers, thus symbolically connecting places of imprisonment (Solovki), exploitation (canals), and execution (Butovo)(Dorman 2010, 432). On the final stage of its journey, the boat even passed the very center of Russian political power, the Kremlin.

The 12-meter-high wooden Solovetskii cross was erected in Butovo on August 8 in order to commemorate the beginning of the mass executions that had started the same day 70 years earlier. Some weeks after the anniversary, on October 30, 2007, the connection between the Orthodox memory of the Gulag and the highest Russian political power reached its peak. On that day, which was the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Political Repressions (i.e. the date of originally secular memory of the Gulag), Russian President Vladimir Putin appeared in Butovo together with Moscow Regional Governor Boris Gromov to attend a religious service hold by Patriarch Alexis II. This was the first time the head of the Russian Orthodox Church was present in Butovo on October 30, and the first time the head of the Russian state took part in a commemorative ceremony for the victims of Soviet terror. Even Human Rights Commissioner Vladimir Lukin was present. The day finally confirmed the Orthodox superiority concerning the interpretation of the Gulag memory at Butovo. All commemorative activities, no matter if their basis was religious or secular, were now held under the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The same occasion, however, also proved how controversial the connection between the leaders of the Russian state and the Russian Orthodox Church could become in terms of using the Gulag memory in support of the current

Russian political regime. When President Vladimir Putin visited the site of memory in Butovo, he met both Patriarch Alexis II and the senior priest of the church, Kirill. On the one hand, Putin paid tribute to the victims and stated that the victims of the 1930s were "the pride of the nation" since they had not feared to speak their mind. On the other hand, however, Putin (2007) added that "in honoring the memory of past tragedies we need to base ourselves on the best things that our people have accomplished. We must combine our efforts and promote Russia's development. We have everything we need to do so." The president never admitted any responsibility on behalf of the Soviet/Russian state, nor did he mention his own past as a KGB officer. The same day, the Russian Orthodox Church (2007) issued a statement that claimed that the crimes of the communist era should be commemorated with prayers and not political meetings. According to this approach, and in keeping with Christian tradition, the "proper form of memorialization" is observed when "people without any meetings and demonstrations go to the places of execution or other places of memory and take part in collective prayer."

The Russian Orthodox Church has included Butovo among places described as "The Russian Golgotha", i.e. places of the highest religious importance. Other such places are, for example, the aforementioned Solovetsky Monastery and Ganina Iama (Ганина Яма) near Yekaterinburg, where the remains of the last Russian tsar, Nicholas II, and his family, all murdered by the Bolsheviks in 1918, were discovered in the 1970s.

The term "Russian Golgotha" has been used to symbolically link the suffering of Russian Orthodox victims to the Golgotha near Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified. In addition to its religious dimension, the term "Russian Golgotha" has an ethnic character in terms of Russianness. The usage of the Russian word *Russkaia* and not *Rossiiskaia* Golgotha indicates that it does not pertain to non-Russian victims of Soviet communist terror in Butovo, such as members of the international communist movement and foreign enthusiasts who came to Soviet Russia in order to help in its communist development and who, too, were executed in Butovo. Citizens of countries such as Germany, Poland, France, the USA, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Italy, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Turkey, Japan, India, and China who were killed at Butovo have thus been excluded from such an ethnically dominated concept of Gulag memory.

Moreover, there were many non-Orthodox people among the victims, including Catholic believers, Muslims and Jews. A large group of victims of Stalinist communism in Butovo were the communists themselves, i.e. those communists who were murdered by their own regime and who, some of them fanatic atheists, would have disliked being commemorated through any reli-

gious traditions.[11] As many as 1,200 victims of Butovo were executed only because they were disabled and thus found to be inferior. This aspect of the Great Terror – the killing of people on the basis of their physical disabilities – has received little attention from scholars so far, even though the treatment of the disabled indicated that Butovo was not the only place in the Soviet Union where people with disabilities suffered and died during the Gulag period.

Since the church took over yet another, smaller site of the Gulag memory in the Moscow region, Kommunarka, it is interesting to compare the style of commemorations in these two places, especially with regard to the memory of religious and non-religious victims.

Kommunarka served in the 1930s as a dacha, summerhouse, of the OGPU (the predecessor of the NKVD) chief Genrikh Yagoda. More than 10,000 victims of the political terror of the late 1930s were buried there, including Iagoda himself. These victims, however, had very little to do with Orthodox belief; they were prominent members of Soviet state institutions and security forces of that time, i.e. those who first supported the terror but who later became its victims. They were, however, executed not because of their previous involvement in or support of the mass murders, but because they fell into disgrace.

Today, the Orthodox church in Kommunarka prays for these victims – who came from within the Soviet Communist Party. The church representatives have solved this paradox in the following way. They keep praying for the victims because "despite the fact that they used to be communists, nobody knew what was going on in their heads when they came face to face with death while waiting for the execution"[12]. From this point of view, the local attitude of the church in Kommunarka seems to be more inclusive than the one in Butovo.

Butovo has even been described as a sacred place, similar to the "fields of Russian glory like Borodino" (Alzo 2007, 175). The commemoration of the sufferings of victims of Stalinism as part of "sacred Russian glory" clearly illustrates the nationalist tendencies of the Russian Orthodox memory culture.

Moreover, by declaring its victims martyrs, or more exactly New Martyrs according to the Orthodox tradition, the church has radically changed the meaning of their suffering. The term New Martyrs is not new. Originally, New Martyrs or Neomartyrs were those Orthodox Christians who were killed by people of other religions or by atheists. In the new Russian context, however, it refers to people who suffered and died as the result of Soviet anti-religious persecutions. The Russian Orthodox Church has commemorated these victims through an unprecedented wave of canonizations, starting during Perestroika in the

11 For more about the proportions of Butovo victims, see: Alzo (2007, 96-144).

12 Author's interview with Ermogen, priest in Kommunarka, 11 October 2015.

late 1980s. While the church had canonized approximately 300 people before 1988, the number exceeded 2,000 by 2010. Butovo has played an important role in this new policy of the church (Hyldal Christensen 2016).

More than 330 of the 936 church victims at Butovo have been canonized. While the reasons for their executions were often absurd and based on false accusations of espionage, terrorism, and hostility to the Soviet regime, the church has interpreted their suffering as a sacrifice for a higher purpose; as martyrs, they suffered not only because they were brutally deprived of their basic human rights, but primarily because of their faith and dedication to their Russian Motherland.

Only the names of the victims who belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church have been presented individually on large boards that hang on a fence surrounding the former killing field in Butovo. The non-religious victims have not been mentioned by name until now, with one exception: in 2014, a new board was installed near the main entrance to the seven hectare memorial area, containing the names of twelve Russian generals from the First World War who were killed in Butovo in the late 1930s. Moreover, hundreds of officers from the Russian Army during the period 1914-1918 are specifically mentioned. This makes the army group from the First World War the second most visible entity after the religious martyrs.

In recent times, the Russian Orthodox Church seems to be more aware than before of the problems involved with the hierarchization of victims at Butovo. In a new park of memory, built in Butovo to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Great Terror in 2017, the names of all victims are fully specified, not according to religious or other hierarchy but in alphabetical order. The Russian Orthodox Church had long since received requests to list all victims, rather than only religious victims, from the victims' relatives, but it came about first in 2017, two years after the new state concept of the Gulag memory. According to the Director of the Butovo Memorial Center Igor' Garkavyi, the new park will finally avoid "competition of memory"[13]. This is happening despite new moral problems for the church, especially the problem of those victims who were executed for criminal and not political activities (and who have therefore not been rehabilitated) being listed side by side with the New Martyrs. The church, according to Garkavyi[14], now recognizes even those people as victims who should be commemorated; although they might have committed crimes that were not merely "politically invented" by Stalin's regime, they were not punished after a decision based on a fair trial. In a similar way, the memory of

13 Author's interview with Igor' Garkavyi, 13 October 2016.
14 Ibid.

the Gulag victims is supposed to be commemorated not only by prayers in both Orthodox churches, but also by a new museum.

However, the museum is now being spoken of as the "Russian Golgotha" museum focused exclusively on victims of religious repressions. The current debate about it illustrates how the Russian state has effectively handed over custodianship of the Soviet past and responsibility for commemorating and mourning the victims of Soviet state terror to the Russian Orthodox Church, while secular civil society organizations are being excluded at the same time. (Fedor and Sniegon 2018).

Of all the places included in this study, Butovo has most evidently shown the formation of a new, patriotically oriented memory of the Gulag in today's Russia, with the concept of "Russianness" founded on religious and ethnic bases. In other places, the adjustments to the new governmental concept of the Gulag memory are visible in different ways.

The State Museum of Gulag History in Moscow

The State Museum of Gulag History in Moscow was founded in 2001. It was created through the initiative of Anton Antonov-Ovseenko, a historian who himself had once been a prisoner of Stalin's labor camps. The permanent exhibition opened in 2004.

The Gulag museum in Moscow received the most prominent location of all museums and sites of memory dedicated to the victims of Stalinism – with the exception of the Solovetsky Stone in Lubianka Square.[15] It was constructed on Petrovka Street at the very heart of the Russian capital, next to the building of the attorney general and not far from the *Bolshoi Theater*, the Russian Parliament and the former KGB headquarters Lubianka.

This first Gulag museum that existed between 2004 and 2015 was visited by approximately 50,000 people annually, one-third of them foreign tourists. Thus, the number of visitors was allegedly slightly higher than the number of

15 The Solovetskii Stone is a monument dedicated to the victims of Stalinist terror, in the form of a stone that was brought to central Moscow from the Solovetskii prison camp on the Solovetsky Islands. It was placed in front of the KGB headquarters Lubianka on October 30, 1990 in order to support a movement for the declaration of a Day of Political Prisoners in the then Soviet Union. Even though the cross in Butovo and the stone both came to Moscow from the same location, the meanings of both sites of memory are different as the stone primarily belongs in the context that links the Gulag memory to the human rights agenda.

those who visit the former execution site in Butovo.[16] In spite of this, the figure seems conspicuously low, considering the fact that Moscow is the capital of a country with almost 150 million inhabitants and that the city itself has 12 million inhabitants. Nevertheless, this might change in the event that the new museum, with its new and recently opened exhibition, manages to become a part of the educational program of Moscow's school classes. Such a development is now being negotiated[17] (Romanov 2015).

The State Museum of Gulag History has had a lower status than the federal Museum of the Great Patriotic War on Poklonnaia Hill since it has been connected with municipal institutions of the City of Moscow and not with state organs of the Russian Federation. The Gulag museum has been supported and supervised by Moscow's own Department of Culture.

The initially small scale of the museum and the fact that this important exhibition was established as late as ten years after the fall of the communist regime in the Soviet Union showed that the demand for such a museum from the state and municipal authorities was low during the 1990s. The State Museum of Gulag History was not the first museum in post-Soviet Russia dedicated to the memory of the crimes of Stalinism. In 1996, a permanent exhibition dedicated to the crimes of communism had been opened in Moscow at the Sakharov Center, a museum and cultural center named after the well-known Soviet dissident and nuclear scientist Andrei Sakharov.

Why, then, were two such exhibitions needed in Moscow? There are two important differences between them. Firstly, the Sakharov Center is linked to the dissident tradition and is deliberately a non-governmental, i.e. not state-owned, organization. Secondly, its exhibition is very critical of the entire period of the Soviet communist regime and does not focus solely on the period of Stalinist terror. This means that the Gulag memory as presented by the Sakharov Center has been substantially more closely connected with liberal political values than the same memory as presented by the Gulag museum.[18]

The Gulag museum has focused primarily on the victims. It has a documentary archive and a collection of personal belongings and works of art made by

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16 Since the entrance to Butovo is free of charge and the area is open to all visitors, it is difficult to find exact visitor figures.

17 Author's interview with Roman Romanov, 12 October 2015.

18 In December 2014, the Sakharov Foundation was declared a "foreign agent" in accordance with Russia's new foreign agent law, introduced in 2012. This status automatically denies any "patriotic" character of institutions labeled with it, as seen from the point of view of current rulers of the Russian Federation. The Gulag museum, on the contrary, cannot be placed in the same situation due to its character as a state museum.

former Gulag inmates, as well as works by contemporary artists who have tried to come to terms with this traumatic past through their art.

The State Museum of Gulag History has faced a very specific problem: from the beginning, it has had to deal with the same questions as the Sakharov Foundation about its attitude to perpetrators, victims, questions of patriotism, and human rights in Soviet and Russian society. However, at the same time, it has had to act within the framework of state policies with their varying relationship to liberal political values. In its first permanent exhibition situated on Petrovka Street, it developed an interpretation of the Gulag that, on the one hand, does not deny the crimes of the Stalinist regime, yet, on the other hand, does not immediately connect the period of the Gulag with human rights activism, i.e. with the effort to increase respect for human rights and civil society in post-communist Russia in general and Russia under Vladimir Putin in particular. Thus, the difficulties are not connected to the facts and discussions about the Gulag period itself, but rather to the question of what specific *meaning* the Gulag should have for post-Gulag Russians.[19]

This solution of the first permanent exhibition also reflected a unique feature of the Soviet and Russian post-terror society: the case of the Gulag in which not all survivors – after being released from the camps – remained critical to the regime that had sent them and their relatives to camps and prisons. While many of these people became critical towards Joseph Stalin, Lavrentii Beriia and other Soviet leaders who were responsible for mass murders between the 1930s and early 1950s, a significant number of them were not equally critical towards the Soviet communist system in general. In this way, they remained convinced Soviet patriots.

The Gulag survivors who have such an ambiguous relationship to the Gulag memory belong to a category that Nanci Adler (2012, xii) describes as *loyalist Gulag prisoner or survivor*. As the American historian Stephen Cohen (2012, 95) points out, those returnees from the Gulag who blamed Stalin but remained pro-Soviet were in a majority in the 1950s and 1960s. Alexander Etkind (2013, 12), a literary historian who focuses on research of memory and cultural development in Russia, has described the current expression of this paradox as *warped mourning*. However, this paradox included many more than just the direct survivors. As the Soviet regime compromised the ideas of socialism, the human victims of the Soviet experiment were mourned alongside the ideas and ideals that vanished in the experiment. The mourning of people who were murdered for their ideas, ideas which also disappeared in the violence, created

19 For more about these discussions, concerning both definitions and interpretations of the Gulag in Russia, see, for example: Khlevniuk and Belokowsky (2015, 479-498).

a very paradoxical double-mourning that paralyzed the efforts to come to terms with the violent Soviet past. That contributed to the fact that no hegemonic regime-critical narrative of Stalinist terror ever developed in the post-Stalinist Soviet Union. This in turn has been one of the reasons why such a widely recognized master narrative, oriented to promote liberal democratic values and influence a large part of the Russian society, is still to a large extent missing in post-Soviet Russia, where those who support such an interpretation of Stalinist crimes are still a minority.

The founder of the State Museum of Gulag History, Anton Antonov-Ovseenko, could be included in the loyalist category. He was the son of the revolutionary Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko, who, after fighting against the tsarist regime, became an important figure during the Bolshevik revolution of October 1917 as a leader in the storming of the Winter Palace in Petrograd. Afterwards, Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko served as a Bolshevik commander on several fronts in the civil war. During the period 1922-1924, he was a political chief of the Red Army. After spending some years in Soviet diplomacy, he became chief prosecutor in 1934 and later, in 1937, People's Commissar for Justice of the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1938, Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko was arrested and executed.

> The wife of Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko, and the mother of their son Anton, committed suicide in one of Stalin's prisons. Anton spent a significant part of his youth as a Gulag prisoner, but because of his family heritage, he did not turn against all the political and ideological values for which his father had once fought. Becoming a historian, he saw his mission primarily as "unmasking Stalin's hangmen and their heirs in the KGB" (Cohen 2012, 137).

This is evident from a book published in the West in 1980. There, Antonov-Ovseenko (1981, xvi) primarily blames Stalin and "the butchers, the informers, the pogromists" but never the communist system as a whole. The circumstances of his life in the Soviet Union, which was still led by Leonid Brezhnev at that time, must be taken into an account. Nevertheless, he did not significantly change his view concerning the communist revolution and system even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which was also reflected in "his" exhibition. In fact, the personality of the founder and the very existence of the Gulag museum (and, of course, its exhibition) were inseparable. Stephen Cohen (2012, 166), a friend of Anton Antonov-Ovseenko, has even described the museum as Anton's museum.

The Gulag museum´s first permanent exhibition did not express any kind of regret from the Russian state and did not provoke any self-reflection from the Soviet/Russian society. The documents and artifacts that were exhibited showed both the brutality on the part of the decision-makers and the horrific suffering of the victims. However, crucial questions remained unanswered. How was Stalin possible? Who were those millions of "ordinary Russians" who made his terror possible and why did they do so? And what about the rest of the Russian society? Last, but not least, what relevance is the memory of the Gulag supposed to have in Russia today?

The international dimension of the exhibition should be examined critically as well. The Second World War was still referred to as The Great Patriotic War. The foreign victims were sporadically mentioned, but the Gulag was still treated as a domestic and not an international crime. A former Czechoslovak army general who was mentioned specifically, Ludvík Svoboda, was portrayed exclusively as a Gulag victim without any mention of his Stalinist activities in the late 1940s when he, as the Minister of Defense of Czechoslovakia, helped the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia seize absolute power in the country, or when he, in 1968 as the president of Czechoslovakia, became one of the leading Czechoslovak officials who assisted the Soviet Union in reconstituting its power in Central Europe after the defeat of the so-called Prague Spring reform process. Svoboda and some other examples illustrate that the museum's way of expressing the trauma of Stalinism in its exhibition was not an attempt to represent the entire communist period as a trauma, either to the Russian public or to an international one, even though it was, beyond any doubt, constructed to condemn the worst crimes of Stalin's dictatorship. Thus, it did not challenge the Putin regime's construction of continuity between Soviet and Russian post-Soviet patriotism – whenever needed by the regime – by introducing "foreign" liberal values into the Russian Gulag memory culture, as was done in the case of the Sakharov Foundation.

In October 2015, the State Museum of Gulag History found its new location outside the Moscow city center, not far, in fact, from the Butyrka Prison, which became "famous" during the Gulag period and which even today serves as a prison, making it a site of memory with limited access. The move of the Gulag museum had been prepared already during Dmitrii Medvedev's presidency in 2011 with the help of the City of Moscow authorities. However, *gazeta.ru* (2015) reported that when the museum was opened on October 30, 2015, which was the day of Remembrance of the Victims of Political Repressions in Russia, none of the Russian top politicians joined in the opening ceremony.

The new museum is about four times bigger than the first one, with much better technological equipment and new facilities for seminars, research, and

other activities. These new opportunities can be seen as a clear improvement. Compared with the first exhibition on Petrovka Street, the visitor is presented with a much more impressive experience based on empathy with the victims. However, some aspects that avoid a collision between the meaning of the Gulag as presented by the museum and the politics of Gulag memory as practiced by the current Russian authorities still remain (Hardy, forthcoming).

First, the Gulag is seen as a problem of the Soviet past and not the Russian present. As stated during the opening, the museum is supposed to be "devoted to research, discussion, and public manifestation of the era of Stalinist repressions" (Moscow City Website 2015). But while the Gulag period has been extended backward to 1918, the dimension after 1953 remains underdeveloped.[20] In fact, even though the term Gulag is included in the museum's name, its content and meaning are not explicitly elaborated. Instead, the continuous dominant focus on the victims and the Gulag as a closed chapter of Soviet history leaves a number of disturbing questions about the entire Soviet system, the relationship between society and mass violence, and the Gulag´s overall legacy unanswered and even unspoken.

Second, the focus on foreign victims of the Soviet terror is insufficient in the museum's narrative, especially concerning groups from territories annexed by the Soviet Union after the end of the Second World War. This lack is particularly evident when the exhibition is compared with the recently closed exhibition at the former Gulag camp Perm-36, where similar problems related to nationality were not omitted to as great an extent. The focus at Perm-36, however, contributed to it being labeled as a "foreign agent" and accused of supporting "fascists" by the current Russian regime, as will be described later.

Based on these two aspects, the exhibition described as the "national memory of the Gulag" seems highly problematic, since the discussion about the memory of the Gulag, in fact, plays a marginal role here. The timeline presented on the floor of the museum's main hall portrays the Soviet period as a problem, while the Russian post-Soviet period appears to be a solution, though without any mention of the new Russia's inability to include the Gulag in the construction of its new identity. The last screen in the last room of the exhibition shows former Russian President Dmitrii Medvedev visiting the site of the Gulag memory at Magadan and Vladimir Putin visiting Butovo, thus giving both of them a prominent place in the meaning of this "national memory" of the Gulag. This is a clear indication that the Gulag can, indeed, be included in a "patriotic" narrative in the sense that the current Russian leadership has been developing during recent years.

20 For more about this concept of the Gulag, see: Ivanova (2015).

Perm-36

The difference between the two processes of trauma construction mentioned previously – the traumatization of the crimes of Stalinism in order to condemn the period of the most cruel communist violence and the traumatization of the entire communist period in order to construct new liberal democratic values – is also clearly visible in the case of the Perm-36 museum in the Ural area of the Russian Federation. Compared with the aforementioned sites of memory, situated in Moscow, the attitude of the state authorities has been very different here.

The Museum of the History of Political Repression, Perm-36, situated at the former Soviet forced labor camp Perm-36 in the village of Kuchino, approximately 120 kilometers from the city of Perm, occupies a very special position within the Russian post-Soviet context. It was constructed on a site that was previously used as a unique Gulag and post-Gulag labor camp. The camp was put into operation during the era of Stalinism in the 1940s as a camp for prisoners who were forced to work in nearby forests. While many other camps at that time were made of wood and served only temporarily (after fulfilling their mission they were abandoned and destroyed), the barracks of this camp were made of bricks and built to last a long time. This was one of the reasons why the camp was not demolished after Stalin's death. Instead, it continued to serve as a labor camp, but now for prisoners of a different kind.

Its new prisoners were former employees and officers, some of them high-ranked, of Soviet judicial authorities and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. They were charged with crimes committed during the Stalinist period. Paradoxically, some of these prisoners had even higher military ranks than their guards, and they were allowed to maintain these ranks also during their time in prison.

Why these people were brought to a small village in the forest outside Perm and isolated there is still not quite clear. Archival evidence is still very limited and the main sources of information are documents from party meetings of the camp employees during that period (Obukhov 2015). According to these reports, the regime in the camp was rather mild and the prisoners lived in privileged conditions – if compared to other, ordinary prisoners.

The situation changed during the 1960s when many older prisoners were released, partly due to the regular end of their sentences and partly due to an amnesty in 1968. Nevertheless, the number of prisoners in the camp still exceeded 600 at that time (Obukhov 2015, 138).

Among the newcomers in the late 1960s were, for example, two men sentenced for their alleged participation in an attempt to assassinate Leonid Brezhnev, the leader of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, carried out in

Red Square in Moscow in January 1969. The two prisoners were acquaintances of the unsuccessful main assassin, Lieutenant Viktor Ilyin.

Also the third and final period of the camp's existence was unique. After 1972, some of the best-known Soviet dissidents, such as the human rights activist Sergei Kovalev, the writer Leonid Borodin, and the Ukrainian poet Vasyl Stus, were imprisoned here for their "anti-Soviet" activities. Vasyl Stus, who served a ten-year sentence in Perm-36 in the 1980s, was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature by the German writer Heinrich Böll in 1985, but died in the camp the same year. Other globally known people who served at least parts of their sentences in the Perm area were Nathan Sharansky, Vladimir Bukovsky, and Anatolii Marchenko.

In 1992, a non-governmental organization started a successful project to turn the former Perm-36 camp into a museum of the Gulag. The museum was established in 1994 and officially opened on September 5, 1995. Its area includes about 20 buildings and occupies 4,855 square meters. The museum's narrative does not limit its attention to the times of Stalinism. The focus on the Soviet dissidents from the 1970s indicates the museum's emphasis on the continuous character of Soviet state repressions, including during the Brezhnev period. On the other hand, this period has increasingly been seen as a period of "stability and plenitude" in post-Soviet Russia, especially during the presidency of Vladimir Putin (Fainberg and Kalinovsky 2016).

The unique character of this site was recognized both by ICOMOS, the International Council on Monuments and Sites, which is a global non-governmental organization for the conservation and protection of places of cultural heritage, and by UNESCO. In 2004, UNESCO included Perm-36 on the list of 100 World Monuments Watch memorials in order to "provide an opportunity to attract visibility, raise public awareness, foster local engagement in protection, leverage new resources for conservation, advance innovation, and demonstrate effective solutions" (World Monument Fund n.d.). There were even discussions about how to increase the status of the museum from regional to federal, although they met with the obstacle of economic authorities not wanting to provide sufficient economic help that such a change would require. Nevertheless, the museum was reconstructed by other means even though its status officially did not change (Shmyrov and Kursina 2014).

During the years when Dmitrii Medvedev was president of Russia, the Perm-36 museum was in the process of being added to the UNESCO World Heritage list. Despite its regional status, it was recognized as a museum of international importance, partly subsidized by the Russian state, partly financed by foreign grants.

Things began to change in 2012, right after the return of Vladimir Putin to the Kremlin, when a new governor was appointed to the Perm area. The existing international connections were cut, and after the Russian annexation of Crimea the Russian state took full control over the museum. Perm-36 started to change in two particular ways.

Firstly, one part of the permanent exhibition was closed since it allegedly glorified human rights activists, anti-Russian nationalists, and dissidents, i.e. those who actively fought against the Soviet regime during the postwar period. Its so-called glorification of dissidents from other former Soviet republics was especially criticized. The NGO that previously handled issues concerning the memory of the Gulag at Perm-36, ANO Perm-36, was labeled a "foreign agent", part of the so-called "Fifth Column", i.e. as an organization hostile to the Russian state and representing interests of foreign – Western – powers.[21] The exhibition was reorganized in a way that prevented the promotion of sympathy for those who had opposed the Soviet regime, especially after the fall of the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union. Thus, the museum narrative lost its connections with liberal political values and human rights agenda concerning both the Soviet and Russian post-Soviet context. While the founders claim that the character of the new exhibition is supposed to present the museum as an organic part of the "normal" Soviet penal system that acted only against "criminals" and not ordinary citizens, the representatives of the new official course do not agree, claiming that the interpretation of the character of the repressions is not radically changed but only "corrected from previous mistakes" (Киктенко 2016).[22] Nevertheless, the current anti-liberal tone has been evident even outside the museum. The organizers of the conference "Gulag: Echo of the War and Victory", held in October 2016 at Perm-36, for example, stressed the importance of connecting new research into the topics in question with the new *State Policy to Perpetuate the Memory of Victims of Political Repressions.*[23] In this way, the "new" research is supposed to correspond with the quest for Russian patriotism in accordance with the government's line. Moreover, the main topics of the conference, according to the official website of the Perm region (2016), were "the contribution of the Gulag prisoners to the Victory in the Great Patriotic War and their participation in postwar reconstruction of the Soviet Union." In connection with the conference, the exhibition was further modified (Perm visitor website 2016). Although this did not mean that the partici-

21 In 2016, ANO Perm-36 was definitively forced to close down its activities.

22 See also Shmyrov (2016), and Kantor (2016).

23 Labirint. Zhurnal sotsial'no-gumanitarnykh issledovanii, <http://journal-labirint.com/?p=6354>.

pants automatically accepted the direction indicated by the organizers, the conference followed another controversial step made by the new museum to present the Gulag as an at least partly positive contribution to Soviet history (*ru.rfi.fr* 2016). Earlier the same year, in April 2016, the museum had published a booklet about the positive and "efficient" contribution of the Gulag to Soviet science, which, after some protests, had been withdrawn from its website (*business-class* [website] 2016).

The second change in Perm-36 was the abortion of all peripheral activities on the part of the museum. This primarily concerned the international forum "Pilorama", which could be translated as "The Sawmill" or "Power-saw Bench". The forum annually attracted thousands of people, including some well-known Russian artists, human rights activists, and people with liberal views, who came to Perm in order to discuss the Soviet past but also to call for respect for human rights and freedom. "Pilorama" was organized yearly at Perm-36 between 2005 and 2012.

Today, Perm-36 is losing its former importance as a place dedicated to education about human rights and increased knowledge of the crimes of Stalinist terror. Prior to the most recent changes, Perm-36 was visited by a total of 30,000-40,000 visitors annually. This is a figure similar to those of Butovo and other sites of the Gulag memory in Russia. The importance of Perm-36 as a symbol, however, has been much greater in current Russian media and the entire Russian historical culture. The national media controlled by the central authorities found it necessary to organize a campaign in order to condemn the liberally oriented activities of the museum's founders.[24]

Due to its geographical location, some judicial proceedings connected with current changes, and the lack of access to documents, Perm-36 remains one of the least-examined sites of memory of the crimes of Stalinism in Russia today. The developments from 2012 onwards clearly show an effort to limit the importance of this site and to deprive it of the chance to become a place that provokes a debate about the situation and role of political prisoners in regimes based on terror, or about the importance of the Soviet dissidents – from both Russia and other former Soviet republics – in the development of a civil society in Russia. As sites of memory – monuments and museums – represent the "hardware" of traumatic memory, the lack of such places paralyzes cultural debates over the need to revive and reinspire that memory, making it impossible

24 "Fifth Column." *NTV*, TV documentary, 2014. <http://www.ntv.ru/video/849280/> (accessed 2 March 2018). The analysis of the Russian media debate about the sites of memory connected to the Gulag in general and to Perm-36 in particular would, however, require a specific study and is not the main task of this text.

to reach a consensus about the past. As Alexander Etkind (2013, 246) has pointed out, memory without memorials is vulnerable to a cynical, recurrent process of refutations and denials. Feelings of guilt can be assuaged and soothed by new voices, and even the most influential texts can be challenged by new texts.

Conclusion

The Russian state still lacks a consistent official commemoration policy for the crimes of the communist dictatorship, especially with regard to the Stalin period. The situation is confusing. In 2015, the Russian government published its plan to deal with this memory, which could be partly understood as positive since previous governments have paid very little attention to this subject. At the same time, the main direction of the Gulag memory has been developing in a much more centralized way than before. Clearly defined conclusions as to how to create a modern post-communist narrative critical to the Soviet dictatorial past are still missing, despite the fact that Russian President Vladimir Putin recently issued a decree to build a new memorial to the victims of the crimes of the Stalinist regime in the Russian capital of Moscow.[25]

The situation at the sites of memory indicates that the attitude of the relevant Russian authorities is anti-liberal and anti-Western. While the authorities did not initiate the establishment of Butovo, the Gulag museum in Moscow, or Perm-36 as sites of memory of the Soviet communist terror, and while they were initially highly ignorant of them, today the authorities are attempting to strengthen their control over the narratives and activities in these places. At the same time, former Western support to these sites, which contributed in large part to the possibility of preserving and developing a number of them, is now presented as very negative, as a kind of "intellectual invasion" that the West conducted through its "foreign agents" in Russia. Thus, none of these sites is allowed to make attempts to construct and present a sense of the Gulag history that could stress the individual responsibility of the visitors in order to promote democratic values based on individual human rights, i.e. to challenge the model of centralized state power in Russia. The memory of the Gulag is accepted if left as a closed chapter of the Russian/Soviet past or interpreted in a way that does not challenge the interests of the current rulers. If it challenges an organized and predominantly top-down interpretation accepted by the authorities, it is severely criticized and/or completely silenced.

25 <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/acts/files/0001201509300028.pdf>.

The Orthodox commemoration of the Gulag does not seem to experience the same issues, even though it is highly critical of the communist past. Since it shares the notion of a bright Russian future if distant from the West, and since it does not challenge the goals of the increasingly authoritarian Russian regime, it is much less "problematic" for the leadership of the state than the non-governmental organizations are. In fact, the Orthodox narrative of the Gulag is the most "patriotic" coherent and officially accepted Gulag narrative existing in present day Russia.

The current Russian regime wants to see the victims of the Gulag as *victims of modernization* rather than as victims of senseless terror (Etkind 2009, 193). The intensifying convergence between Russian nationalism, Orthodox belief and communist sentiment is creating a new category that portrays the victims of the Gulag as *martyrs* of *Russian uniqueness and superiority.* Such an interpretation does not refer to individual victims or losers, since it attempts to turn all former losers into martyrs who – by their sacrifice – have contributed to their country's future collective success. It allows the communists to feel less guilty and more progressive. Simultaneously, it legitimizes Orthodox supremacy in Russia and encourages nationalists and other opponents of liberal democratic values. Moreover, it does not challenge the *nationalism of despair* as defined by Serguei Oushakine (2009, 7) on the basis of his research among "ordinary Russians" belonging to various communities of people who lost in the process of post-Soviet development. On the contrary, as the patriotism of despair emerged "as an emotionally charged set of symbolic practices called upon to mediate relations among individuals, nation, and state and thus to provide communities of loss with socially meaningful subject positions," these forms of nationalization and ethnification of Russian suffering based on intensifying convergence between Russian nationalism, Orthodox belief and communist sentiment have provided the key base of support for the resurgence of Russia's national assertiveness that has become so vivid during the presidency of Vladimir Putin. The memory of the victims of the Gulag has not found any specific or prominent place here. Instead of displaying empathy for the individual victims of the Soviet communist dictatorship, the narratives belonging to the nationalism of despair have rather been transformed into ideas of national belonging.

As the historian Catherine Merridale (2001, 327) has shown in her study about the Soviet and Russian "culture of death", there is no self-evident connection between the Russian experience of a tragic past – war, dictatorship, violence, and terror – and a necessity to develop a liberally oriented culture of memory. While Western historical narratives about the tragic past are molded by a specific culture in which individual creativity and freedom occupy

dominant positions, Russian suffering and victimhood are molded by the experience of lasting aspiration to universal empire. "To speak as a former Soviet citizen and a Russian is to speak.... from a culture of endurance and heroism; it is to use the language of historical destiny, to talk (however ironically) of the audacity involved in leading the collective struggle for human liberation." Therefore, the number of people who openly object the current use of the Gulag memory mentioned above still seems to be rather limited.

Thus, the main lesson from the tragic past in the form of the message "Never again!", which has become common in Western historical thinking connected especially to the Holocaust, does not find its clear Russian parallel in the form of "Never again the Gulag!" The situation that influences the specific places in this study does not indicate a quick change of attitude among decision-makers, or among those who visit the sites or are supposed to visit them, i.e. the Russian society in general. On the other hand, the different attitudes displayed in this study can aid in the understanding of the factors that contribute to a significant number of people in today's Russia still being able to see the disappearance of the Soviet Union – rather than the violence of the state against millions of its own, as well as many foreign citizens – as their shared trauma, as their common tragedy, despite their different individual beliefs and opinions.

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CHAPTER 6

Memory Watchdogs. Online and Offline Mobilizations around Controversial Historical Issues in Russia

Elena Perrier (*Morenkova*)

> In our country we are only starting – only now! – the real process of rethinking of our history. And the role of Stalin in this history is not yet defined in collective consciousness. We need to talk a lot to each other (…). And the Victory day is the right time for such a conversation[1].

During the Soviet period, the Victory of the USSR in the Great Patriotic War over German invaders was both a "civic religion", the main symbol of the regime, exploited by State propagandists and the only real holiday and memorial day for millions of citizens (Tumarkin 1994, 24). Starting from the Thaw and more openly starting from the period of *glasnost'*, two conflicting versions of the Great Patriotic War coexisted in public discourse and cultural memory in Russia: the officially approved version ("the glorious history") and the alternative version ("the truth from the trenches"). Those two versions presented not only different interpretations of the role of the USSR in the Second World War, but also two different attitudes towards historical Stalinism. The first one is the memory of the Victory, eliminating the question of its price and concentrating on the heroic side; the second is the memory of hardships, large number of victims, imprisonments, evacuation and collaboration, but also of secret protocols of Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, that divided territories of Eastern Europe into the Nazi and the Soviet spheres of influence. The former emphasizes a patriotic consensus between the Communist Party and the Soviet People ("For Motherland! For Stalin!"), the latter is intertwined with the memory of the terror and thus is intrinsically anti-Stalinist (Roginskii 2009). The omission of Soviet – Nazi relations before 1941 from the glorious narrative serves to replace

1 'Leonid_b' (March 9, 2010). 'Tipa tol'ko voprosy'/'Sort of just questions', *Livejournal.* Accessed January 1, 2014. <http://leonid-b.livejournal.com/667464.html?thread=13840712#t13840712>.

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the Second World War history by the one of Great Patriotic War, which started, according to this version, on June 22, 1941 with the sudden and perfidious aggression ("*verolomnoe napadenie*") of the USSR by Nazi Germany[2].

Under Brezhnev, the cult of the Great Patriotic War comes along with the rampant rehabilitation of Stalin. However, banned from the public discourse at the end of the 1960s, the "dissident" memory comes back to light during the period of *glasnost'* at the end of the 1980 – beginning of 1990. The wave of destalinization led to a critical re-examination of the official Soviet Great Patriotic War narrative as a part of an unprecedented historical re-evaluation. The glorious version was challenged from all sides: we can, for example, mention Viktor Suvorov's[3] large audience historical books, such as his bestsellers *Ledokol* or *Day M*, making parallels between Stalin and Hitler and concentrating on their relations before 1941; the wave of *samizdat* and *tamizdat*; or the outbreak of the oral history in the press. Besides, the post-Soviet elites, former apparatchiks in their majority, wanted to highlight their break with the "dark past" and its symbols by denigrating the Soviet past and claiming their opposition to Communism (Smith 1996; 2002). In those conditions, the sumptuous commemorations of "megaholiday" of the Victory Day were temporarily suspended (Tumarkin 1994; Andreev, Bordugov 2005).

However, the drive for destalinization lost ground in the mid-1990 with the rise of a new "revamped patriotic ethic" (Smith 2002, 57). Since the second half of the 1990s, the theme of national revival has crystallized in Russia, notably in the form of promoting patriotism rooted in the glorious version of the war (Daucé, Désert et al. 2010). In 1995, the Parliament adopted a bill "On the immortalization of the Victory of the Soviet people in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945",[4] marking the transition to an "era of commemorations": Victory Day had its status confirmed as the principal national day, and is more solemnly celebrated now than it used to even during Soviet times (Andreev, Bordiugov 2005).

This tendency strengthened in the 2000s, when the symbol of the Victory became both the cornerstone of Putin's regime and the foundation of national

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2 For the « canonical » Soviet version of the Great Patriotic War, one can refer to the following classic work edited by the Communist Party Central Committee: Pospelov, Petr (ed.) (1960-1965), *Istoriya Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny Sovetskogo Soyuza 1941-1945 v chesti tomakh/History of the Great Patriotic War of Soviet Union in six volumes, 1941-1945* (Moscow: Institute of Marxism – Leninism of Central Committee of CPSU).

3 Soviet military intelligence officer and author of historical bestsellers as *Ledokol* or *Day M*, making parallels between Stalin and Hitler.

4 Federal bill n° 80-FZ of May 19, 1995 'Ob uvekovechenii pobedy sovetskogo naroda v Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voine 1941-1945', <http://www.referent.ru/1/14905>, accessed January 10, 2014.

self-identification (Etkind 2009; Gudkov 2005; Roginskii 2009). The reason for that is twofold. On the one hand, the Russian population strives for positive symbols rooted in its national history: in 2005, 87% of Russians placed the Victory at the top of the list of events in Russian history of which they were particularly proud, while in 1996, this percentage was no higher than 44% (Gudkov 2005, 98). This demand for positive narratives could be explained by social–psychological factors such as feeling of collective humiliation due to the defeat in the Cold War and the breakdown of the Soviet empire (Dubin 2011). On the other hand, the instrumentalisation of the Victory constitutes one of the tools of current regime symbolic policies. Current research emphasizes the convergence between an offer "from above" and a demand "from below" of a new patriotic narrative rooted in the Great Patriotic War: the political strategy seemed to converge upon more broad cultural discourse (Nivat 2008; Adler 2012).

However, this revaluation of the Great Patriotic War raises an issue of reintroducing into the commemorative space one of the most controversial figures in Russian history, i.e. Joseph Stalin: since the two symbols are intertwined, the rebirth of the Victory mythology requires the clarification of Russia's relation to the historical Stalinism. This issue remains one of the most controversial in current cultural debate, mainly because of the failed memory work and the absence of significant measures of transitional justice at the beginning of the 1990s. Due to the absence of any clear social, legal and even historical interpretation of Stalin and Stalinism in Russia, both Russian state and society have adopted an ambiguous attitude to Stalin in the years 2000. The unclear attitude of current political leadership in Russia towards Stalin is evident from the contradictory discourse and memory polices, simultaneously rehabilitating the Stalinist version of the Great Patriotic War and trying to keep a distance with historical Stalinism. The creation of the Presidential Commission to Counter Attempt to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia's Interests in 2009, promoting the "patriotic" version of the Great Patriotic War in its Stalinist version and the "Destalinization Commission"[5] in 2011 that launched the third wave of destalinization of Russia is just one of the illustrations of this ambiguity. As for the cultural memory, it is also ambivalent. While the memory of the darker sides of the war (notably, the division of Eastern Europe by Stalin and Hitler, the errors of Soviet leaders, but also the concentration camp universe of the rear echelon, the collaborations, etc.) appears to vanish away with the

5 The Commission was formed on a basis of the program "On the perpetuation of the memory of victims of the totalitarian regime" prepared by the Working Group on Historical Memory of the Presidential Council for Civil Society Development and Human Rights in February, 2011.

generational change (Veselova 2004), and the symbol of the Great Patriotic War seems consensual, Stalin remains a highly controversial figure, perceived as both "chief of Victory" and "tyrant" (Levada, 2004).

The clumsy efforts to keep and instrumentalise the glorious memory of Victory and not to assume explicitly Stalin's heritage are regularly accentuated on the occasion of the Victory day, triggering debates that emphasize the problematic character of the symbol: what was exactly the role of Stalin in the Great Patriotic War? Can his image be associated with the symbol of the Victory and to what extent? And, in more broad terms, can one be separated from another without a complete re-evaluation of the Russian history and, hence, of the fragile post-Soviet identity? This tension between two intertwined symbols forms the central focus of this chapter as it explores heated debates over Stalin's role in the Victory on the occasion of 2010 Victory commemoration in Russian online communities, online and offline mobilisations generated by this controversial issue, as well as their sustainability.

It pays however to remind in this regard that the Ukrainian crisis that started in 2014 has significantly reinforced the positive attitude to Stalin and Stalinism in Russia, as well as it has boosted the government's policies aiming to glorify Stalin: in February 2015, Russian authorities inaugurated, in the region of Crimea, a 10-tones bronze sculpture of the Yalta's 1945 conference "Big Three", Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt (Radio Liberty, 2015). A month later, a museum honouring Stalin and his legacy sets to be opened in Russia in 2015, as a result of an initiative of Russian Military-Historical Society, headed by Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinskii (TheMoscowTimes 2015).[6] While this dynamic illustrates a thrive of an imperial sentiment in Russia up from the beginning of military conflict in Ukraine, it should be considered as an epidemic reaction provoked by heavy patriotic propaganda. In the normal course, Stalin remains a controversial figure of Russian history, and the opinion of Russian population as well as elites' is split on this particular matter. In the beginning of 2010, the year our research was carried out, the controversies about Stalin's legacy were particularly emotional.

Online Communities: New Actors in Memory Games

While the traditional debate on those issues, both academic and popular, remains stirring, the introduction of social media has now offered an opportu-

6 More about the activities of Medinskii and the Ministry of Culture headed by him see the chapter by Jonson in this volume.

nity for the opinions to be communicated online by non-academic commentators, allowing the more active part of society to engage in discussions concerning the controversial issues in the national memory and history. This chapter aims to analyse the debate on the social memory of the role of Stalin in Second World War in post-Soviet Russia by exploring new memory practices and new forms of civic memory activism facilitated by dissemination of internet in Russia. Although the Great Patriotic War memory in post-Soviet Russia has featured in research, and although internet debates on national history are a part of wider cultural debate, limited attention has been paid to how those issues are discussed within online communities, in particular in the light of ambiguous attitude of Russian authorities and society to historical Stalinism. Posing a set of questions concerning the emergency of new actors in the national memory space who engage with social media (internet memory activists, or internet "watchdogs/guardians of memory"), my research will develop a threefold argument.

I will first argue that new memory spaces and actors are emerging within the *Runet* as a reaction to certain memory policies ("memory watchdogs"), perceived as attempts to "re-stalinize" or "de-stalinize" the Great Patriotic War narrative. In the case explored, two contradictory public authorities' decisions (namely, to introduce and to remove Stalin from the Great Patriotic War commemorative space and narrative) triggered fierce debate and mobilizations, both online and offline, thus exemplifying a public desire to construct a space of counter history and counter memory, challenging the official memory policies.

I will then argue that the reaction of "memory watchdogs" and social media users to memory initiatives of central or local authorities emphasizes the conflicting nature of the Great Patriotic War issue as related to the memory of Stalin, bringing to light the complex attitude towards historical Stalinism in contemporary Russian society. The link made between Stalin and the image of Victory in the Russian cultural memory is highly controversial: the image of "victor" competes with the image of "tyrant", those two issues being difficult to separate without challenging the entire Russian XXth century history.

I will finally argue that a dichotomy tends to be made in non-academic discourse between "the patriotic" and "the liberal" versions of history, displaying antagonistic interpretations of Stalin's role in the war and, as protagonists claim, different attitudes to the Soviet past. As such, those labels and mobilisations around them, both online and offline, are emphasizing the fact that the painful gap that emerged during the Thaw period and exacerbated during *perestroika* is far from being closed.

In focusing on those three hypotheses, I devote special attention to the following questions: how is the discussion about the role of Stalin in Second World War developed within online communities, what are the key topics and the opinions at stake? What is the relation between the bottom-up memory and history developed within digital communities and the wider cultural debate, on the one hand, and official narrative and public policies, on the other? How does this debate reflect the tension between the glorious version of the Great Patriotic War and the problematic image of Stalin? How are the members of those communities positioning themselves, how do they perceive and relate to this memory according to the identity they construct, how do they express their engagement in memory shaping? What are the mechanisms of apparition, interaction and establishment of spaces of confrontation over divergent historical interpretations?

Studying Memory in the Digital Age: Methodological Framework

While memory has always been mediated, nowadays it is no longer limited to *lieux de mémoire* (Nora 1984) and traditional institutions, but is increasingly shaped by and through everyday internet practices. Indeed, today, instead of going to the library or visiting an archive, we are accessing the past through the web (Historical Controversies Now 2010), where memory and history are from now on collectively constructed through Wikis, networked through digital communities and unlimitedly stocked. Current attempts to find new interpretations of Stalin's role in the Second World War are particularly dynamic on the internet, which offers a relatively free space for non-official, non-academic, personal, and diverse contributions to the collective memory (Garde-Hansen et al. 2009). The social media, by turning upside down the relations between individual and collective memory (Garde-Hansen *et al.* 2009; Van Dijck 2010; Maj, Riha 2009), is giving rise to new memorial practices, such as online commemorations (De Bruyn 2010), exchanges of personal memories and the treatment of the past through images and multimedia (Hoskins 2011). More specifically, the internet is geared to the construction of heterogeneous interest-based digital communities, including those structured around the – often painful – memories of events from the distant past (De Bruyn 2010, 46; Kaelber 2010), to building spaces of confrontation between opinions, as well as historical milieus and alternative memories, and even counter-histories and counter-memories[7].

7 It is worth mentioning that this role of the Internet leads logically to its instrumentalisation by political power using internet for propaganda purposes. For example, up from the begin-

This shift makes it necessary to renew the research instruments as applied to grounded sociotechnical digital objects, making connections between online and locality-based realities. The issues raised in current chapter make it necessary to approach social media as a phenomenon based on constant interaction between activities online and offline: today, researchers deal with a social world that contains both traditional and technologically advanced modes of communication and sites of social activity (Postill, Pink 2012). It is evident that the debate on the Great Patriotic War does not exist solely online and is not separated from other aspects of memory discussions, but rather constitutes a part of wider cultural debate, even if the *RuNet* has been reputed to generate a radicalization of discourse (MacLeod 2009).

For this study I have focused on two cases of conflict debates around two memorial initiatives simultaneously arising in Moscow and Saint-Petersburg, on the occasion of the Victory commemoration in 2010 that provoked a vivid debate concerning the role of Stalin in the Second World War in Russian media, including blogosphere and other social media. The first initiative involved the failed attempt of Moscow City Council to decorate Moscow's streets with placards representing Stalin; the second, successful, launched by the partisans of the reintroduction of Stalin in commemorative space as a reaction to the "Destalinization" programme announced by Federal authorities in 2010, involved a bus travelling around Saint-Petersburg with his effigy on it. My aim was to analyse the most ardent online debates reflecting the Russian bloggers' view of the role of Stalin in the Second World War, on the one hand, and of relevant local and federal memory policies, on the other. To do so, I focused on the blogging and social network platform *Livejournal.*

While the Russian language blogosphere counts about 85 million blogs, most of the political and social discussion is hosted today on *LiveJournal* (hereafter referred to as LJ), a blogging platform with many social media features (detailed member profiles, "friending", private messaging, and an active commenting culture) (Reuter, Szakonyi 2012; Alexanyan 2013), generating, with its 2.8 million accounts, 90.000 posts daily (Koltsova, Koltsov 2013). Starting from the beginning of the 2000s, a number of authors noted the political and social importance of LJ debates in the context of the lack of critical debate in tradi-

ning of 2014, 'troll farms' are actively created in Russia as a part of wider informational war strategy. See for example Daisy Sindelar's (2014) article "The Kremlin's Troll Army." *The Atlantic.* August, 2014. Accessed February 20, 2018. <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/08/the-kremlins-troll-army/375932>; see as well Aric Toler's research "Inside the Kremlin Troll Army Machine: Templates, Guidelines, and Paid Posts" *Global Voices Online,* March 14, 2015. Accessed February 20, 2018. <https://globalvoicesonline.org/2015/03/14/russia-kremlin-troll-army-examples/>.

tional media in today's Russia (Krasnoboka 2002; Lonkila 2008, 1130; MacLeod 2009, 13). Qualified 'the discussion centre of the *Runet'* in 2010 (Etling et al. 2010), LJ still carries, together with Facebook and Twitter, the reputation of Russia's most politicized social network, while "native" Russian social networks such as *Vkontakte*, *Odnoklassniki*, *MoiKrug* and *MoiMir* remain less politicized. This role was emphasized during the 2011 contested legislative elections, when of the top 25 Russian LJ blogs, 8 were run by opposition activists posting extensively about electoral fraud. Russian most well-known political blogger Alexei Navalny runs Russia's 3rd most popular LJ blog, focusing his attention on corruption scandals and electoral fraud (Kol'tsova, Kol'tsov 2013).

Up from 2012 *LiveJournal* starts to lose its popularity facing the rapid growth of more "up-to-date" social media as *Facebook* and *Vkontakte* (Forbes 2013): from January to August 2011, the monthly number of unique users to LiveJournal worldwide dropped by 8.2 million to 27.7 million (-23 per cent), and of Russian LiveJournal by 2.8 million to 8.6 million (-25 per cent), according to materials from Comscore (Vedomosti 2011). As for Alexey Navalny who owes his political reputation to *LJ*, the leader of Russian liberal opposition diversifies his communication channels by creating standalone sites[8] as well as *Twitter*, *Vkontakte* and *Facebook* accounts as a response to *LJ*'s popularity drop. According to Maxim Kornev, Assistant professor and lecturer at the Institute of Media Studies of Russian State University for the Humanities, while up from 2013 *LiveJournal's* role of information diffusion is weakening, its role of "topic-starter" remains almost undamaged: *LJ* is still used by different political forces to organise informational and propaganda attacks, the information being then virally relayed by *Twitter*, *Facebook* and *Vkontakte*[9].

To explore the discussions and mobilisations around two controversial issues, I have chosen to focus primarily on discourse analysis (including however some visual data). The corpus analysed contained 19 posts and more than 5.500 comments selected within LJ. The study proceeded through two stages. The first consisted of the identification of the debate by looking for the key-words related to the controversial issues, "Stalin's portraits" (*portrety stalina*) or "Stalin's plackards" (*plakaty Stalina*), using the web search engine "*Yandex Blogi*", identifying relevant discussions containing this expression through the chosen period of the debate (February-April 2010). This first selection resulting in 744 posts and comments was followed by manual selection of most popular

8 <https://navalny.com/>.

9 Expert interview with Maxim Kornev, author's personal archives. However, it should be pointed out that the present article is based on the research conducted in 2010, when the political and social importance of *LJ*, as well as its role in the information diffusion, was on its top.

discussions (i.e. gathering over 100 comments), eliminating purely informative or marginally relevant posts (reposts of the same newspaper information, for example) and giving priority to the motivated and historically founded reactions of internet users to memory initiatives, namely the posts and comments explaining the reason *why* this initiative is approved or disapproved. The sample that resulted from the key-word search that I subjected to a qualitative analysis represented 19 posts followed by 5.552 comments.

At the same time, since in the Beaulieu's classification the communities observed could be classified as "social phenomena which exist primarily online" (members may have some offline contact but the majority of their contacts and their primary experience of that setting are online, their interactions and contacts are routinely computer mediated) (Beaulieu 2004), I have adopted the method of online ethnography. Since participants in that setting communicate through online behaviour, the approach consists in "being there", that means becoming part of selected communities through a membership, observing discussions and behaviour, watching text and images and establishing direct contact with the social world studied (Garcia Cora et al. 2009, 52), without however making any personal contributions in the debate to keep a researcher's neutrality. For this reason, the second stage of the study implied continuous daily observation of online pro-Stalin network "*Stalinobus*" emerging in April 2010 as a reaction to those discussions; triggered by the initial debate of Stalin's portraits, the activity of communities' members of the network were cemented for the long term in 2011 and early 2012. It should be noted that in order to "be there", I did not have to create a special profile within those networks for the research purpose, since all the discussions are open to all internet users and can be accessed freely. The long-term observation (from April 2010 to late 2011, then from early 2012 up to 2013) involved discourse and visual elements analysis within the sample of eleven independent but related units, located on different platforms (individual blogs, communities of blogs, SNS communities, standalone blogs, websites), forming together a sort of pro-Stalinist social network.

The Controversy over Stalin's Reintroduction into Commemorative Space

In February 2010, the Moscow City Council unveiled a project emphasizing Stalin's role in the Great Patriotic War "as the head of the military headquarters, President of the Soviet government, marshal and generalissimo" through posters bearing his effigy on the occasion of the Victory Day. The municipal

authorities justified this decision by saying that the Mayor's office had merely responded to the initiative of a committee of Moscow Great Patriotic War veterans (Rosbalt, 19.02.2010). Some weeks later, placards and busts of Stalin appeared spontaneously in several towns in Russia, provoking different reactions of local authorities: in Vladivostok, for instance, the Mayor's office authorized for display the image of Stalin in the city to "respond to citizens' requests", whereas in Iakutsk, a city located in the north of Russia, a similar request by the Veterans Committee elicited a formal refusal from the mayor (Rossiiskaia Gazeta 2010.04.20; 2010.04.30). Those attempts to reintroduce Stalin into the commemorative space have triggered heated debates online.

Watchdogs of the Great Patriotic War Memory

For two months, the unfolding debate in the blogosphere clearly illustrates the societal controversy raised by the place reserved for Stalin in celebrations of the Victory. The analysis of these often stormy discussions shows that, beyond the divergent interpretations of Stalin's personality and his role in the war, typical of the social memory in Russia and therefore locatable in the blogosphere, the posters revealed the equally controversial evaluations of the official memory policies, bringing to light the marked politicization of Stalin's image. In fact, some of the discussants considered that the posters were not an isolated case of local initiative, but part of a broader authorities-led program for the "re-Stalinization" of the Great Patriotic War narrative. According to them, the appearance of Stalin's image as victor in Moscow's streets pertains as much to memory policies as to the general orientation of the regime: the image of the generalissimo was supposed, they contend, to send a strong signal to society, giving it to understand that the current Russian state has, at long last, fully assumed its continuity with the Stalin era and the methods specific to it. "If this regime allows the glorification of Stalin, it is only one step from the Stalinist actions[10]", states the blogger '*moullenoir*' on April 11[11]. The commentators, apparently feeling that their views represent a minority in Russian society, deplore the influence of "Soviet mentality" and the population's "slave syndrome", which means that it always has a need for a "great leader": user '*benena*', for example, wonders why Stalin is still so appreciated in Russia, in spite of

10 All translation from Russian are made by the author of the article

11 'moullenoir' (April 11, 2010), 'Stalinu h*i'/'F*ck Stalin', *Livejournal,* <http://uskov.livejournal.com/116289.html?thread=6161473#t6161473> (accessed February 1, 2014)

the magnitude of repressions ("It's quite enigmatic why in presence of at least one repressed in every family so many people love him[12]").

Other discussions focused on the methods to prevent the authorities from exposing portraits. While some users appeal to "minor vandalism" (calling people to tear off the placards or to throw red paint all over them), others proposed to organise a full-scale mobilisation. The issue provokes strong civic sentiments even among usually passive persons: thus a user '*lenkalen*', visibly shocked by the decision of City Council, states that "Partisanship is not a method", and that "we need the unity of civic forces, manifestations, collective declarations etc. Due to my laziness, I never participate in any such stuff, but in this very case I am ready to support collective declarations and even to go to manifest[13]".

While a part of bloggers was shocked by this reintroduction of Stalin into commemorative space, other commentators hailed the decision of the city council: at last, they claimed, the historical truth would be restored by the reintroduction of Stalin, who had been "unjustly forgotten" within commemorative space in his quality of victor. Disposed to "render Stalin's Victory to him", and wanting to underscore his role in Russia's transformation into a "great world power", they were outraged by the state of forgetfulness into which he had fallen after *perestroika,* or even, for some, after the 20th Congress of the CPSU. For a considerable part of bloggers, the portraits of Stalin remain "the symbol of the Victory and the faith of Soviet people of that time", who would "have followed those images to go and to fight". "It's the same kind of symbol as the red star and the arms of USSR. The fact that he was a tyrant is another thing. (…) Nobody can today compare what was more important, the country that survived or the millions of executed[14]", states '*Ilya Gorokhov*'. He is echoed by another blogger, '*esquirem*': stating that even if Stalin was a tyrant, removing this symbol from the Great Patriotic War narrative will weaken the nation: "I don't justify Stalin, on the contrary, I understand that he was a real bastard, but, whatever one might say, he was one of the main factors and symbols of our Victory. And refusing Stalin, we will refuse our main historical achievement. Only a weak nation is capable on that. It's not democracy, it's foolishness[15]".

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12 'benena' (April 13, 2010), 'Stalinu h*i'/'F*ck Stalin', *Livejournal,* <http://uskov.livejournal.com/116289.html?thread=63568801#t63568801> (accessed February 1, 2014)

13 'lenkalen' (April 12, 2010), 'Stalinu h*i'/'F*ck Stalin', *Livejournal,* <http://uskov.livejournal.com/116289.html?thread=6192193#t6192193> (accessed February 1, 2014)

14 Ilya Gorokhov (April 12, 2010), 'Stalinu h*i'/'F*ck Stalin', *Livejournal,* <http://uskov.livejournal.com/116289.html?thread=6201409#t6201409> (accessed February 1, 2014)

15 'esquirem' (March 4, 2010), 'Prazdnik bez razdora'/'Holiday without discord', *Livejournal,* <http://vsoloviev.livejournal.com/229779.html?thread=7419027#t7419027> (accessed Feb-

The contradiction between two symbols is emphasized by the blogger '*be_it_so*': for him, there is a great "dissonance from the fact that our country has accomplished this great achievement being led by a leader like Stalin". However, for him, the Russian society is not yet ready to raise "such questions", because raising them would mean "stir the boat during the storm": "We have not yet assimilated the system of notions wherein we can adequately relate Stalin to the saint symbol of the Victory[16]".

Typically, bloggers had difficulties interpreting this decision of local authorities as a part of wider state policies: rather, comments were pointing out the general confusion of political elites concerning their attitude to Stalin. In particular, bloggers emphasized the dissonance between the official rhetoric and politics: as the blogger '*uskov*' puts it, "Judging by numerous declarations of Putin and Medvedev, and heads of United Russia, the power is against the rehabilitation of Stalin and exposing his placards in Moscow streets[17]". Other bloggers also point out the inconsistency of public discourse and policies: '*mr_alexandrew*', for example, highlights that some months ago "the President has publicly condemned (...) the politics of Stalin". In all evidence, the blogger refers to Dmitrii Medvedev's discourse published in his video blog on the occasion of the Day of Memory of Victims of Political Repressions on October 30, 2009. Entitled "The Memory of National Tragedies is as Sacred, as the Memory of Victories", the discourse firmly condemned Stalin's repressions, Medvedev stating, "the crimes of Stalin can't belittle the feats of people who won the Victory into the Great Patriotic War", indicating Kremlin's position on the issue (Kremlin.ru, 30.10.2009). "Do we have a disorder and vacillation in the ranks of one party? No agreement on this question?[18]", wonders '*mr_alexandrew*', echoed by other confused bloggers.

Faced with the prospect of Stalin's reintroduction into the commemorative space, the NGO Memorial, which has fought for the memory of victims of Stalinist dictatorship since 1986, and the liberal political party Iabloko mobilized against the project, warning the officials of the consequences of such a decision. Iabloko's representatives, for instance, declared that, together with

ruary 1, 2014).

16 'be_it_so' (March 12, 2010), 'Tipa tolko voprosy'/'Sort of just questions', *Livejournal,* <http://leonid-b.livejournal.com/667464.html?thread=13875272#t13875272> (accessed February 1, 2014).

17 'uskov' (April 12, 2010), 'Stalinu h*i'/'F*ck Stalin', *Livejournal,* <http://uskov.livejournal.com/116289.html?thread=6265153#t6265153> (accessed February 1, 2014)

18 'mr_alexandrew' (March 5, 2010), 'Luzhkov i Stalin'/'Luzhkov and Stalin', *Livejournal,* <http://ru-antidogma.livejournal.com/716617.html?thread=20441417#t20441417> (accessed February 1, 2014).

Memorial, they will organize a counter-commemoration, exposing the portraits of Red Army officials arrested, tortured and executed on Stalin's orders just before the War. This initiative has been variously evaluated by bloggers. While "antistalinist" bloggers hailed Iabloko's initiative, for bloggers in favour of the idea of placards, the negative reaction from those that they qualify as a "handful of marginals" is explained by the fact that the Russian population has long been a victim of brainwashing to make them forget Stalin and his "major achievements". After City Council rejected the project under pressure from liberal civil society, but also after a disapproval expressed by some leaders of *United Russia*, such as Boris Gryzlov, who stated clearly that "for us victor is not Stalin, but people" (Baltinfo.ru, 2010.18.02), these same bloggers accused the municipal authority of going against the "true will of the people", for whom Stalin would always be the symbol *par excellence* of the victory. The stance of these bloggers is particularly interesting: rejecting out of hand the very possibility of expressing oneself sincerely against the project, they attribute negative societal reactions either to the population's having been "brainwashed" and the influence of NGO's, or to various sorts of manipulation (falsifying surveys); moreover, they manifest in their discourse a strong anti-liberal and anti-western dimension – according to them, the Russian population has been infected by perceptions of Stalin as a tyrant by the west and its "agents".

The clear divergence of evaluation of the state's memory politics indicates the absence of clarity and coherence in the state's stance on the Stalinist heritage: while some commentators have deplored the "re-Stalinization" of Russia, others have complained of the domination of memory politics by the "liberal pest".

Debate over Stalin's Role in the War Online

The discussion over the memory politics of the Russian state and on the possibility of placarding the capital with an image of Stalin for the day of the commemoration unfolded against the background of general debate about Stalin's role in the war. Here again, opinions have been divided between two camps: while, for some, the Russian people won the war in spite of Stalin, paying for his extremely grave errors with their blood, for others the war was won thanks to Stalin, since he was the one who ensured good leadership and galvanized the nation. Based on the arguments most often used in this type of discussion, I have tried here to construct a model of the "typical online debate" on Stalin's

role in the Victory, presenting the opinions of his “adversaries” as well as those of his “defenders[19]”.

Several types of argument can be highlighted. The historical arguments focus on Stalin’s contribution to the Victory, both as Head of the Army and as Supreme Leader of the USSR. Stalin’s “adversaries” most often refer to the high number of the war’s victims, which could have been avoided. Figures and statistics are called upon to demonstrate Stalin’s mediocrity and incompetence in his capacity as Head of the Army. Referring to him as the “the moustached one”, “the vampire”, or in an ironic way as the “great leader”, the bloggers elicit his inability to draw conclusions from information supplied on the exact dates of the German attack, his strategic errors, the repressions carried out in the Red Army a few years before the war, and so on. ‘Is it not thanks to the “wise” leadership of the moustached one that the Germans progressed as far as Moscow? And the 26 millions of lives of my compatriots – isn’t that cost a bit too high for the so-called “genius”?[20]’, asks rhetorically ‘*palych_ru*’. “The moustached one wiped out the officers (…), he missed all the information about the launch of the attack and subjected the army to the first violent strikes of the enemy[21]”, affirms ‘*mahabon*’. Other users defend the thesis that the war was won by “Stalin’s victims”: “It was not Stalin who won the war. His victims did (…). And there would have been fewer victims if he didn’t exterminate Army headquarters at the end of the 1930s…[22]”. “The Army won the war, the rear echelon, the Russian winter and smart military commanders. Alexander I of Russia also won the war, but he didn’t need to exterminate millions of compatriots for this[23]”, affirms blogger ‘*desdichadov*’.

19 We should note that « adversaries» and « defenders» of Stalin exist only as ideal-types and models, the reality is, of course, much more nuanced. I am fully aware of the evident disadvantages that this approach implies: indeed, an undiluted sample of ‘pro’ and ‘anti’ communities is difficult to obtain, since a part of the debate advocate a much more complicated view on the Soviet epoch and a purely ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ vision is quite rare even within radicalised online discourses. Thus the distinction ‘pro’/‘anti’ does not need to be taken as a rigorous border between two isolated types of communities, but rather as a methodological assumption in order to facilitate the data collection and interpretation.

20 ‘palych_ru’ (February 18, 2010), ‘Leonid Gozman o Staline’/‘Leonid Gozman on Stalin’, *Livejournal,* <http://ru-politics.livejournal.com/28052206.html> (accessed March 10 2012).

21 ‘mahabon’ (March 6, 2010), ‘Provokatsiya Luzhkova – plakati Stalina v Moskve’/‘Luzhkov’s Provocation – Stalin’s Posters in Moscow’, *Livejournal,* <http://ru-politics.livejournal.com/28423494.html> (accessed March 10, 2012).

22 ‘panstudia’ (April 12, 2010), ‘Stalinu h*i’/‘F*ck Stalin’, *Livejournal,* <http://uskov.livejournal.com/116289.html?thread=6222401#t6222401> (accessed February 1 2014).

23 ‘desdichadov’ (March 4, 2010), ‘Prazdnik bez razdora’/‘Holiday without discord’, *Livejournal,* <http://vsoloviev.livejournal.com/229779>.html?thread=7431315#t7431315 (accessed February 1, 2014).

Stalin’s “defenders” marshal counter-arguments designed to point up his military competences: according to them, Stalin was if not a great strategist, then at least a good organizer, having himself chosen the generals who secured the Victory. As a matter of fact, the bloggers ask, “if Stalin was so stupid and so cowardly”, and his generals were “all no-hopers”, how did the army manage to win? “Who made the decisions thanks to which we found ourselves in Berlin?[24]”. Parallels with other countries are mobilised in order to legitimatize the reintroduction of Stalin into the commemorative space. For some bloggers, Stalin has a right to be remembered in the same way as Churchill and Roosevelt are remembered in England and the United States respectively: after all, all three of them were commanders-in-chief of victorious countries: “Why can Churchill and Roosevelt can be symbols of England and the United States, but Stalin can’t be the symbol of Russia?[25]”.

Statistics showing the USSR’s progress in heavy industry are often put forward to emphasize the “objective role” played by Stalin in the modernization of the country. According to this type of argumentation, the Victory would not have been possible without Stalin, since it was he who had set the country on the path of modernization, enabling it to reach an industrial and military level sufficient to conduct and win the war. If no modernization had been carried out, the Russian nation would have been destroyed, as was foreseen by the “Barbarossa”[26] military plan: thus, it was thanks to Stalin, these bloggers maintain, that they are alive today. The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact made it possible to postpone war, leaving the country more time and possibilities to mobilize.

Faced with the exultation of Stalin’s industrial achievements, his “adversaries” raise ethical arguments, underscoring the immorality of glorifying tyrants, notwithstanding their “objective achievements” (*i.e.,* material progress) in different domain. Highlighted is the complicity and collaboration between Hitler and Stalin, leading to the splitting of Europe in accordance with the secret protocols of the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact: for these bloggers, there was no difference between these two tyrants.

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24 ‘m_b_polyakov’ (February 18, 2010), ‘Leonid Gozman o Staline’/‘Leonid Gozman on Stalin’, *Livejournal,* <http://ru-politics.livejournal.com/28052206.html> (accessed March 10, 2012).

25 ‘kudrjashovai’ (March 4, 2010), ‘Prazdnik bez razdora’/‘Holiday without discord’, *Livejournal,* <http://vsoloviev.livejournal.com/229779.html?thread=7452307#t7452307> (accessed February 1, 2014).

26 See more on the development of the ideological bases of operation “Barbarossa”: André Mineau (2004), *Operation Barbarossa. Ideology and Ethics Against Human Dignity.* Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Often, family war memories that have been handed down the generations are mobilised to counter the “Stalinist” narrative: grandparents’ testimonies are called upon to legitimate the viewpoint of the speaker. “You know, my grand-dad is a veteran. He was through all the war. And I have never heard from him the desire to look at the portraits of Stalin”, states user ‘*ptitsa*’. In another thread, user ‘*tushinets*’ appeals to memories of his two grandfathers: “As both of my grandfathers told me, nobody ever yelled “For Stalin!” during the attack”. User ‘*voskresenskii*’ echoes this opinion by stating that seeing the portraits of Stalin will be tough for his 93 years-old grandmother and his two deceased grandfathers, “but also their 10 brothers and sisters, which had all been through the entire war. And some of them were afterwards sent to camps because they were partisans[27]”.

For those bloggers, the question of Stalin is above all one of leadership methods: can one leave morality aside and justify the mass repressions by the “positive” aspects of the regime, be it the industrialization of the country that enabled the Victory in this most horrible of wars? Bloggers often raise the example of Germany, where the memory work that has been carried out no longer permits one to claim that Nazism had its “good sides”. Another controversial aspect in the debate is the key argument of Stalin’s “defenders”, who claim that as the soldiers launched their attack they cried out “For Stalin”, thus proving the essential role of the Leader in the Victory. For Stalin’s “adversaries”, this is only a myth created by Soviet propaganda after the war in a bid to shore up the totalitarian regime. In their view, people fought not for the Party, and still less for Stalin, but instead for Holy Mother Russia, and for their own families who, even behind the front line, were threatened both by Hitler’s troops and by Stalin’s reprisals[28]: from this viewpoint, the war was, indeed, a “people’s” war

27 ‘ptitsa_fenix’ (April 13, 2010), ‘Stalinu h*i’/‘F*ck Stalin’, *Livejournal,* <http://uskov.livejournal.com/116289.html?thread=6340161#t6340161;‘tushinets’> (March 6, 2010), ‘Provokatsiya Luzhkova – plakati Stalina v Moskve’/‘Luzhkov’s Provocation – Stalin’s Posters in Moscow’, *Livejournal,* <http://ru-politics.livejournal.com/28423494.html?thread=405188934#t405188934;‘voskresenskii’> (March 5, 2010), ‘Luzhkov i Stalin’/‘Luzhkov and Stalin’, *Livejournal,* <http://ru-antidogma.livejournal.com/716617.html?thread=20441417#t20441417> (accessed February 1, 2014)

28 According to the legislation then in force, encircled officers could be judged for “abandoning their positions with a view to facilitate the enemy advance” (Art. 193 paragraph 21 of the Penal Code of the USSR); officers that had become prisoners could be judged for “abandoning the military unit” (Art. 193, paragraph 7), “fleeing from the enemy” (paragraph 8) or “capture unjustified by the military situation” (paragraph 22). Thus, the very fact of being made a prisoner was considered a crime, following the example of acts of betrayal. Penal responsibility of “family members of traitors to the fatherland” could be evoked, in which case they were sentenced in absentia (Polian 2002, 124).

('*narodnaia voina*'). Underscoring the fear that reigned in the army due to the policy of banning all retreat from the battlefield without orders, they maintain that the soldiers had no other choice but to fight.

Analyzing the blogosphere debate makes it possible to get a measure of existing societal controversies over the role reserved for Stalin in the national holiday: initiatives by citizen groups to promote his image as a symbol of the Victory quickly came up against counter-reactions on the internet, leading to the construction of spaces of different opinions. I should note that the discrepancy expressed in the blogosphere is a part of a wider cultural discourse, where the debates on Stalin's role in the war are often articulated in terms of opposition of moral arguments and arguments about efficiency of the State machine (Bomsford, Bordugov, 2006). The question "Who won the war, the people or Stalin" persists in the media discourse as well and remerges regularly on different occasions[29],[30],[31].

But in 2010, the internet not only became a battle-ground for the internet users who wanted to express something on the subject: it became a means to organize and create a sustainable offline social mobilization aiming not only to reintroduce Stalin into the commemorative space in his role of a victor, but also to promote a lasting patriotic view of Soviet history by opposing it to what is considered to be a "dominant discourse". In order to illustrate the birth and evolution of a mobilization of this type, I will look at the case-study of a movement initiated by bloggers, "The Victory Bus", or "the Stalinobus".

Mobilizations around "the Victory Bus": New Form of Memory Activism, Old Discrepancies

The history of the "Stalinobus" began in April 2010, as a reaction to the debate around placards. Disapproving of the decision of City Council to renounce the project, a blogger called Viktor Loginov, a 28-year-old resident of Saint-Petersburg, stated that civil society will "restore the historical truth of the Great Patriotic War" on its own. He organized a money collection on his blog for a bus to carry an effigy of Stalin through the city with the slogan "Eternal Glory to the Victors!" ('*Podarok k 9 maia*' 2010). His *Livejournal* post titled "A present for May 9", aroused great enthusiasm among bloggers deceived by the failure of the project, who found the idea tremendous: the required amount of 17 thousand

29 *Ekho Moskvy*, May 8, 2010.

30 *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, May 8, 2010.

31 *Novaia Gazeta*, November 12, 2012.

Roubles (425 Euros) was quickly collected and, despite the absence of authorization by the municipal authorities, a contract with a private transport company was signed to have the bus running in the city starting from May 7.

As with the case of the effigy of Stalin, the blogosphere served us as an observation field of the campaigns underway. When news of the "Stalinobus" spread throughout the blogosphere, internet users against the idea of seeing Stalin in the streets of Saint-Petersburg declared "a fight against the image of the tyrant". One popular blogger, Andrei Malgin ('*avmalgin*', 13,864 readers), published on his blog of 17 April detailed instructions for making homemade "bombs" representing an empty light bulb filled with red paint, a symbol of the blood spilt by the Russian people: in the text titled "let's welcome the Great General with dignity", he proposed to his readers to throw these "bombs" at the images of Stalin adorning buses. This publication generated 298 commentaries: while a minority of bloggers called for people to "reconcile with their history and to stop this brawl over the Victory", the majority were radically split. Some radical bloggers proposed "quite simply to burn the buses", while for other commentators, throwers of bombs and destroyers of posters were "doing the work of Nazis" and "vilifying the history of Russia". The result of the bloggers mobilization was the continual desecration of the bus: at the end of the first day's travel, the face of Stalin was completely sullied by paint. Responsibility for this act, qualified by the organizers of the advert as "vandalism", was claimed by the St. Petersburg department of the liberal political party Iabloko. Simultaneously, the struggle continued on the internet, mainly using images: "defenders" of Stalin thus drew and published a caricature representing Hitler thanking key figures of the Russian liberal opposition ("Thanks! Thanks, my dearest ones!") for their efforts against Stalin's image (Figure 6.1).

Patriotic Mobilization Online: Crowdfunding for the Generalissimo

While the efforts of liberal parts of society, as a response to this concrete initiative, were only short term, the pro-Stalin movement, emboldened by its initial success, became sustainable and unveiled a broad programme to re-evaluate the image of Stalin and the whole of the Soviet history. In fact, far from being an isolated act in the months of April and May 2010, "Stalinobus" movement rapidly took on a considerable scope, building up its social capital through a mobilization of enthusiastically "patriotic" internet users. This spontaneous movement formed very quickly around the organization committee: apart from the pioneer and the author of the idea of "Stalinobus" Viktor Loginov (LJ '*viklamist*'), members of the committee included Dmitrii Lyskov (LJ '*_lord_*'), a

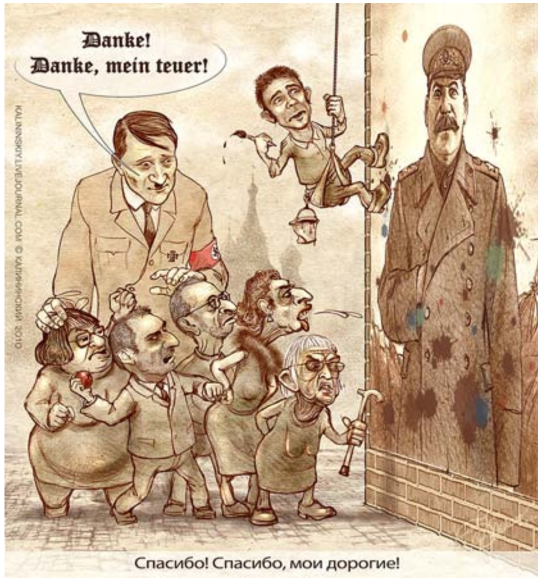

FIGURE 6.1
Caricature drawn by the blogger "kalininsky". Among the "spitters", one can see, for example, human rights defenders Valeria Novodvorskaia and Ludmila Alekseeva, President of "Holocaust" foundation Alla Gerber, chess champion and opposition politician Garry Kasparov, liberal journalist Nikolai Svanidze and opposition politician Ilia Iashin. Note the grammatically incorrect German in the caricature. *Source:* <http://kalininskiy.livejournal.com/188521.html>, accessed 28 February, 2018.

32-years old journalist and historian belonging to a "patriotic" wing of Russian historiography[32], and also Andrey Martianov (LJ '*gunter_spb*'), an impassioned writer and translator of the history of the Second World War who characterizes his political opinions as "deeply anti-liberal", as well as other popular bloggers who often had several hundreds of permanent readers.[33] The movement fast established itself on the main social networks: "Stalinobus" communities were created on Facebook[34], Vkontakte[35], and Twitter[36]; the movement procured itself three identical sites, including one in the Russian national domain (.рф/rf, '*Russian Federation*') and another in the domain of the Soviet Union (.su,

32 Dmitrii Lyskov has written several books on the question of Stalin's repressions: "Stalinskie "repressii". Velikaia lozh' dvadtsatogo veka"/"Stalin's "repressions". The greatest lie of twentieth century" (2009), "1937. Glavnii mif XX veka"/ "1937. The main myth of the 20th century' (2010).

33 <http://los-desdichados.livejournal.com/profile>, <http://periskop.livejournal.com/profile>, <http://rene-spb.livejournal.com/profile>, <http://sotnik.livejournal.com/profile> etc. Accessed February 20, 2018.

34 <https://www.facebook.com/stalinobus>, accessed February 20, 2018.

35 Vkontakte [In Contact] is the most popular free Russian social media site and boasts more than 100 million active users and a daily audience of more than 25 million users <http://vk.com/stalinobus>, accessed February 20, 2018.

36 <http://twitter.com/#!/stalinobus>, accessed February 20, 2018.

'*Soviet Union*')[37]; a blogger community called "The Commissariat of the People for Historical Truth"[38] gathered more than six hundred blogger-partisans for the movement.[39] The name of community is not incidental: it shows the engagement of the bloggers to restore "historical truth" by revalorising the role of Stalin in the Great Patriotic War.

The functioning of digital communities networks rallying under the banner of "Stalinobus" is governed by several principles. First of all, they display an openness towards initiatives coming from below, and from all corners of Russia: all of the network's communities display a set of "do-it-yourself" style instructions titled "How to organize a campaign in my town". The organization committee is also open to questions from internet users who would like the bus to do runs through their towns. Next comes the principle of crowdfunding, transparency and mutual financial aid: money collections organized by the bloggers operate via an online payment system "Yandex Money", and screenshots of the account are regularly published so that every internet user can monitor the transactions; it is worth noting that the same transparent system was used in 2012 by opposition blogger Alexey Navalny to finance his municipal campaign. Excesses of collected money are redistributed by the organization committee among towns where the collected sums are insufficient to enable the project's implementation. Lastly, the organization stresses in particular its complete independence from political movements and the state: in a press release dated February 2011, it emphasized the independent and private character of the initiative, which aimed to "celebrate (…) the 66th anniversary of the Great Victory (…) not only under the auspices of the official commemoration, but personally, that is, as a group of Russian citizens, independent of parties and political organizations" ('*Avtobus Pobedy poiavitsia*', 2011.02.28).

Since the first initiative of May 2010, the movement has continued to rally greater numbers of Internet users under the "Stalinobus" banner: while in 2010 the bus only ran in Saint-Petersburg, in 2011 the list of cities was extended to Moscow, Omsk, Kirov, Volgograd, Ufa, Novosibirsk, Sebastopol, and Irkutsk ('*Aktsiia "Avtobus Pobedy"*' 2011), thus assuming a genuinely national dimension. At the present time, the movement claims, in geographical terms, to embrace the entire Federation "from Kaliningrad to the Urals" and "from the Urals to the Kurile Islands", and is endowed with local self-designated coordinators.

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37 <http://сталинобус.рф/>, <http://stalinobus.info/>, <http://stalinobus.su/>, accessed February 20, 2018.

38 'Narodnii Komissariat Istoricheskoi Dostovernosti'. The name of the community revisits Soviet abbreviations, such as, for example, the NKVD: the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, etc. <http://ru_nkid.livejournal.com/>, accessed February 20, 2018.

39 273 members, 350 permanent readers.

Civic Memory Action as a Response to the "De-Stalinization Programme"

Far from being a mere accident, the movement's success must instead be considered part of a more general tendency to re-evaluate the whole of the Soviet history through some key events and historical figures, the radical manifestations of which are articulated in the space of public memory (Etkind 2009; Dubin 2009, 2011). For better or for worse, the Russian authorities have tried since 2008 to develop a "useable" past and promote, intermittently, a discourse condemning Stalin and Stalinism (Sherlock 2011: 93). One can mention in this connection the "Destalinization Commission" formed in 2011 on a basis of the program "On perpetuation of memory of victims of the totalitarian regime", prepared by the Working Group on Historical Memory of the Presidential Council for Civil Society Development and Human Rights. Some State-financed blockbusters, as Nikita Mikhalkov's "Burnt by the Sun – 2" film (2011) devoted to the Great Patriotic War subject, also promoted negative representations of Stalin's role in the war. Also, Russian political authorities regularly criticise Stalin's legacy, as for example Dmitrii Medvedev's, expressing in his public statements his negative attitude to this historical personage: thus, for Russian Prime Minister, Stalin "was in war against his own people" (Dmitrii Medvedev Facebook, 2012).

Even if government's attempts in "destalinization" direction remained quite limited and public statements ambiguous, the "patriotic circles" of Runet have not remained static in the face of these developments. An analysis of the materials published on the movement's various relays (sites, blogs, social networks) reveals its motto: in contemporary Russia, history and memory are fields of struggle in which "just" interpretations, that is to say "patriotic" ones, are opposed to the falsifying discourse, belittling national history by reducing Stalin's role in the Victory to silence and denying his historical merits. In fact, the movement is positioned as "civic resistance to revisionism and to the re-evaluation of the results of the Second World War and the Great Patriotic War, and to so-called de-Sovietization/de-Stalinization ("Commissariat of the People for Truth") and as "an educational project" ('*Pochemu ia podderzhivaiu*' 2010.03.19). In this way, the dissemination and preservation of the myth of the "Great Stalin" has taken the appearance of a critical re-evaluation of Soviet history. According to the members of the movement, ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Soviet history has been a victim of a real campaign to discredit and defame it, undertaken by "anti-Soviet and anti-Russian forces", which aim in particular at the Victory, the symbol of Russian national pride, by attacking the image of Stalin – inseparable from it. Following this logic,

blackening Stalin means blackening Victory. One widespread opinion, according to which the Victory was won by the people in spite of Stalin, is considered a logical consequence of this "information war". The aim of this campaign is allegedly to cultivate shame in the Russian people and promote a "complex of collective guilt" for the entire seventy years of Soviet history, presenting the period as "an inexplicable aberration, a chain of catastrophes and of monstrous crimes" ('*Pochemu ia podderzhivaiu*' 2010.03.19); they aim to undermine "the international authority of the Great Russia" and to "shape in our fellow citizens a negative attitude toward the history of their country" ('*Avtobus Pobedy 9 Maia*' 2012).

It is exactly this discourse against which participants oppose their version of "accurate" Soviet history: beyond Stalin's reintroduction into the commemorative space as a victor, the point is to rehabilitate and purify Soviet history from being "smeared". Based on various declarations made by the movement, it is easy to see that this rehabilitation consists in foregrounding the memory of a glorious history of the war to the detriment of a darker one: for example, discussing the issue of Russian society having to fulfill a duty of memory, the organizers speak of "all the defenders of the Fatherland who, in the hard years of the Great Patriotic War fought and worked for Victory with the name of Joseph Stalin on their lips and under [Stalin's] leadership" ('*Avtobus Pobedy 9 Maia*' 2012); on the other hand, nothing is said about the memory of the victims of Stalin and of his policies; these pages of history do not seem to concern the movement, but are instead considered "calumnies" and "smear attempts."

The ambition to promote a patriotic and in fact very selective view of Stalin's role in the war is highlighted by the movement's reactions to certain state initiatives in the domain of history and memory. In February 2011, a "programme of national reconciliation and of immortalization of the memories of victims of totalitarian regime" was adopted by the Russian authorities. Elaborated by the Development Committee for Civil Society and Human Rights in close collaboration with Memorial, the programme set out to achieve a number of measures in the domain of history and memory in order to get beyond the totalitarian heritage of present-day Russia (opening of archives from the Second World War, compensation for victims of Stalinist terror, creation of bipartite commissions from Russia and the Baltic countries on the most complex issues in common history, etc.). Baptized in current language the "Programme for the de-Stalinization of Russia", it gave the social debate on Stalin and Stalinism a second wind. The "Stalinobus" organizers quickly took a stance. In a press release from February 2011, they violently criticised current policies on history and memory. According to them, "de-Stalinization" represents a danger for national memory: "The change of context obliges us to say that the state,

though it declares an absence of a dominant ideology, is in the process of trying to impose a univocal view of history, to infect citizens with the idea that the entire Soviet period was but a black stain on Russian history. From the negation of Stalin's role in the Victory it is but a step to the negation of a whole set of achievements of the Soviet state (...) and to the negation of the Great Victory", affirms the press release ('*Press-reliz Aktsii*', 2011)

The author of the call affirmed that, faced with the project of "de-Stalinization", the movement would double its efforts to prevent the "vilifying of national history". The recurrent theme of civic resistance to a "falsified" history imposed from above enabled "Stalinobus" to appear as a space of patriotic counter-history and counter-memory, one developed on the internet thanks to the mobilization potential that it offers. In fact, less than two years after it emerged, the project extended beyond the Russian borders thanks to the growing activism of internet users: hence, on 10 April 2012, one month before the commemoration of the 67th anniversary of the Victory, 30 Russian, and 3 Ukrainian towns confirmed their participation in the project; 137 420 Roubles, or almost 3 500 Euros were collected by Internet activists to make it possible to expand the network of circulation to ensure that "our voice and our protest is heard from Vladivostok to Kaliningrad" ('*Avtobus Pobedy. Promezhutochnye Rezul'taty*', 2012). In addition, the organizers announced "the confirmation of activists from the Baltic countries": the aim was to have the "Stalinobus" travel to Riga and Tallinn. Even if the organizers came up against considerable resistance from the municipal authorities in both these capitals, they did not renounce their provocative approach, though they were fully aware of the possible consequences, including the clash of differing national versions of the Second World War or an umpteenth "memory war" further poisoning the already strained relations between Russia and the Baltic countries. In 2013, the organizers continued their actions, this time, supported by the Communist Party and some trade unions; however, the buses still circulated on crowdfunding principle: in 2013, the Stalinobus action named "Give the Victory her name back!" ('Stalinobus 2013', 2013) was mainly sponsored by individual contributions. Besides, the organization widened its scope of action, campaigning for other measures to strengthen the link between Stalin and Victory, for example, renaming Volgograd back into Stalingrad ('*Makety dlia aktsii*', 2013).

The project's success continues to attract internet activists, sometimes very young ones, to the "just cause": for example, the coordinator of "Stalinobus" in Ufa, the capital of Bashkiria, was only born in 1986.[40] This same success, however, provokes, starting from 2011, fierce reactions from representatives of

40 Eldar Latypov-Shi. <http://www.latypov-shi.livejournal.com>, accessed February 20, 2018.

liberal political parties, defenders of Human Rights and some State officials: in April 28th 2011, the President of the Development Committee for Civil Society and Human Rights and one of the authors of "Destalinization program" Mikhail Fedotov complained to the Federal Antimonopoly Service about the Stalinobus project, on the grounds that placing Stalin's portraits on buses is "provocative" and violates the law on advertising. Another member of "Destalinization committee", Sergei Krivenko, promised to inform heads of regions about the action, emphasising the fact that the "Destalinization" programme was initiated by President Medvedev and carried out by President Putin. The leader of the political party "Iabloko" Sergei Mitrokhin states that, just as before, members and activists of his party would paint over Stalin's image with red paint. For him, "State authorities must show greater firmness [on this issue]. (...) Perhaps the war would never take place, should it not be for the idiotic Stalin's politics and his cronyism with Hitler" (Izvestia, 31.01.2013)

Notwithstanding the resistance, the authors of the project display ambition and optimism about the future, maintaining not only their determination to continue to expand the movement "*based on the internet community* (my italics, – EM) and with the help of interested citizens", but also to seek out other forms of struggle in the "information war", including: publishing brochures, launching a journal, strengthening the work on the internet etc. The organizers announced at the start of 2012 that at the current moment "the point is to create a legally recognized NGO" ("Commissariat of the People").

While this spectacular development in 2010 and 2011 seemed to forecast not only the growth of the movement's popularity on the internet and the possible emergence of imitators, but also its eruption in the field of memorial NGOs, with the inevitable restructuring of the institutional memorial landscape and an important turn in Russian collective memory, the Stalinobus movement started to falter as a civic historical initiative up from 2013. The decrease of activists' interest to the project was due to its recuperation by neoliberal patriotic political forces. Thus in 2013, the *Stalinobus* organisation process was split, the similar action was organised by the activists of the movement "Essence of Time"[41] ("Sut' Vremeni"), an avatar of classic Russian intelligentsia discussion club with a strong neo-Soviet patriotic bias. Its eminent leader, Sergei Kurginian, bears a neo-conservative antiliberal ideology. This self-styled academic has become in 2010 a TV commentator and was purposefully promoted on governmental television *via* The Historical Process TV Show. During this show, Kurginyan defended Stalin's legacy and, globally, the USSR period as the period of power and glory. He also played an eminent role during the 2011 anti-Putin

41 <http://eot.su/tags/stalinobus>.

protests, organising counter-manifestations against liberal opposition. It pays to note that the official LiveJournal Stalinobus project community claimed 'a temporary hold-on" of their activities because of 'lack of capacities to influence the media environment'. Thus, the Stalinobus collective encouraged all the imitators to carry on the project on their own: the project started to live its own live as an independent concept. However, the official community announced that their struggle for the Russian history will continue: other forms of action were to be elaborated (*Press-Reliz,* 24 April 2013).

Today, the activity of the original *Stalinobus* community was reoriented to crowdfunding money to support "Novorossiia", term designing a confederation of self-proclaimed separatist pro-Russian Ukrainian republics. The root LJ community as well as Facebook and Vkontakte branches have adopted the State-promoted imperial patriotic rhetoric, linking current situating in Ukraine to the overall historical context of the Great and Mighty Russian Empire. Not only this development emphasizes the proximity of Stalinist ideology and modern Russian patriotism rooted into the glorious imperial past; it also shows that "memory watchdogs" are in fact the social basis of new imperial patriotic discourse. From their point of view, the historical justice is about to be finally accomplished.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued several points. First, that the debate on Stalin's role in the Great Patriotic War (and in Russian history in general) is far from being closed: the confrontation between conflicting interpretations has given rise to multiple debates in public space, which become particularly ardent as commemorative occasions near. The missing memory work, repressed trauma, and the absence of a defined and coherent memory policy with regard to the Stalinist heritage constitute the main obstacles to homogenizing collective memory. A study of the debates and mobilizations in the blogosphere confirms that the young urban elite is as split on the issue of Stalin and Stalinism as the Russian society as a whole: Russia is still haunted by its "unburied past" (Etkind, 2009:182).

Second, while tendencies to re-evaluate the Soviet history emerge and are articulated in public space, internet plays an increasingly important role in mobilizations bearing on history and memory. Abolishing the borders between profane and scientific discourse, between producers and consumers of historical knowledge, internet fosters the greatest plurality of interpretations, whose influence rests not on historical veracity but instead on the authors' ability to

make themselves heard in the vast sea of the Internet. While the emergency of "memory watchdogs" primarily online can be observed, the openness of the internet facilitates the permanent clash of interpretations of the role of Stalin in the Second World War. Those spaces of alternative memory are, in the present Russian context, part of a logic of struggle for the "true" memory of the Great Patriotic War, as opposed to the "falsified" one. The return of the "Great Leader" in his capacity of victor of the Great Patriotic War is presented as a critical and necessary re-evaluation of the Soviet history in the context of the state's inability to carry out a coherent memory politics.[42] The State's attempt to "destalinize" Russian history accentuated memory activism that struggles for the return to the glorious version of the Great Patriotic War. This activism emphasizes the fact that through its ability to foster debate and form groups of opinion, the internet is becoming, and increasingly so, a milieu in which the spaces of patriotic counter-history and counter-memory are created in opposition to the officially promoted discourse.

Third, supporters of the "patriotic" view of history who adopt the appearance of a "critical re-evaluation of history" are gaining more and more digital ground. They are the most active, higher mobilized than liberal civil society, and web-savvy. The resulting mobilizations may turn out to be either short or long term, depending upon the goals pursued; once launched by internet users, they are liable to leave the bounds of the internet[43] and enter the field of offline civic action. The success of the "Stalinobus" initiative only confirm the mobilizing potential of the "struggle for patriotic history". In the context of the state's inability to establish a coherent memory policy for re-thinking historical Stalinism, the digital communities emerged from below can be considered the avant-garde of the global movement of patriotic re-evaluation of the Soviet history. The marked success of the pro-Stalin movement within commemorative space demonstrates its mobilizing potential, revealing the need, being expressed by sections of society *via* "patriotic" communities, for an alternative reading of the Soviet history. In plus, the latest developments in connection with the Ukrainian crisis indicate that this particular "patriotic" vision of the Soviet history often goes hand in hand with a certain neo-imperial way of thinking and receptiveness to State-promoted patriotic ideology.

42 For more about the ambiguities in the memory politics of the Russian state see the chapter by Malinova and the chapter by Sniegon in this volume.

43 The term "internet bounds" can be applied with good reason to the Russian context, where the situation of "digital divide", *i.e.* the inequality between those who have access to internet and those who don't is quite sharp: indeed, according to the 2012 statistics, only half of the population is connected (*Lenta.ru*, June 2, 2012)

The retrospective view in 2018 on the findings of this study conducted in 2010-2011 allows to confirm and nuance them. While LiveJournal have lost digital ground and hence its influence in shaping the debate around controversial historical figures, Livejournal's "old guard" (influencers with huge number of followers keeping their journal active despite the diminishing role of the platform) continue to harvest hundreds of comments by solely posting a few lines about Stalin ("I don't understand how we can still have people respecting this old moustached Georgian and his deeds", as Livejournal influencer "tema" put it in January 2018, instigating a 768-comments worth debate). In parallel, the debate is full swing on more recent social media (eg. Facebook, Vkontakte, Twitter). For example, Facebook public groups boast 72 communities dedicated to Stalin, from which 41 are Cyrillic. Totalizing more than 37K members, these communities mainly promote and diffuse a glorious image of Stalin as a military leader and a great Chief of State. On the other spectrum of the debate, only one Cyrillic community, counting 345 members, is dedicated to the crimes of Stalin.

These statistics echo the broader situation in the Russian current perception of Stalin's role in the Great Patriotic War – according to recent polls of the Levada centre, the number of critics have steadily decreased during the 2000s, to touch a "historical minimum" in May 2017 (only 12% attributed to Stalin the USSR's giant human losses during the war, as compared to 34% in 1997). While the debate continues to prove highly polarizing on social media, it seems that the public opinion has reached a consensus on the topic.

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PART 3

Popular Culture and Its Embeddedness in Politics

CHAPTER 7

"Your Stork Might Disappear Forever!": Russian Public Awareness Advertising and Incentivizing Motherhood

Elena Rakhimova-Sommers

This study investigates the rhetoric and imagery employed in the marketing of Russia's ongoing campaign aimed at incentivizing motherhood.[1] The campaign began in 2006 as a government initiative to fight the country's decline in population by offering women what were seen as incentives to have more children.[2] Since visual texts such as advertisements are particularly embedded with cultural and historical context, current Russian public awareness advertising offers a window into the workings of a new pronatalist ideology that focuses on creating associations between fertility, social adequacy, patriotism, and ethnic and national homogeneity.

The fluctuating relationship between the Russian state and "its mothers" is closely intertwined with larger political struggles. The start of a new millennium brought a shift from a retreat to re-engagement on the part of the state in matters of women's bodies. Women's fertility began to be considered in terms of the country's ethnic and political survival, viewed through the lens of anxiety about the influx of immigrants and illegal workers from Central Asia. As Russia introduces a new national idea with a three child model at its center, it finds itself in the awkward business of selling the joys of procreation while also attempting to rebrand its image at home and abroad.

The Birth and Decline of the "State-Mother-Child Triad"

Before we examine the twenty-first century post-Soviet concept of womanhood and motherhood, it is essential to take stock of the history of the Soviet state-mother relationship, which is marked by the state's anxiety about "the

1 Моим дорогим Российским друзьям и коллегам: надеюсь эта статья будет воспринята как часть позитивной и продуктивной дискуссии по вопросам, которые волнуют всех кто любит и поддерживает Россию.

2 A version of this paper was published in *From Russia with Love Conference Proceedings April 19, 2013*.

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private sphere" and its efforts to control it. A study by Olga Issoupova explores the evolution of the notion of motherhood from the Soviet 1920s to the Russian 1990s by analyzing a cross-section of women's magazines: the official Soviet state journal *Voprosy materinstva i mladenchestva* (Questions of Motherhood and Infancy), the Russian editions of *Cosmopolitan, Good Housekeeping* (*Domashnii ochag*), *Motherhood* (*Materinstvo*), and the two most popular women's magazines of the Soviet era – *Rabotnitsa* and *Krestianka* (*Woman Worker* and *Peasant Woman*). Issoupova argues that from the 1917 October revolution on, "the state sought to develop a special alliance with mothers" (Issoupova 2000, 31). She defines the nature of this relationship as "the state-mother-child triad," from which fathers were symbolically excluded, and suggests that in the private sphere "the Soviet State has usurped the role of men … to such an extent that it had all but ceased to exist" (Issoupova 2000, 31, 50).

Issoupova identifies three characteristic features of the Soviet government's interpretation of the "women's question": motherhood was regarded as a social and not a private matter, as a "natural" destiny of women, and "as a function which was to be facilitated and rewarded by the state" (Issoupova 2000, 32). The authorities' grip on the institution of motherhood is best illustrated by the state monopoly on all obstetrics services and access to abortions. Beginning with the post 1917 legalization of abortion, the procedure was carefully regulated by the state, which intermittently banned it or reinstated it depending on the demographic climate of the time. The state enacted these policies while failing to supply contraception to its population, making abortion essentially the only option for the majority of Soviet women.[3]

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the ensuing economic crisis essentially brought an end to the "state-mother-child triad," as maternity stopped being viewed as a state function. As state support for mothers was reduced and daycare services were shifted to the private sphere, the press placed new emphasis on individual responsibility in family-planning decisions. Issoupova points out that as the state began to "hand women potential control over their bodies," it faced public criticism of "desertion" (40). The Russians found the post-Soviet state responsible for neglecting its parental responsibilities and

3 Abortions were legalized in 1920 and banned from 1936 until 1955. In 2011, the Russian Parliament passed a law restricting abortion to the first twelve weeks of pregnancy, with an exception up to 22 weeks if the pregnancy is the result of rape. (The procedure can be performed for medical necessity at any point during pregnancy). The new law made mandatory a waiting period of two to seven days to allow the woman time to reconsider her decision.

lamented the lack of state action on issues like child poverty amid a sense of a looming demographic crisis (44).

Demographic Crisis and Maternity Capital

Russia's demographic situation gradually worsened with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, when the country was devastated by an economic crisis. In 1994, life expectancy fell to 57.7 years for men and to 61.2 years for women (Notzon et al., 1998). The Total Fertility Rate (TFR), the average number of children a Russian woman would bear in her lifetime, fell to 1.17 in 1999 (Rifkin-Fish 2006, 158). My own personal conversations with a cross-section of Russian women all reflect the same sentiment in regards to reproductive decisions during the dire economic climate of Boris Yeltsin's 1991-1999 presidential term. The consensus among the interviewed women is that "under Yeltsin, women stopped giving birth." [4] To combat the 1990s demographic decline, the State Duma introduced a pronatalist measure, a law establishing government support known as "maternity capital." Beginning with January 2007, women that give birth to or adopt a second or consecutive child are entitled to a "maternity capital" fund of approximately $11,000 which they can obtain, as a once in a lifetime measure, after the child reaches the age of three. The funds can be used towards acquiring housing, paying for children's education, or investing in the mother's retirement fund. According to Slonimzyk and Yurko's study *Assessing the Impact of the Maternity Capital Policy in Russia* (2013), out of three million maternity capital certificates issued by 2012, about a quarter (23.9%) were fully claimed.

Predictably, over ninety percent of the certificates were used towards acquiring and improving housing conditions.[5] Russia has been plagued by chronic housing shortage problems since the birth of the Soviet Union. A significant number of Russian families continue to live in difficult conditions where it is not uncommon for parents, their adult offspring, and sometimes a grandparent to share a two-room apartment for years. In the 2013 presidential address to the Federal Assembly, Vladimir Putin addressed the issue of quality permanent housing, but did so only in relation to the servicemen of Russia's Army and Navy. Making the issue a government priority, President Putin appealed to the Department of Defense to help military families on a case by case basis. Putin's 2006 Strategic plan did call for a special program for improving housing

4 My own, personal conversations with Russian women, research data, unpublished, 2012.
5 Slonimzyk and Yurko cite the Pension Fund of the Russian Federation Annual Report 2012.

conditions for families with three or more children by using the funds "left over after the completion of the Sochi Olympic facilities, the APEC facilities in Russia's Far East, and the housing program for servicemen" (KT). Considering the Sochi Olympics were reported to be the most expensive in history, it might be difficult to expect a significant improvement of the housing situation, which in Russia remains one of the key factors in family planning decisions.

After four years of the maternity capital program, Russia's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) rose to 1.58, but demographers cautioned against attributing these results to the effectiveness of the government's pronatalist policies. After all, the cumulative effect of maternity capital on fertility came to a mere 0.15 children per woman (Slonimzyk and Yurko 2013, 36). Slonimzyk and Yurko's study concludes that "much of the increase in birth rates post 2007 was due to rescheduling of births and not long-term increases in fertility" (Slonimzyk and Yurko 2013, 37). The following, frequently cited story from the city of Ulianovsk serves as an example of the "rescheduling of birth" practice and points to a lack of a comprehensive government approach to Russia's demographic situation. On the heels of the government's designation of 2008 as The Year of Family and the introduction of a new "Day of Family, Love, and Fidelity" holiday (July 8th), the city of Ulyanovsk came up with its own pronatalist "Give Birth to a Patriot on the Day of Russia!" campaign. This initiative rewards couples that produce an offspring on June 12th, the Day of Russian Independence, with a car called "A Patriot" no less. To facilitate the coordination of such a measure, September 12th is designated as "The Day of Family Socializing," which the straightforward locals call "the day of conception." On this day, the city governor recommends that employers let their employees go home, and stores are prohibited from selling alcohol.

On February 13th 2012, President Putin published a sixteen page article, "Building Justice: a Social Policy for Russia," in the *Komsomolskaya Pravda* newspaper. The very last page of this extensive strategic plan, titled "The Conservation of Russia," outlines the country's demographic decline and makes a passionate appeal to the country, warning of ethnic and political extinction: "Our territory is home to about 40% of the world's natural resources, whereas the population of Russia makes only 2% of the global population." Putin continues, saying: "I believe the conclusion is clear. Should we fail to carry out a large-scale and long-term project for demographic development, the build-up of human resources and territorial development, we risk becoming an 'empty space' in global terms, and then our fate will be determined by someone else, not us" (Putin, 2012). Projecting that Russia's population–at 143 million in 2012–is bound to shrink to 107 million by 2050, Putin calls for a "comprehensive population conservation strategy" that would bring the number to 154 million"

(Putin, 2012). At the closing of the article, Putin equates passivity with dramatic loss of life, saying that "the historical price of choice between action and inaction is almost 50 million human lives within the next 40 years" (Putin, 2012).

This new national idea, an American-esque dream with a three child model at its center, is channeled through social awareness advertising campaigns that focus on the message of reproduction as a means of social fulfillment. This is not an entirely new approach. Victoria E. Bonnell, in her *Iconography of Power. Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin*, demonstrates that between 1926 and 1957, in a series of now iconic propaganda posters, the Soviet woman's body becomes an experimental canvas for the changing needs of the state. Starting out as a larger-than-life figure with androgynous features when heavy industrial labor is expected of her, she then undergoes various transformations: she either slims down or gains weight, appears with children or without, her chest and hips either expanding or becoming understated depending on whether the politics of the time focus on production or reproduction (Bonnell 1999, 105).

Triplets, Storks, Toys, and Cosmonauts: Crafting a Message of Urgency

This part of the study will analyze a cross-section of social awareness advertising initiatives: the 2008 Moscow subway billboard "The Country Needs Your Records," the 2011 campaign "They Were Born Third," ushered in by then President Dmitri Medvedev in the Altai region and Kamchatka Peninsula, and the two winning short films of the 2012 Social Advertising Conference contest in the city of Novosibirsk. The "Boost the Birthrate" campaigns in Siberia and the Far East demonstrate pronatalist policies outside of Moscow and point to the federal government's efforts to revitalize these regions.

The Moscow subway billboard, "The Country Needs Your Records. Three persons are born in Russia every minute," features a modestly dressed young "every mom" holding three identical babies on her lap.[6] The outlines of the mom's bra are visible through the fabric, revealing a healthy bust. She seems to have broad child-bearing hips. The noun "records," "рекорды," in "The Country Needs Your Records," carries a distinct Olympic-Games connotation, equating

6 Considering how much effort a Russian woman devotes to her wardrobe, female internet users took issue with the fact that the pictured "every mom" is poorly dressed.

FIGURE 7.1
"The country needs your records." Photo from the author's personal collection.

motherhood with competition, and is meant to prompt action.[7] By implication, since every minute "three persons" are born in Russia, you too can join the renewal process and help the country win. The language of the ad is also reminiscent of the 1930s Stakhanovite campaign, launched by the Communist Party to celebrate and reward model Soviet workers who set production records. The plural "you," "ваши" in "The Country Needs Your Records" ("Стране нужны ваши рекорды") groups all women in one class. Replacing the more traditional "babies are born" with "persons are born" aims to elevate motherhood to an act of duty while also multiplying the mother's emblem of worth by three.

7 The opening ceremony of the 2014 Sochi Olympic Games, the biggest global advertising and public relations machine of them all, also had a demographic "accent." It featured dozens of young men handing over dozens of twins to dozens of young women, who donned red kerchiefs, and pushed red strollers against the word, "Children," inscribed on the stadium floor in giant letters.

A wedding ring, a necessary wholesome component of a western ad, is not pictured, though the mom is wearing a golden bracelet and earrings. Absent from the picture is another detail – a dad. There is no hint of him in the background making breakfast or leaving for work. The pose that mom is made to assume is unnatural (one of her legs serves as a bench for her two boys). She and the eerily clone-like triplets are stiff, her body language is strained, and as a result the image reads forced. Awkwardly smiling and barely managing to balance the triplets on her lap, our mom looks not only decidedly alone, but also somehow lost and abandoned. The ad, a misguided attempt at an "every mom" image, advances a certain standard of femininity that reinforces the child caring role as exclusively feminine. This billboard speaks volumes about the need for a national conversation about the role of fathers and partners in family dynamic and the pattern of the "absent father" in the Soviet/Post-Soviet iconography, which will be addressed later in this chapter.

The 2010 "They Were Born Third" initiative was introduced by the Charitable Foundation for the Protection of the Family, Motherhood, and Childhood.[8] The foundation's official site includes a separate category for "Anti-abortion Social Ad Series" that feature smiling toddlers, women in the midst of agonizing decisions, together with images of nuclear holocaust and fetus skeletons accompanied by such slogans as "Russians, wake up!" and "Birth control is the ideal method of mass genocide."[9] When "They Were Born Third" was co-launched with the Russian OTP Bank, its president V.V. Korovin lamented "a catastrophic decline in the number of Russian multiple child families (from 23.5 million or 9.8 % in 1989, to 1.4 million or 6.6 % in 2002)" and suggested that the three child family model will solve the demographic problem in the Russian Federation.[10] This statement echoed an earlier endorsement of the campaign by then Russian President Medvedev in his 2010 address to the Federal Assembly.

"They Were Born Third" campaign targeted the Altai region, the Kamchatka Peninsula, the cities of Novosibirsk, Omsk, and later Moscow, Rostov, and Nizhniy Novgorod. A series of billboard ads each featured a photo of a different Russian historical figure such as cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, Russian poetess Anna Akhmatova, the writer Anton Chekhov, and others. Each celebrity photo is framed by an outline of a pregnant women's stomach and is accompanied by the words, "They Were Born Third."

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8 Благотворительны фонд защиты семьи, материнства и детства: <https://semyarussia.ru>.

9 <https://semyarussia.ru>.

10 <http://www.advertology.ru/article90140.htm> accessed Feb. 7, 2018.

Consumers had a field day with the "They Were Born Third" ad in their sarcasm-filled internet posts on the Russian social networking service, LiveJournal. One discussion thread mocked the new initiative as yet another "attack of the social ad industry," pondering why Stalin, also a third child, was not included and challenging the authorities to "widen the propaganda horizons by including 'those who were born fourth,' such as Lenin, Hitler or better yet, Mendeleev, the seventeenth child in the family," since "one has got to populate the Far East somehow." The same LiveJournal user noted that this propaganda piece was no less irritating than the 2008 one, "The Country Needs Your Records" and argued that these "primitive efforts mask the complete absence of any kind of social guarantees." She advocated for additional vacation time, 100% paid sick leaves for both parents of three children, priority daycare placement, free medicine, favorable bank credits for homebuilding, tax breaks, and special deals with the makers of diapers, baby food, clothes, and toys. Women shared their frustrating experiences regarding lack of childcare options, bemoaned the "withering of their dreams," and said that those women who "went for the third child can count only on themselves for survival."[11]

While the two above analyzed social awareness ads represent the end product of each of the pronatalist projects, the 2012 Social Advertising Conference in city of Novosibirsk is an opportunity to see these initiatives in the making.[12] The Novosibirsk conference was a five day training camp for the advertising professionals. The event included round-tables and workshops and culminated in a social ad contest, with two winning short films selected out of fifty-six submissions. The mission of social advertising was outlined as follows: "to influence perception stereotypes, habits and models of human behavior in order to solve a number of social issues." The conference web brochure cited Putin's address to the Federal Assembly where he advocates for the three child model: "Demographers argue that the choice to have the second child is potentially the choice for the third. It is important that the family makes this step. And despite the hesitations of some experts, and with all due respect, I'm convinced that the norm in Russia must be the family with three children.[13]

Participants were charged with "the production of materials that would advance traditional norms and values in the sphere of demographic politics." In a symbolic gesture, the conference's homepage opens with a quote from the

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11 <http://kalinnka.livejournal.com/547043.html>.

12 Transcripts and conference materials are available on-line. All further discussed materials of the Novosibirsk conference are obtained from its official website: <http://www.slideshare.net/filurin/201212-15730507>. Translation is mine.

13 Materials of the Novosibirsk conference: <http://www.slideshare.net/filurin/201212-15730507>. My translation.

Russian State Law that defines public awareness advertising as "information, disseminated in any form and by use of any means, aimed at accomplishing philanthropic or other socially useful goals, and insuring state interests." This legal speak signifies a focused effort to redefine the notion of motherhood as a blend of self-fulfillment, social adequacy, and patriotic duty.

The advertising conference focused on two groups: 1) "educated urban professional couples in their twenties and thirties" and 2) "financially comfortable middle class couples with two children." The conference outlined the problem with the younger demographic in the following way: "young urban professional couples in their twenties and thirties often postpone childbirth 'till later,' a decision which sometimes leads to abandoning the idea of childbirth altogether." The charge was to find "a platform to persuade young families on the issue of the advantages of early childbirth" by employing a "tomorrow will be too late" message that would create an association between delaying childbirth and infertility. Because Russians are known to attribute their medical problems to the environment, advertising agencies are encouraged to exaggerate the environmental causes of infertility. Conference guidelines recommended linking an anxiety inducing "tomorrow will be too late" message with the idea of looming medical complications as a fail proof narrative.

While these age-old scare tactics are not entirely uncommon, what is of interest is a new and a slightly more subtle part of the charge – the cultivation of a social inadequacy message. The short film-makers were encouraged to promote the idea that "postponing childbirth for too long, you risk ending up altogether childless and socially inadequate." The association of childlessness with inferiority is quite new for Russia, especially as it relates to professional women, and the conference participants seem to have been aware that they had to tread lightly. The winner of this category, the short film "The Stork," presents an attractive, professionally and personally fulfilled businesswoman, who, it suggests, could benefit from an urgent reminder that life marches on and fertility does not last forever. "The Stork," takes the audience through four scenes, each accompanied by a lullaby tune. The first shows a fashionably dressed young woman shopping, her fatigued but willing beau trailing behind her. As the woman picks up a dress hanger from a clothing rack, the gap reveals a stork that gazes into her eyes. Visibly annoyed, she shoves the hanger back and walks away. The contrast between the aggressive woman and what appears to be a fragile cartoon-like figure, something a child might have made out of cardboard for a first grade project, becomes instantly apparent. The second scene shows our childless woman, with her hair up, in a smart beige suit, in her office. As she enthusiastically types away at the computer, the camera points to a

framed picture of her and a boyfriend on her desk. When the stork appears, stretching out his neck and reaching for her, she blocks him with her monitor.

The next encounter takes place while she is on a date in a trendy coffee shop. Here too the stork is angrily dismissed. The ad ends on a snowy night, as the woman is snuggling on a couch, watching TV with a vaguely identifiable male. When the stork knocks on her window, she resolutely shuts the curtains. Visibly defeated, the stork disintegrates into pieces. As we watch, the stork pieces merge with the snowfall, and a gentle male voice sounds an alarm: "While still young, you are strong and full of health. But years go by and, postponing pregnancy, you are decreasing your chances to conceive and give birth to a *healthy child*. Later your stork might disappear forever!"[14] The ad's anxiety inducing tactics appear to be effective as medical complications due to inadequate healthcare and environmental factors are known fears among young Russian women. It is arguable whether or not the ad delivers on the required association between childlessness and female social inadequacy, but it effectively shapes a selfish diva portrait as the fragile, vulnerable, and childlike stork is no match for the sterile, ice queen's decimating stare.

"The Stork" echoes ideologically motivated, "litanous" construction of demographic analyses, characteristic of the 1990s when Russia's economic and political decline was directly linked to its failure to reproduce (Rivkin-Fish 2006, 154). Such discussions on women's health characteristically sidestep socioeconomic problems but frame the issues of fertility in terms of Russian identity and the future of the Russian nation itself. While the rhetoric seems to have gotten more subtle with time, one can observe that the advertising industry has kept the core ingredients of the recipe the same. "The Stork" ad combines the use of scare tactics with dangers of irreversible medical complications, while equating a woman's ability to reproduce with a life well lived.

The Absent Father

The four scenes of the "The Stork" are linked by a certain narratorial absence. What they have in common is what they lack – a husband/father/partner image. Although the successful businesswoman is featured with two male figures, their presence is marginal and fleeting, and their roles are ambiguous. The heroine comes across as alone on her life journey and certainly in her child-

14 "В молодости ты полна сил и здоровья, но годы идут, и, откладывая беременность на потом, ты снижаешь свои шансы зачать и родить здорового ребёнка. Ведь потом твой аист может исчезнуть навсегда!"

bearing decision, a discursive pattern that is important to address. While Russia has a distinct tradition of a motherhood narrative, there is little if anything to fall back on as far as a "school" of fatherhood portrayal. This gendered space was previously occupied in the Soviet iconography by a succession of Soviet political leaders beginning with Lenin and Stalin. In terms of a national consciousness, the "father of the nation" space is currently filled, but it still remains empty in the advertising terrain. To this end, it is informative to refer to an in depth study of sixty years of family related advertising in *Good Housekeeping* magazine (Marshal et al., 2014). Examining discursive shifts in the advertising portrayals of the father's role in family identity construction, researchers identified seven "epochs of fathering" among which are "the absent father" (year 2000), and "the invisible but implied" father figure (year 2010). The study suggests that the absent father "cultural script" reflects society's general anxiety and uncertainly about the role of fathers within the family dynamic, a pattern and sentiment that certainly reflects current Russian reality.

Johnny Rodin's and Pelle Aberg's 2014 study shows that although the post-Soviet era created conditions for a "breadwinner model," which assigns financial and discipline responsibilities to men, the Russian fatherhood discourse "continues to involve an unclear and sometimes weak role for the father" (13). Although the gendered space made vacant by the "retreat of the state" created an invitation for a male father figure to step in, Russian men do not appear to be ready for the new involved, engaged, and hands-on role, which the post-Soviet women would welcome. Rodin and Aberg argue that "men's ties to their children are in many cases weak due to the high number of non-marital births and high divorce rates, which frequently imply separation from the children too" (13). Issoupova suggests that "the future of motherhood, fatherhood and parenthood is still in the balance, with the gulf between the new ideas and the existing reality likely to do little to resolve the gender tensions bequeathed by the Soviet state" (50).

The second winner of the Novosibirsk social ad contest, "Toy store," makes an effort to bridge this gender gap and repair the father figure void by targeting "financially comfortable *couples* in their thirties and forties with two kids" (my emphasis). The goal set up by contest organizers was to capitalize on what was identified as an emerging fashionable trend – "having a third child as a symbol of stability, wellbeing, family health, and the woman's social success." "Toy store" shows a textbook family unit – mom, dad, and two blond, perfectly groomed children – on a shopping trip, but suggests that even this ideal is lacking and that real "happiness you can afford" is just around the corner. When the daughter suggestively picks out a toy baby stroller and the boy winks knowingly at his father, the parents smile and a male voice delivers the message:

"Children already read your thoughts. Leave your doubts behind. The third child is happiness you can afford!" In the last frame the now family of five (mom is holding a bundled up newborn) appeals to the audience: "We've got three. What about you?"

By targeting upper-middle class couples with two or more children, the "Toy store" ad emphasizes individual financial responsibility in the matters of child-bearing and child-rearing while at the same time hopes to capitalize on a recent cultural shift in the treatment of large families. During the economically and politically tumultuous 1990s having a large number of children was viewed as unquestionably negative. Given that the responsibility for reproduction was transferred to the private sphere, having more than one child was seen as an irresponsible behavior characteristic of the under-educated class and a gateway to the lumpenization of society. Such sentiments, while still very much "audible" as related to low-income families with multiple children, eventually gave way to a new cultural trend, in which financially comfortable families with multiple children are viewed as a sign of national health and prosperity.

The ad industry's attempt to capitalize on the financially comfortable families misses the mark as the upper middle class represents a mere fraction of the Russian population. Additionally, despite its attempts to sell an inspiring image of a desirable family, the "Toy store" ad fails because its mannequin-like ensemble of characters lacks the natural intimacy shared by parents and children. Just like her awkwardly smiling and overdressed for the occasion husband and kids, the heavily made up "mom," in an outdated 1980s era cocktail dress and high heels, looks very much out of place in a Toys-R-Us-like toy store. In a country plagued by inadequate healthcare system, difficult housing conditions, lack of quality, affordable daycare options, and weeks' long "prophylactic" hot water shut offs in entire apartment districts, these sickly-sweet images of ersatz family togetherness have little chance of motivating any woman to action.

Russian social awareness ads on demographic topics lack sophistication and nuance, and fail to connect with their target audience. This fact does not appear to escape the industry professionals as more and more articles and surveys on "Why Do Social Ads Fail in Russia?" are beginning to emerge. For example, a recent *Survey on the Effectiveness of Russian Social Awareness Advertising* devoted to demographic topics asked internet users to evaluate "They Were Born Third" for its level of "effectiveness" and "ability to convince the audience to forgo abortions or have a third child." The survey also asked for help in identifying flaws in the social ads after which it requested information about the user's age, gender, marital, educational, and financial status.[15]

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15 <https://www.survio.com/survey/d/R5X7M5I7A3F8B4E9U>.

While a social ad may be able to convince a consumer to consider drinking responsibly or give up smoking, there may not be a successful ad that influences a woman's decision to have a second or third child. A new set of 2017-18 Russian government initiatives, following reports of continual population decline, reflect Russian government's growing awareness regarding a need for a comprehensive approach to demographic issues. Speaking at the November 28, 2017 meeting of the presidential council for the implementation of a 2012-2017 National Children's Strategy, President Putin voiced his concern about the "acute demographic situation in Russia," urging "active and consistent work along all avenues: lowering death rates and stimulation of birth rates." Putin announced the government would "reset Russia's national demographic program" with a particular focus on low-income families. He introduced a new financial support initiative beginning in January 2018 by which parents would receive about $180 per month, for eighteen months after the birth of their first child. This federal aid would be distributed to the sixty Russian regions where the birth rate average is two children or less. Also, special lower interest rate mortgages would be available for families with two or more children. Additionally, the President charged the government to work out a timeline for reconstruction of the country's pediatric clinics in order to ensure accessible and quality healthcare.[16]

Some Concluding Thoughts: A Woman's Body as Experimental Canvas

The issue of incentivizing motherhood is always problematic. Short-term financial programs have historically proven to be ineffective, as child-bearing decisions, regardless of geography, are determined by a reliable system of social support and medical care. Hoping to facilitate a pronatalist shift in a culture, in which one-child family has been an expected national standard for over seventy years, the Russian government seems to be seeking to find a way to re-engage with the everyday of its citizens and re-enter their private lives. The untranslatable and culturally elusive Russian notion of "byt," "the everyday," yet again finds itself at the center of politics in the new millennium, after Russia's rapid and painful transition from a socialist to a market-oriented economy.[17] Embracing the sudden array of choices and eager to create bright and

16 <https://iz.ru/676425/2017-11-28/putin-prizval-stimulirovat-rozhdaemost-v-rossii>.

17 Svetlana Boym's study of the phenomenon of "*byt*" and the Russian peculiar conception of private life shows that Russians have historically considered the idea of privacy to be a

cozy domestic nests, new post-Soviet consumer is redefining the Soviet concept of "byt" from that of accepted mediocre everydayness to the well overdue, highly sought after, and eagerly embraced lifestyle of material comfort. This new concept of "byt" does not necessarily include a multi-child family.

The advertising industry's pronatalist push for a "new woman" to be used in the production of Russianness and the Russian tomorrow continues a pattern of Soviet iconography politics with women as passive ground for the nation's political and economic desires. With new cultural developments rapidly ushering new interpretations of "byt" and "private life," pronatalist ads' implied messages regarding a set of things women owe impose preferred models of womanhood and motherhood that are sure to be ineffective in the post-Soviet space.

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Western, bourgeois notion, synonymous with "I-centered," egotistical behavior. "Byt" carried a firm negative connotation, associated with suffocating routine, monotony, and stagnation. The act of living a life, "*bytie*," on the other hand, occupied the realm of artistic, spiritual, and intellectual exploration. The historic opposition between "byt" and "bytie" is reflected in the fact that state-driven initiatives against or in favor of "byt" continued throughout the Soviet years, beginning with the 1917 campaign against "petit-bourgeois everyday life." Since the working mother was "a pillar of the Soviet gender contract," (Rodin and Aberg, 9) domesticity in terms of its "reproductive potential" did not constitute the government's priority, but "utility was exalted as virtue and the marriage of fitness and beauty was proclaimed" (36). In contrast, the post-World War II period and its devastating demographic loss saw a new government respect for the new Soviet middle class and its culture that welcomed domesticity, femininity, and accumulation of household items.

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"The Country needs your records." ("Стране нужны ваши рекорды") – photo from the author's personal collection.

CHAPTER 8

Fashionable Irony and *Stiob*: the Use of Soviet Heritage in Russian Fashion Design and Soviet Subcultures

Ekaterina Kalinina

Introduction[1]

Political reformation within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union started in 1985. Widely known as *perestroika*, it brought a draught of fresh air into the life of Soviet subcultures. Previous bans on musicians' performances and artists' exhibitions were lifted, and many young people who shared the same sense of dissatisfaction and protest towards the dominant ideology and the Soviet life style got an opportunity to express their discontent openly (Kveberg 2012, 9). And just like that, dress culture became one of the platforms for the mediation of protest and an important indicator of a particular worldview that questioned the dominant communist ideology. Members of subcultures openly mocked the Soviet life style not least in the way how they dressed by combing and mixing together garments and accessories that hardly could be imagined together. Their irony – a 'rhetorical and structural strategy of resistance and opposition' (Hutcheon 1994, 12) – and *stiob* – a 'ridiculing that tends to veer towards mortifying and even humiliating' (Klebanov 2013, 235) – became the tools to unpack power hierarchies.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, when foreign commodities of varying quality flooded the Russian market, many designers built their brand identities on *podrazhanie inostrannomu*, or 'foreignism', i.e. trying to appear anything but Russian. With time, however, young and aspiring designers felt the need to create a distinct Russian cultural identity and soon enough Russian themes indeed became the entrance card to the global fashion markets – something new, something different, something special. What was striking about the most successful of these brands was a humorous attitude to life, to the self and to the symbols of the past. The designers proposed looking at the Russian past and identity ironically, often without searching for a profound

1 This chapter is an edited and updated version of a chapter of my doctoral dissertation: Kalinina, E (2014) *Mediated Post-Soviet Nostalgia*. Stockholm: Södertörn University.

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meaning. They suggested accepting both the past and the present and laughing at some aspects of it.

This humorous twist had another 'fashionable' reincarnation coinciding with Vladimir Putin's third presidential term (2012-2018). Several pro-Kremlin designers and brands such as Antonina Shapovalova and PUTINVERSTEHER were launched as political projects promoting a mixture of state patriotism and a cult of personal happiness in a disarming ironic manner. However, while the Soviet subcultures used *stiob* as an effective strategy to mock the Soviet regime, the pro-Kremlin designers promoted official version of patriotism where these modes of joking were used as a strategy to disarm and attract more sympathisers. Against this background, it seems relevant to raise a question about the usage of irony and *stiob* both in the promotional strategies and in the treatment of national history in Russian dress culture in the 1980s-2010s.

The Rebellious *Stiob* of the Soviet Subcultures

The relations between the Soviet system and Soviet subcultures were a complex matter. Even though many subcultures were in opposition to the Communist party, they nevertheless were largely tolerated by the state during late socialism (Steinholt 2005, Zhuk 2010). As Gregory Kveberg (2012) writes, a policy of tolerance allowed official culture and subcultures to evolve together in a dialectical process, with the banning of some cultures in the Soviet Union leading to the emergence of others, creating some sort of hybrid culture, where official and non-official elements were deeply intertwined (Yurchak 2006). This dialectics provided a fruitful arena for the outburst of creativity, which spilled over to the dress culture that in its turn became one of the main instruments adapted by subcultures to mock the Soviet way of life. The underdeveloped Soviet fashion industry with its constant deficit and more often than not poor quality of its products not only bred artisanal dress-makers and seamstresses, but also begot out-of-the-box solutions such as the use of second-hand garments (Bartlett 2010, Gronow & Zhuravlev 2015, Gurova 2008).

For subcultures, the creative appropriation of second-hand clothes also had an important function – to overturn Soviet the ready-made truths some of these garments or accessories symbolised. Elena Khudyakova, for example, appropriated Soviet military and working uniforms such as *vatnik,* a warm jacket used in the Tsarist and Soviet armies as well as in the punitive systems.[2]

2 Vatnik (*Teplushka*) is an element of military ammunition during winter time. Vatnik was made of textile of green colour and had a quilted cotton lining. It was usually put under greatcoat,

Artistic collaboration between Gosha Ostretsov and Timur Novikov resulted in the collection consisting of costumes of Communist invaders and was dedicated to the resettlement of Communism onto other planets. Ostretsov lucidly ridiculed both the ideals of military might of the Soviet army and the idea of world revolution by adding children's toys and plastic baby night pots to military uniforms.

The type of mockery the members of the subcultures developed is considered to be a specific Soviet phenomenon – *stiob,* a type of irony, which is defined by its serious attitude to the ideological symbols of the system (Yurchak 1999, 2006). Svetlana Boym (2001, 154) wrote that stiob 'is the ultimate creation of homo sovieticus and post-sovieticus that allows one to domesticate cultural myths'. It 'uses shocking language to avoid a confrontation with shocking issues', as well as tautology, overstatements and trivia (Boym 2001, 154).

Parading the streets dressed in ridiculous looking outfits was a kind of public intellectual epatage, an aggressive and provocative disempowerment of hegemony of the system through using the semiotic resources available within the Soviet discourse of power. But it was not only the communist ideology itself that was being laughed at and mocked, it was also the submissive loyalty and sincere attitudes to this ideology. Through gaudy hyperbole, clowning and semiotic surplus Soviet tackiness, vulgarity and fetishism were overemphasized. By using the same instruments as the state used in order to manifest its power position, the subcultures challenged and sifted power in the society of late socialism.

According to Michel Foucault, resistance to hegemonic discourses is a natural part of how power is exercised (2002). Where there is power, there is always resistance. He writes that resistance to a certain discourse always occurs within it, with the same words and concepts (Foucault 2002). It is not possible to exercise resistance to a discourse without also being a part of it. Resistance is possible when discourses fight for the creation of meaning at strategically organized resistance points, which can break down positions of power in the dominant discourse and force new groupings (Foucault 2002, 106). In practice it meant an automatic reproduction of the form of the sign (a banner or a military uniform, a night pot, a tank-toy), and placement of the sign into a different context (a dress was made out of this red banner or a uniform and a tank toy was placed on a hat). Hence the absurdness of the whole ideological construction, which might not be apparent in the ordinary context, became visible.

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however it was allowed to wear it without a coat while at home or during studies (Chernov 2011).

This ironic treatment of the re-appropriated symbols of Soviet ideology did not always mean a complete degrading of these inherited signs. It also contained a warm and caring attitude towards them. After all they were a part of the everyday life and it was possible for certain affirmative and naive aspects of Soviet culture to preserve their constructive significance. With time progressing critical attitudes towards the Soviet system transformed into explicit cynicism and negative assessment of many spheres of Soviet life. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the Soviet period became discredited, while the identity of an average Soviet person was distorted by the overwhelming presence of the ugly truths of the past. The new Russian political elites demonstratively rejected the Soviet ideas and tried to get rid of the consequences of the 'Soviet experiment' and to bring the country back to the 'normal' condition. At that:

> What before had been seen as a symbol of 'national pride', now was viewed as 'collective trauma'. Such reformatting demanded changes in the customary practices: not only the emphasis from the 'heroes' (which seized to be heroes) should have been put on the 'victims', but also the perpetrators should have been punished. Such work demanded great resources and was complemented with great risks. The point was not in the fact that the revealing of the 'real' roles of 'heroes', 'perpetrators' and 'victims' in the society, which went through the civil war, is a painful process; but such abrupt change of the implication of a historical event, functioning as a myth, interferes the whole construction of collective identity. It is not that easy to substitute 'national pride' with 'national trauma' (Malinova 2015).

By mocking Soviet symbols such as Pioneer and military uniforms, the members of subcultures who were still active after the demise of the Union not only removed their heroic pathos, but also re-established sincere and warm attitudes to these symbols, which had often been dismissed during perestroika and during the 1990s.

One of the essential aspects of these dress cultures is a distinct relation to Western consumption. The Soviet state failed to eliminate the appeal of Western goods, which in the society of constant deficit of both necessary and luxury sartorial objects acquired a status of sacred – everyone dreamt of possessing American jeans (Pilkington 1994, Roth-Ey 2011, Rybak, 1990). Fashionistas had good contacts on the black market and were able to lay hands on sartorial import, for which they were accused of creating a cult of Western consumption. But instead of simply mimicking the Western fashions the Soviet subcultures created their own unique dress styles by mixing various elements and styles

informed by the cultural and social conditions they lived in. They searched for inspiration everywhere – among the stalls of flee-markets, grandmothers' wardrobes, and garbage piles, hence proving that the sartorial appeal was not restricted to the Western looks, but also included Soviet commodities (Petlura 2012, Morozov 2012).

This mode of treating second-hand objects in order to question the normalised social structures by the Soviet subcultures is comparable with the cut 'n' mix, bricolage attitude of Western punk as analysed not least by Dick Hebdige (1979). If one is to follow Hebdige's logic, all subcultures should undertake the same path: starting as styles challenging dominant ideology-(ies), hegemony-(ies) and social normalization(s) through its symbolic forms of resistance, they later become commodified by eventual entrepreneurs to decline later; the Soviet subcultures, or at least some of their practices once subversive, rebellious, and radical, should at some point have become contained and served the mainstream ideology-(ies). It seems that this was to a certain extend the trajectory many Soviet subcultures followed.

The impulsive breakout of subculture fashion started to fade out sometime around 1995, even though the Tishinka flee-market in Moscow, the main threshold of this culture, was still alive (Baster on-line). There were many reasons for this decline. First, around the same time the Western formats of glossy magazines, such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Vogue*, introduced Western brands in Russia. Second, subculture designs were not fit for the tough economic rules of the 1990s, let alone to be adopted by large-scale mass production (which was in deep depression by 1998 and still struggling to recover by 2017). Third, when it became possible, some of the designers and artists emigrated to the West and continued their career as professional designers. Meanwhile, some of them left the subculture scene for personal reasons. However, it would be wrong to say that such conceptual artistic practices died for good. Artist Alexander Petlura, for example, continued working with the recycling of second hand clothes and was and still is the most prominent figure in Moscow with his massive collection of historical dress, which he has exhibited in his explorative and provoking performances and installations.

One can say for sure that at least the mocking of Soviet ideals combined with sincere attitudes to it was picked up by designer fashion.

The Commercial *Stiob* and the Use of the Soviet Heritage

In the 2000s some the subcultures were absorbed by the growing commercial sector of design, which seized the opportunity and appropriated ironic use of

the Soviet symbols. Almost simultaneously several designers and artists introduced collections where conceptual art and design were blended in a deliberate provocative way. Designers such as Olga Soldatova (fashion design and jewellery), Katia Bochavar (brand MUCH2MUCH, jewellery), Denis Simachev (fashion design), Maxim Chernitsov (fashion design) created thought-provoking collections by producing rich and high connotative designs. In 2005, Chernitsov presented his collection Homocosmodromo, in which he explored the theme of space travel using images of Iurii Gagarin and the Soviet space dogs. In his subsequent work he elaborated more on the Russian theme, taking a profound philosophical approach to it (Chernitsov 2012). One example is the Fall – Winter 2010/2011 collection, *Russkii Dukh* ('Russian spirit'), where the designer investigates in rather poignant form the appearances of Russian spirituality.

Starting from 2003 designer Denis Simachev has presented several collections where he scrutinized the Soviet theme among others. He used the Olympic symbols to signify the period of the 1980s, which framed the happy undertones of the collection – the celebration of youth and light-hearted moments of unlimited daydreaming. Olga Soldatova and Katya Bochavar (who are more artists than strictly speaking fashion designers) created several collections of accessories and jewellery, where they played with such easily recognisable Soviet symbols as the red star, images of Vladimir Lenin, animated films characters, and the symbol of the Soviet industrial pride – airplanes. Compared to Denis Simachev and Maxim Chernitsov they also worked with recycled materials. Katia Bochavar, for example, used pioneer pins, badges with the image of Vladimir Lenin, the red star as well as the old Soviet medals, which she combined with brooches in form of insects (collections: Lenin as a superhero, Russian Phoenix).

What unites these brands is their positioning as shocking and insightful countercultural observers with key objections both to capitalist consumer culture and Soviet ideology – some kind of nihilistic troublemakers that invited smart decoders into the realm of irony and *stiob.* The descriptions on the designers' websites (such as MUCH2MUCH and Denis Simachev) stated that the brands promoted irony, provocation, intelligence and for Denis Simachev – sex appeal. For example, the name of the brand MUCH2MUCH already signifies hyperbola and exaggeration. The description in the designer blog states:

> MUCH2MUCH marries two fields: jewelry design and conceptual art, in a deliberate, provocative way. It not only recycles and combines various materials and objects to create each individual piece but, most importantly, it also recycles and combines ideas relative to these materials in

> order to bring about entirely new ones. Each piece tells a story. Each is a part of a larger narrative that is intrinsic to modern life. Many of my pieces weave together stories of different cultures, aesthetics, and lifestyles and, as a result, become metaphors of the modern world itself: a delicate balance of seemingly incompatible notions that nonetheless strive for harmony. I feel that this creates a deeper appreciation of the role of art in maintaining this fragile balance (MUCH2MUCH, blog).

The similar could be also said about the fashion brand of Denis Simachev, who uses an inverted logo and both Cyrillic and Latin letters to emphasize the brand's special outlook on life. The description reads: 'the brand looks at things from an extraordinary point of view, doubts common values and brings out hidden facts' (Denis Simachev, official website).

Through the application of the Soviet animated films characters (such as Cheburashka, Volk and Zaiats), the 1980's Olympic mascot, and the Soviet comedy characters, the designer revealed exaggerated sentimentality associated with these Soviet cultural icons both in the past and today. At the same time the constant reproduction of these cultural icons of the Soviet childhood made them almost obsolete – on the one side, their reuse in this new fashion context functions as a stimulus for flashback memories which remind people about positive moments of their lives, on the other hand this repetition risks leaving an empty form, a simulacrum, which is used for a creating a momentary emotional connection between the customer of the brand and the past. The past and especially childhood has become a treasure trove of new business ideas. Being packaged in an attractive way (and it is very difficult to package childhood and Soviet comedy icons in a non-attractive way) and being easily digestible and aesthetically pleasing, it becomes a very successful marketing and advertising tool, especially among young adults. In the culture where childhood and sincerity are the most usable elements for attracting any sort of attention, playing with childhood memories and sentiments is one of the best selling strategies. At the same time, striving for a unique identity, young people are looking back into the past to find styles that suit them and would make them distinguishable in the crowds of the mainstream. Having a t-shirt with your favourite animated film character simultaneously marks a belonging to a specific generation, in this case the last generation of the Soviet children (born approximately between 1980 and 1991), a positive attitude towards one's past, and also self-reflexive ironic attitude.

What is important to keep in mind when it comes to the analysis of these brands and Denis Simachev in particular, is that the recycling of the easily recognisable Soviet symbols (or even objects as in the case with the brand

MUCH2MUCH) does not signal nostalgia for the Soviet period, in a sense of the longing for the time of the past and willing to restore it. It is a branding strategy and a marketing strategy, which uses positive emotions to sell a product. It does not mean that there is no commercial nostalgia, where the past is being commodified and itself becomes a product one can sell and buy. It is definitely the case, and the designers are also aware of that, as well as they are aware of the nostalgia debates. They consciously deny any political nostalgia for the Soviet past, pointing out that their contribution is in the ironic attitude both to the past and to the present. So, despite of the use of the Soviet past being an important element in Russian fashion in the mid-2000s, it is the attitude with which this past is being used in fashion design that I find the most significant. Denis Simachev says: 'It is widely accepted to knit one's brows and say, 'Yes, it was very difficult, it was a terrible period in the history of our country'. Of course one can moan about it, but one can also smile and fight everything bad that happened with humour' (Simachev 2013). What Denis Simachev sells is an ironic attitude to the past, the present and the future, in other words, it is the ironic stand towards the idea of time, change and age. He says: 'I observe it all from a distance and pick funny moments. I try to transplant all these funny moments onto clothing, or some event or lifestyle, in order to sell it. A person does not buy something Soviet, but he or she buys an emotion' (Simachev 2013).

There is nothing random in the mocking and re-examination of the past by these designers. To include irony does not necessarily mean to exclude seriousness and purpose of this creative production. The description to Katia Bochavar's collection states:

> Lenin was our grandfather, a kind, yet austere god. A childhood photograph of my father shows him looking just like the Baby Lenin on the Oktyabrenok badges – the first regalia of a young Communist. This same badge would be pinned on the chest of every seven-year-old during the first days of September. I myself was officially made a Pioneer at the Lenin Museum on Red Square. They placed a red tie around my neck and pinned the badge of a young Leninist closer to the heart, before leading us to the Mausoleum. When I was a teenager, I joined the Komsomol. On this badge, our Vladimir Ilyich was portrayed striding boldly forward, offering himself as an open target for the tide of events rushing by. 'Lenin as a Superhero' is a mocking cry, addressed to our own past: 'Nobody is afraid of you anymore, you Asian tyrant, medieval princeling, dried dummy…' We are the last ones who keep you close to our hearts (Lenin as a superhero, Bochavar, official website).

Remembering is central to the linking of the past with the lived: through personal memories about Vladimir Lenin, the designer enters collective childhood memories of the whole generation of Soviet children pointing out that they are 'the last ones' who have direct memories of this figure and the Soviet period as a whole. The description of the collection thus combines a sincere memory about one's past and a mocking attitude to it, which liberates from the tyranny of Soviet ideological hegemony.

The Soviet past is present in the memories of the designers and has a material form not only in the objects they operate with (pins with Lenin's head), but also in the modern urban palimpsest. One cannot avoid a direct confrontation with the layers of history, which is present in the everyday life – architecture, interior design and in people's apartment's, and even in people's behaviors and attitudes. Art director of the Denis Simachev brand Ivan Makarov suggests that material markers (monuments, buildings, interiors etc.) and emotional structures (behavioural and emotional characteristics of homo sovieticus) are present on many different levels in contemporary Russian society and that it was impossible to overlook them while working on the collections because fashion, as he believes, is a mirror of whatever happens in society (Makarov 2013). One did not have to be nostalgic for the Soviet times since the Soviet 'aura' has never disappeared from the fabric of day-to-day life (on palimpsest see Oushakine 2009). Hence the designers are not interested in copying or reviving this past. They want to come in contact with the positive aspects of the immediate past and present and then put them in question.

The designs are not depthless. It is not a trivial kitsch as some might think. According to Thomas Kulka (1996), for a cultural form to be certified as kitsch: the subject matter in question has to be emotionally charged; it has to be immediately identifiable; and it should reinforce our basic belief and sentiments, rather than subject them for critical examination. A closer look at the garments of these designers suggests that kitsch is appropriated in order to mock. One of the best examples is the portraits of Vladimir Putin in the flowery frame or Roman Abramovitch on the t-shirts (Denis Simachev brand). Hence these kitschy mocking designs produce a doubt about the brands' belief in their own apparent messages. In these cases, its application diverges from Kulka's definition as it destabilizes the prospect of flawlessness by insinuating its concealed motives. These brands hint at something lying underneath the kitschy recycling of Soviet symbols and icons – they open up rather than close down enquiry. What they bring up for discussion is an inherent presence of the Soviet in the culture and identity of modern Russia – the fact that Vladimir Putin appeared on the t-shirt is not random, but it rather points out to the emergence of a new cult of personality.

Another aspect where this analysis goes against Kulka's model, is when it comes to the working together of kitsch and irony. Kulka writes that 'one of the salient features of kitsch is that it is always univocal, unambiguous, and deadly serious. It is this seriousness that makes kitsch so pathetic. And it is often its pathos that makes kitsch ridiculous ... irony is incompatible with kitsch' (Kulka 1996, 111). In these cases we see the opposite – kitsch and irony come together. It becomes especially visible in the designs of Katia Bochavar and Denis Simachev who, I would say, produce *kitschified* parodies of kitsch, some sort of parody of kitsch in a kitschy manner, where kitsch is the serious attitude to the Soviet ideology, Soviet kitsch and consumer culture all together.

The designers' use of the Soviet past cannot be reduced to 'aesthetic cannibalization' (Jameson 1991). Of course, it cannot offer what Frederic Jameson (1991) calls 'genuine historicity' – 'social, historical and existential present and the past as 'referent'' as 'ultimate objects'. But the designers' deliberate refusal to do so cannot be read as naïve. What they do in reality is to question the very possibility of any system, including the communist and the capitalist one, any ideology and any 'totalizing' history. These designs are doubly ironic (there is a double coding) – they are ironic both of the Soviet past and the capitalist present. They are ironic towards the system and the aesthetics of Soviet kitsch, but they are also ironic about the capitalist market logic, that everything can be bought and sold. Moreover, they also take an ironic stand towards themselves as being a part of the both systems (being born and raised in the Soviet period and now capitalizing on their own past). It is self-reflexive ironic introversion suggested by looking back to the past. It reveals the social implication of this design – *the Soviet is still within us and we still take it seriously. We have not learnt to see it clearly by distancing ourselves from it*. Drawing on Foucault's theory of power and discourse, one can suggest that in this particular case the designers use instruments of both systems in order to reveal the working of their ideologies. In this process the ironic echoing of the past marks both continuity and change. It uses its historical memory to signal that this kind of self-reflexive discourse is always bound to social discourse. In this case, the *stiob* of the designers became a mode of self-reflexivity because its incorporation of the past into its very structures points to the ideological context in a more obvious manner than other forms of humor. *Stiob* allows speaking to a social discourse by being within it, but without being totally recuperated by it.

One could also argue that this ironic attitude towards the Soviet symbols was reached through the application of a semiotic device called 'camp'. Susan Sontag suggests that 'the essence of camp is the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration' (Sontag 1964, 53). Camp 'inserts the signifier into quotation marks, theatricalizing it at the expense of the signified' (Christian 2001, 118). What is

most significant about camp is that it is also double-coded both as a clever protest against nostalgia for the Soviet past and as a reinforcement of nostalgia for the Soviet – simultaneously subversive and reactionary. Camp does not so much ''subvert' or displace the dominant code as it juxtaposes the latter with the 'perverse' code, rendering the sign available to a doubled interpretation [&] it converts the sign into a lure. Camp creates an oscillation between discursive codes (Christian 2001, 137). Hence, camp can also be applied as an analytical category, because it allows for double-talk and ironic attitude to the subject of inquiry.

Denis Simachev claimed exclusivity in introducing an ironic attitude towards the Soviet past: 'In regard to the references to the USSR, I should say that no one ever played with this type of humour. No one ever looked at it with such *stiob*' (Simachev 2013). As I have pointed out in the previous section, however, *stiob* had been used by the members of subcultures as a strategy in their disempowering of the Soviet system, so that the designer was actually following a trail that had already been blazed. Let alone he and the other designers active in this period were not the only ones who took an ironic stand towards the past. However, those who followed them on this creative trail had used irony in a different manner.

Stiob 'Kremlin Style' and the Political Uses of the Past

During Vladimir Putin presidency, fashion became a platform for visual propaganda. Kremlin-friendly fashion brands such as Antonina Shapovalova and PUTINVERSTEHER promoted state ideology by producing designs for the loyal youth movements.

As a response to the Ukrainian Orange revolution of 2004 *Obscherossiyskaya obschestvennaya organizatsiya sodeystviya razvitiyu suverennoy demokratii* (*OOO SRSD*) *molodezhnoe dvizhenie Nashi* (All-of-Russia Civil Organization for the Promotion and Development of Sovereign Democracy Youth Movement Nashi) was officially launched by the politicians Boris and Vasilii Yakimenko in 2005 (Shevchuk, Kamishev 2005). Nashi claimed to be an anti-fascist organization (subsuming communists and liberals under the term 'fascists') supporting President Vladimir Putin in his battle against the oligarchs (Rosbalt 2005). After a number of scandals where the commissars of Nashi were involved, it became evident that the project had to be rebranded or closed down. In 2012 its leader Vasilii Yakimenko declared that the history of the movement in its existing form had ended, and a new political party would be founded to succeed it. In 2013 it was decided to develop smaller projects with clear objectives aimed

at promoting patriotism under the umbrella organization *Vserossiiskoe Soobshchestvo Molodezhi* ('All-Russian Youth Association') (Atwal 2009, 2012).

After the Moscow streets protests caused by election fraud during the parliamentary elections in 2011 it became clear to the advocates of Kremlin's political line that youth politics should be reorganized and the means of persuasion of young people should be changed, as the street politics applied by Nashi youth movement were no longer effective. At the same time, the criminal prosecution of the activists after the Bolotnaia Square demonstration on the 6th of May 2012 in Moscow had a cooling down effect on the mass protest movement in Russia. As a result the state has created another youth organisation – *Set'* (Network), which started to promote Russian cultural values as defined by the state and its ideologists. Set' became a response to the fastly spreading ideas of liberal democracy and its ideas of civic engagement in Russia by providing an alternative formed around neoconservative ideas, orthodoxy, and support for the president. Instead of focusing on the mobilization of loyal crowds for demonstrations and street protests, the Kremlin turned towards cultural and patriotic upbringing of young people. This is how one of the members of the new movement Set' explains the need of reformation of the youth politics in Russia: 'We have understood that there is nothing to be done on the streets as we have won there, but there should be something new done in youth politics' (quoted in Tumanov and Surnacheva 2014).

Both Nashi and Set' have their own in-house designers, some kind of promoters of the ideologies the organisations advance. Antonina Shapovalova, one of the leaders of pro-Kremlin youth movement Nashi, became the very first designer to promote patriotic glamour, which in 2015 reached its zenith (Feldman 2015a). Shapovalova provided visual support of several campaigns calling for action to join the army and increase birth rates.[3] The strength of this fashion propaganda was indeed in the medium used to disseminate political messages: fashion often seems to be a non-threatening field and hence functions well to disarm and take people off-guard.

In 2010 Antonina Shapovalova made a collection which was inspired by a military theme – the Collection Fall/Winter 2010-2011, or otherwise called Pobeda # 22. The collection consisted of men's and women's wear – dresses, bodices and skirts, trousers and jackets adorned with chains, metal studs and rivets, sequins, rough edges, geometric shapes and blackened gold. Erotic glamorization was emphasized with the means of blood-color make-up that covered the naked legs of the female models. The collection also included

3 For more about campaigns promoting nativity see the chapter by Rakhimova-Sommers in this volume.

t-shirts with various 'patriotic' prints, which is some sort of a trademark of the Shapovalova brand. They were decorated with the number 65 (pointing out to the 65th anniversary of the Great Victory), as well as with aphoristic phrases calling for contributions to the demographic picture of the country with the slogans: 'Mating is pleasant and helpful!' *Razmnozhat'sia priiatno i polezno*! and mocking those who ditch military service.

Shapovalova's designs called for patriotic devotion to Russia in the form of personal involvement in supporting the state's decisions and actions, which she calls 'an active civic position' (Shapovalova 2013). By amalgamating patriotic action with creative practice she defined the role of cultural industries in the politics of the state as supportive and propagandistic. By looking for inspiration for her collections in the past, she also introduced a specific take on history, which is deprived both of the negative reminiscences and direct memories of the Soviet past. She operates with what Marianne Hirsh (2008) calls *post-memories,* i.e. the second and third generation's memories about historical events that they have never experienced personally but rather through media and popular culture. Shapovalova's perception of the Soviet past is influenced by the mainstream media and political discourses, especially the discourses on WWII and the indisputable heroic role of the Red Army in the liberation of Europe. Hence it comes with little surprise that the visual language of Shapovalova's patriotism aimed at strengthening and directing the passions of young people towards personal sacrifices for the state and the country.

I would argue that Shapovalova's use both of history as an inspirational material and of irony and stiob as tools for unpacking the past and present and constructing Russian identity is the opposite of what the members of the subcultures did in the 1980s. Instead of questioning military power and stagnant power hierarchies, she glorifies the country's military might and reinforces Putin's 'power vertical' through her fashion design. In Shapovalova's collection, she turns to the main uniting event – the Great Patriotic War and the Victory Day, hence intensifying the cult of the war and its centralizing role in the reconstruction of national identity in Russia. While doing so she redirects attention towards the sincerity of sacrifice in a military battle and its heroic nature. She says:

> It so happens that lately we perceive the celebration of Victory too formally. For 65 years, an emotional message became weak and is broadcasted more out of inertia, and not from the heart. In this collection, I want to focus on the personal attitude to victory, think about the place of heroism in the context of the everyday. (Shapovalova, official website)

Shapovalova frequently invokes sincerity as an important value which Russians have lost, but should have among their principal virtues. By excavating memories of the Great Patriotic War, Shapovalova indirectly looks back on and romanticises Soviet times by searching for sincerity there. This sincerity had two related but distinct meanings: as a way to explore life in the past (in this case, the Soviet past), and as an intrinsic characteristic of that life itself: 'In both these senses, sincerity is further related to a set of other terms: idealism, romanticism, humanism, purity, friendship, comradeship, self-sacrifice, etc.' (Yurchak 2008, 257). Shapovalova claims sincerity towards the past, while in fact she is one of those who contributes to the Kremlin's discursive and ritualistic officialdom.

However, it is difficult to catch her on being insincere – any critic and accusations of being a political project the designer fights back by presenting her brand as *stiob*. She called it a 'provocation with a smile', and disarmed anyone who tried to make her responsible for promoting official propaganda, even though it is clear that Antonina Shapovalova acted as a mouthpiece for many of Nashi's projects. While the subculture used *stiob* as an effective strategy to mock the Soviet regime, in a pro-state movement that promotes the official, patriotic line, *stiob* becomes a powerful tool for disempowerment of the propaganda's target audiences. The designer not only admits that her designs are propagandistic, but overidentifies with the propaganda and ridicules it. By making the viewer believe that her work is just a harmless joke, the designer induces the viewer or consumer to let his or her guard down and assume that it is not propaganda. Shapovalova's second step is to claim that her collections are 'provocative' and to overidentify with provocative action. The word 'provocative' is usually understood as a negative attribute, indicating an action committed to cause a strong reaction by creating a difficult situation or consequences for the one being provoked. However, in this case provocation is seen as a positive act directed towards mobilizing young people to be more active in the life of the country. However, this mobilization is supposed to be ideologically 'correct' – activities should fall within the ideological guidelines laid out by the youth movement and the ruling party. By claiming that her designs are provocative, the designer safeguards herself from criticism by announcing that everything she says and does is only a joke, although with a grain of truth in it: 'Every print is a joke, and, as we know, there is a part of truth in every joke!' (Shapovalova 2013).

Patriotic fashion has not stopped with Shapovalova but intensified with the annexation of Crimea. The year 2014 was rich on patriotic creativity in Russia advancing 'patriotic fashion'. Patriotic frenzy, which overwhelmed Russian society in connection with the Crimean annexation and the feeling of empathy

for people living in Donbas region in Eastern Ukraine, further materialized in dress culture. Internet shops offered a variety of t-shirts with encouraging prints such as 'Russia', 'I am Russian', 'Crimea is ours', 'Polite people' etc. The youth organisation Set' staged an 'ironic clothes exchange campaigns' in several cities in Russia. People could get 'patriotic' t-shirts in exchange for clothes of 'foreign' fashion brands. Designers working for and together with Set' mediated political messages through cultural and artistic practices. Set's launched several initiatives such as competitions for the best design to stimulate young artists and fashion designers to produce patriotic designs that would boost moral spirit and reflect Russian identity. Young Ukrainian Anna Kreydenko even became the own in-house designer of Set' and soon after debuting with her first collection already showcased it at the fashion show *Novyi Russkii* ('The New Russian') organized by Set' in Sevastopol, Crimea, in May 2014.

Kreydenko is part of the designer collective PUTINVERSTEHER, which provides another exiting example of appropriation of *stiob*. The name of the brand is itself an ironic appropriation of the German term Putin-versteher, the 'prominent German Putin-Empathizers (from Versteher or, literally 'understander' in German)' who 'serve as Putin's first line of defense against European sanctions for the Anschluss of Crimea' (Gregory 2014). The brand overidentifies with those who support Russia and Putin's politics, turns the negative connotation of the word around and makes it its strength by pointing out to the 'patriotic' aspect of it. The slogan says: 'By wearing the clothes by PUTINVERSTEHER you not only support Putin, you challenge the whole world with its corporations, revolutions, humanitarian bombing, double standards and beardy women' (official Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/Putinversteher-923254937704512/>). While the description of the brand refers to such sensitive issues as gay marriage and non-governmental organizations, the imagery of the brand consists of military symbols combined with romantic outfits, which visually support the movement's manifesto which proclaims its role in defending 'traditional family values', Russian culture and history, the legacy of the Great Patriotic War, and support for the president of the Russian Federation.

This type of irony is allowed and approved within the frames of the Kremlin's political discourse. Shapovalova's case, together with Katya Dobryakova and Alexander Konasov, AnyaVanya and PUTINVESTEHER makes a viewer believe that 'freedom of artistic expression' is allowed in Russia. They play the role of 'agent provocateur' by openly mocking even the president of the country. Antonina Shapovalova's underwear with slogans like 'PUTin the Best' or *Volodia, ia s Toboi* (Volodia, I am with you) as well as t-shirts and sweaters of PUTINVERSTEHER with images of Putin and other prominent Russian politicians are in reality a mockery of those who believe in the possibility of criti-

cism directed towards the political elites of Russia. In fact, mockery and criticism are possible only if they are allowed and sponsored by the state itself.

Even their revoking of the military thematic and the use of war imagery rests within the boundaries of the limited criticism. It promotes heroic pathos, not calls for reflection on war atrocities or criticism towards the actions of the Red Army in Europe. The duality of these designs is also well illustrated through the combination of the evening and cocktail garments with propaganda t-shirts with catchy slogans, which mock European democracy and values, European sanctions against Russian politicians and even Turkey.[4] It promises the masses access to wealth and power of elites through sacrifice and devotion, and the theme of war serves this purpose well. Certainly, warfare cannot be attractive, so the designers turn war into a game and a glamourous event, where blood becomes an accessory and tragedy of the war is in the past. The imagery of the catwalks, with fleeting dresses in the women's line, creates a myth of a distant past and projects it into an alternative present or future where wars are, or will be, victorious and death impossible.[5] Their designs focus dramatically not only on the tantalising promises of a utopian future, but more importantly on the utopian version of the past and present.

Just like many artists and designers opened up in the past to revolutionary ideas and propaganda, this new generation of designers responded to the call to work towards the country's restoration after 'the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century' and the supposed anarchy of the 1990s.

Concluding Remarks

The fashion brands presented in the last section of this chapter illustrate a new turn in Russian fashion culture and the Kremlin's youth politics: fashion becomes an active propaganda tool that mediates the state politics and ideology. The Kremlin designers show their collections during the official festivities and have exclusive entrance to the most visited cultural platforms. This is a new type of fashion, which is orientated to ideologically indoctrinate masses with

4 On November 24, 2015 a Russian military plane was taken down by Turkish military forces. This incident caused a diplomatic crisis between Russia and Turkey and resulted in viral anti-Turkish campaign in Russia. Several 'patriotic designers' such as Alexander Konosov (famous for his patriotic prints, such as 'They are patriots, and you?') and Katya Bodryakova announced a production of 'patriotic' t-shirts to support Russia's sanctions towards Turkey. See more at: <http://rusnovosti.ru/posts/399148>, accessed February 21, 2018.

5 For more examples of the futuristic imagery and its function in the Russian contemporary culture see the chapter by Majsova in this volume.

the means of visual propaganda. At the same time, the Kremlin harvests 'ideologically correct' commercial fashion brands and benefits from their 'right' patriotism, which is promoted through 'post-popular' (Konosov), non-banal (Dobriakova) ironic designs. The ironic language and immediacy of the imagery of these brands make a direct appeal to an emotional rather than intellectual response. Targeting predominantly young people, these fashion designs intensify myths about World War II and facilitate the mobilisation of the state ideology in which the authority of the present dictates a certain presentation of the past. In contrast to the second-hand clothes found at flea markets stalls (and used by artists such as Alexander Petlura, who believed that these garments breathe history and allow us to become part of history by wearing them, or by reenactment groups whose members believe that wearing the original garments stimulates and enhances the experience of the events by materialising them), modern design creates not a connection with history, but the illusion of such a connection. As new fashion products, which do not transmiss a conscious memory of former users and has none of the strangeness of old clothes, which unavoidably exists in the case of vintage dress and deepens the gap between the past and the present, these designs have the potential to appeal to mainstream customers. The strangeness of the past also is minimised by the removal of all negative memories, while only positive emotions are sold for consumption. In their toolboxes irony and stiob become instruments for the re-establishment of state hegemony through disempowerment and confusion of the consumer. At the same time they have another alluring duality: they simultaneously lay claim to historicity and deny that they do so by hiding behind a notion of fashion as something superficial. In this way fashion becomes a perfect weapon of manipulation: it disarms its viewer and then mediates its message still more effectively than any pamphlet or speech would have done.

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CHAPTER 9

Humour as a Mode of Hegemonic Control: Comic Representations of Belarusian and Ukrainian Leaders in Official Russian Media

Alena Minchenia, Barbara Törnquist-Plewa and Yuliya Yurchuk

Introduction

The existing multidisciplinary scholarship on political humour widely agrees about the discursive power of jokes. The recurrent patterns of joking (who is laughing at whom and why) reflect and create power structures (Purdie 1993, 129; Attardo 2014). Inspired by this insight, we want to inquire and reflect on the function, dynamics, and social effects of political humour in framing and conveying the political imagination in a particular political context – relations between Russia and its two neighbours, Belarus and Ukraine. Thus, in the following, we will examine the content of a selected number of Russian political jokes and humorous cartoons dealing with Belarusian and Ukrainian leaders and ask how Russian-Belarusian and Russian-Ukrainian relationships and Russia's self-perception feature in these representations. The aim is to explore what geopolitical ideas define the content of these jokes. We find this discussion more than timely in the context of the strengthening of imperialist tendencies in the region of Eastern Europe as expressed by the Russian annexation of Crimea and the war in Ukraine.

Belarus and Ukraine have a lot in common, but still differ in many respects, which leads us to inquire about the similarities and differences in representations of these two countries in Russian satirical programmes. Both became independent states as late as 1991 in connection to the fall of the Soviet Union and are situated in a geopolitically contested scene, between Russia to the east and the EU and NATO to the west. Both countries have a long history of political, economic, and cultural dependency on Russia. Throughout the 19th and almost the whole of the 20th centuries, Belarusian territory and most of Ukraine belonged first to the Russian and later to the Soviet empires. Belarus and Ukraine are Slavic-speaking and, though they have their own national languages, the Russian language holds a strong position and is recognized as official in Belarus. Moreover, Russian media are widely accessible in both Belarus and Ukraine, and therefore their inhabitants are exposed to messages coming

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from Moscow. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, the two countries took quite different tracks in relation to Russia. While Ukraine underwent changes of government in its pursuit of democracy that were often turbulent, and oscillated between the EU and Russia, Belarus chiefly remained under the rule of one president and its economic dependence on the Russian Federation increased.

The Belarusian government has long pursued the policy of close cooperation with Russia, which is discursively framed in terms of familial intimacy between the two countries and as the enactment of their brotherly ties. The Russian government financially supports Belarusian authority, providing credits and low prices for natural gas and oil (e.g. Ioffe 2008). At the same time, since 2015 Belarus has searched for support in Europe. The circumstances that lead to this are twofold. On the one hand, in 2015 the EU first suspended and then, in February 2016, lifted sanctions against Belarusian officials, which had been introduced in 2010 because of the violent suppression of the peaceful protests against fraud in the presidential election. On the other hand, the Russian authorities, confronted with the economy suffering from the restrictive European measures and low oil prices, are not willing to finance Lukashenka's system without real concessions on important issues (e.g. the placement of a Russian military airbase in Belarus, recognition of the Republic of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and support of Russian politics in relation to Ukraine). Going in either direction – turning towards Europe or continuing negotiations with Russia – can endanger Lukashenka's personal power and, therefore, is considered dangerous. This dubious setting defines the current geopolitical orientation of Belarus.

The case of Ukraine seems to be different given the openly hostile relationship between Russia and Ukraine since 2014 when the Russian Federation annexed Crimea and supported separatists in Eastern Ukraine that led to the long-term military conflict in the country (Grant 2015; Wilson 2014). The war shapes its own dynamic in terms of power relations. Therefore, in order to make the cases taken up here more comparable, we decided that it would be of particular interest to see how Ukraine was presented in the Russian satirical media preceding the open hostility between the countries and in media aiming at entertainment rather than political analysis. Thus, the analysed data refer to the time when Russia and Ukraine had a complex relationship oscillating between the coolness of antipathy and the warmth of friendship. A cool, antagonistic relationship was characteristic of the period when Viktor Iushchenko was the president of Ukraine. His aims of closer integration with NATO and the EU were treated as a betrayal of Russian interests. A return to a friendly Russian-Ukrainian relationship happened chiefly when Viktor Ianukovych

became president in 2010, as he supported closer cooperation with the Russian Federation.

In what follows, we will attempt to show that popular cultural products, in the form of humour, can shed light on some lesser noticed aspects of Belarusian-Russian and Ukrainian-Russian relations. They can disclose the geopolitical imagination that underlies politics and lay bare the deeper cultural subtext of power relations between political players.

Studying Humour: Presenting Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Data

Our argument about the entanglement of geopolitical ideas based on power relations and humorous representations originates in the recent theoretical development in the field of geopolitics. Since the 1990s, there has been a shift from the classical understanding of geopolitics as focusing on states and official policy-makers to a broader perspective that asks for the incorporation of mundane phenomena, such as popular culture, as a site for analysing knowledge (re)production, and (re)enactment of international relations and political inequalities (Dittmer and Gray 2010; Dittmer and Dodds 2008; Sharp 1996). As Dittmer and Gray put it, "[c]entral to the development of critical geopolitics has been the recognition of geopolitics as something everyday that occurs outside of academic and policymaking discourse; this form of geopolitical discourse has been termed 'popular geopolitics'" (2010, 1664). The shift towards popular geopolitics was based on the rethinking of a narrow understanding of power and political agency. Engaging with the Foucauldian conceptualization of power as multiple and diffused, the scholarship on popular geopolitics approaches different cultural phenomena (e.g. cinema, literature, television, magazines, etc.) as mobilizing and enacting politics (Dittmer and Dodds 2008; Sharp 1996). From this perspective, everyday culture is saturated with interpretation of geographical entities on different scales (local, national, transnational) in political terms, such as the loci of power vs. margins and peripheries, sources of threat or danger vs. places of safety, or borders as divisions vs. territories of alliances.

Within this framework separate attempts have been made to define humour as a revealing and relevant object for geopolitical analysis (Ridanpää 2009; Purcell, Brown and Gokmen, 2010; Dodds and Kirby 2013). For example, for his analysis Juha Ridanpää takes the case of the reception of the Muhammad cartoon controversy in Finland. What is important for us is that the author not only concentrates on the Othering of Muslims and the inequality constructed

through these representations, but, by looking at the resulting discussions on the issue of comic images of the Other, he analyses a specificity of Finnish society (Ridanpää 2009). This way of asking questions and approaching humorous representations, which relies on the classic postcolonial critique that the Other implies a particular construction of the Self (Said 1978, Gandhi 1998, Harper 2002), is also at the heart of this paper.

Next, we would like to present some foundational ideas about humour and political humour in particular. The philosophical understanding of humour connected to the writings of Aristotle, Kant, and Kierkegaard highlights incongruity as its main feature. Humour is seen as "the enjoyment of incongruity" (Tsakona and Popa 2011, 4; also see Morreall 1987; Attardo 2014). This understanding became the foundation for more recent research done in the field. Employing this perspective, Tsakona and Popa propose to conceptualize political humour as "a communicative resource spotting, highlighting, and attacking incongruities originating in political discourse and action" (Tsakona and Popa 2011, 6). At the same time, Billig adds another criterion, besides incongruity, to define humour. He suggests that humour is always embedded into the system of social hierarchies (2005). This in turn brings us to the issue of power.

Another line of theoretical discussion that sets the background for the following analysis is connected to conflicting interpretations of humour as, on the one hand, being subversive and challenging the power of the normative, and, on the other, humour as supporting and strengthening the existing social order (e.g. Klumbyte 2011; Paletz 1990; Tsakona and Popa 2011; Weaver 2010). There is substantial empirical support for both of these two positions in existing scholarship. For example, research on a Lithuanian Soviet satirical magazine (Klumbite 2011), the humorous actions of the Serbian Otpor movement (Sorensen 2008), or the emotions linked to protests in Central Europe in the 1980s and 90s (Flam 2004) demonstrates how humour serves as a tool for diminishing power and challenging its omnipresent character.

At the same time, there is a substantial amount of research revealing the other aspect of humour, namely that it supports and reproduces the dominant order (e.g. Gouin 2004; Pearce and Hajizada 2014; Tsakona and Popa 2011). For instance, Krikman and Laineste (2009) show that jokes and anecdotes in different (post)socialist countries function as part of the existing socio-political system and Weather (2011) and Perez (2016) reveal that antiracist, anti-Muslim, and anti-Semic jokes become a mechanism ensuring stability of social inclusion/exclusion.[1] Moreover, humour is directly employed by powerful agents of

1 For irony and humour in the service of the existing power system, also see the chapter by Ekaterina Kalinina in this book.

different scale (from individual to official media and state representatives) to maintain and reproduce systemic domination. For example, Pearce and Hajizada (2014) show that humour, being recognized as a tool appealing and accessible to a wide audience, is used by the official regime in Azerbaijan to discredit its opponents. Research dealing with racism and islamophobia compiles an archive of cases that explicates how asymmetries between different geopolitical regions and white Western privileges are preserved in humour (e.g., Cotter 2014, Hervik 2018, Malmqvist 2015, Weather 2011). After ten years Hervik (2018) refers back to the so-called Muhammad cartoons controversies to show how hegemonic imagination of race, religion, and space already heavily criticized in 2005 is easily evoked and employed in perceptions of the "Copenhagen Shooting" and discourses on terrorism in 2015.

Furthermore, the examples presented above point to the tendency, observed among others by Tsakona and Popa (2011, 7), that humour communicated through official media channels mostly does not intend to bring about political changes, but rather preserve the status quo.[2] This idea is especially instructive for the analysis of humour in the context of state-controlled media, which is the case in our study. In the following, we will deal with humour produced by the major Russian TV channel *Pervyi kanal* that serves the needs of Russian political elites. Therefore, we see the analysed jokes and cartoons as humour produced from a position of power and a way of translating the Russian elites' mainstream perception of Russian-Belarussian and Russian-Ukrainian relationships and Belarusian and Ukrainian leaders into a popular form.

Our sample of humorous representations was constructed based on the following criteria. We selected video clips: (1) produced by the Russian TV channel *Pervyi kanal*; (2) that are fragments of entertaining and humorous TV-programmes; (3) in all which satire and mockery are directed at Belarusian and Ukrainian political leaders, namely Aliaxandr Lukashenka (among the Belarusian political figures), and Iulia Tymoshenko, Arseniy Iatseniuk, Viktor Ianukovych, and Viktor Iushchenko (among the Ukrainian politicians). We analysed 31 cartoons from the project *"Mul'tlichnosti"* (CartoonPersonalities) and 11

2 This does not mean that the humour transmitted by the unofficial media is generally subversive. For example, Miazhevich (2015) and Minchenia (2016) show the contrary to the established perception, on-line humour has a limited potential to counter the hegemonic state order for a number of reasons. As Miazhevich shows, Ukrainian and Belarusian states employ different strategies in controlling internet media. Moreover, alternative media have a marginal position while TV continues to dominate the media sphere (Miazhevich 2015). Research by Minchenia (2016) adds that independent internet media in Belarus, although being sensitive to the power imbalance between Russia and Belarus, reproduce other normative divisions, such as West vs. East and a gendered construction of politics.

episodes of the programmes "*Projektorparishilton*" (ParishiltonSearchlight), "*Bol'shaya raznitsa*" (Big Difference), and "*Vechernii Urgant*" (Evening with Urgant). "*Bol'shaya raznitsa*" is a co-production of Ukrainian and Russian channels. The Ukrainian TV channel *Inter* broadcasted the programme in its "Ukrainian version", which included some guests from Ukraine but chiefly the same content as was shown in Russia. We analysed the videos that were shown in Russia.

Our visual data consists of two types of video clips: animated cartoons and fragments of TV programmes with skits. The analytical difference between them is connected to the importance of visual data *per se*. In other words, cartoons are to be analysed by taking into account both their content – themes, stories, and dialogues – and form, which are visual signs that create their own meanings. At the same time, fragments of TV programmes mostly construct humorous representations by the means of narration. In the programme *"Projektorparishilton",* four male TV presenters partake in humorous banter while reading and discussing issues taken from newspapers, while in "*Vechernii Urgant*" the host deliver a humorous speech at the beginning of the programme. Therefore, in these cases we concentrate our analysis on the discursive level of TV humour. The analysed material belongs to the period of 2008 to 2013. The TV show *"Mul'tlichnosti"* was closed in 2013 and "*Projektorparishilton*" in 2012. We did not include material after the Maidan Revolution in 2014 since the open Ukrainian-Russian conflict created a new media situation in Ukraine that would have made the comparison with Belarus related material problematic. With the annexation of Crimea, Ukraine began to redefine its information and media politics (e.g. Bolin, Jordan & Ståhlberg 2016, Pantti 2016, Nygren & Hök 2016). Russian TV channels were banned in Ukraine and the cooperation between TV production companies was interrupted. Thus, this development deserves a separate analysis that cannot be covered here.

The Power of Money and the Cold War Imaginary: Representing Russian-Belarusian Relationships in Russian TV Humour about Lukashenka

Let us begin with discussing what the personage of Lukashenka looks like in the cartoon series "*Mul'tlichnosti*" and how these representations mirror Russia's own image of politics. Then we will discuss the main themes and plots identified in the visual data and look at how the political relationship of Russia to Belarus and *vice versa* are imagined.

The animated character of Lukashenka from the show "*Mul'tlichnosti*" lives alone in a wooden house and, in the background, one can hear the sound of cattle. No other person is portrayed living in the area. Its emptiness and Lukashenka's loneliness are emphasized by the scarcity of furniture – there is only a throne standing in the room and Lukashenka's portraits hanging on the walls. At the same time, these signs of ambition and egocentrism are countered by the straw and logs lying just near the throne and big sacks full of potatoes that Lukashenka is portrayed as pealing by himself. His wooden house with modest, village interior (except the throne), the sound of cattle, and his surprise at discovering some technical possibilities (like the turning chairs from the show "The Voice" in which he is portrayed as a judge in one of the episodes) are signs representing Belarus as backward and unmodern. Similar images are constructed in other TV-shows. In "*Vechernii Urgant*", the host Ivan Urgant says, while showing a portrait of Lukashenka on his MacBook, "We try to combine all incompatible things. Lukashenka and Apple have never been this close to each other before." (*Vechernii Urgant,* May 14, 2012)[3]. Thus, the figure of Lukashenka is presented as intensely old-fashioned and alien to everything technologically advanced and popular, as signified in the show by the Apple products. Moreover, in the other evening shows under analysis, the hosts address topics that construct Belarus as still living in Soviet times or discursively connect its products with old (Soviet) symbols. For example, *Vechernii Urgant* mocks the proposal of Belarusian members of Parliament of reintroducing gymnastics at work places (April 2013)[4], "*Projektorparishilton*" (June 2009)[5] states that no one (except Russians) would buy Belarusian tractors, as they have not seen the Soviet cartoon that shows how the machine works.

Although in these comical representations Lukashenka wears a suit and tie, he is presented as an uneducated peasant. He speaks a kind of *trasianka* – the mixture of Russian and Belarusian languages with the distinct accent of a

3 Unfortunately, the video of the joke is no longer available, but there are numerous reports quoting exactly this representation of Lukashenka in Belarusian Internet media – e.g. <https://nn.by/?c=ar&i=73443&lang=ru>, <http://udf.by/news/nopolitic/59683-cenzura-ont-vyrezala-shutku-urganta-pro-lukashenko.html>, accessed March 5, 2018.

4 Unfortunately, the video of the joke is no longer available, but there are numerous reports pointing to this representation of Lukashenka in Belarusian Internet media – e.g. <https://gomel.today/rus/news/belarus/41732/>, <http://5min.by/news/-populjarnij-rossijskij-televeduschij-ivan.html>, accessed March 5, 2018.

5 Projektorparishilton (Video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45RoZFG_klk>, accessed March 5, 2018.

Belarusian village person.[6] Sometimes, he is also represented as playing the bayan – a folk musical instrument – signifying that Lukashenka and his context are backward, simple, and rural. Thus, Lukashenka's otherness is created by the classic incongruity between high and low, or, as in this case, a particular combination of provinciality and lowbrow qualities and claims to the highest power in the country, so that the former makes the latter look ungrounded and ridiculous. In turn, this means that Russia's image is implicitly constructed as economically and culturally superior in contrast, as a centre and a modern, urban, and technologically advanced state with modern, educated, and sophisticated leaders. Needless to say, this kind of representation is typical for ethnic stereotyping in the context of unequal power relations such as colonial or postcolonial dependency (Said 1978).

This analytical observation receives further support when interactions between different animated personages and the presented topics of discussion in cartoons and evening shows are taken into account. The main theme present in all of the video fragments analysed here is the financial deficiency of Belarus and its dependency on Russia. Lukashenka is portrayed as desperately needing money. In cartoons he not only literally begs for money by singing and dancing in front of the Russian Minister of Finance Kudrin (episode 15)[7], but also steals some things like a candlestick from the British Queen (episode 15)[8] or tries to sell a tractor to Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton (episode 39, "*Taxi-2*")[9]. Significantly, no one seems to take him seriously. In episode 15 Lukashenka approaches Berlusconi, Merkel, and Elizabeth II to ask for money, but does not succeed in getting any financial help. In this context, Russia is literally presented as the only solution as Lukashenka comes back to sing and dance for the Russian minister Kudrin later in the episode.

This idea of Russia's financial superiority and Belarus's unescapable dependency can be found in other cartoons and evening shows as well. In episode 4, "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?"[10], the personage of Lukashenka comes to the popular game show to win some money. Exactly the same story of Lukashenka, coming to the Russian game show to improve his finances, was later presented

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6 For a thorough explanation of the linguistic situation in Belarus in general and the phenomenon of trasianka in particular see Tsykhun (2006, 61-76).

7 Mul'tlichnosti. Episode 15 (Video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jv3oxdcJvEg>, accessed March 5, 2018.

8 Mul'tlichnosti. Episode 15 (Video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fqfAtrZxAmY>, accessed March 5, 2018.

9 Mul'tlichnosti. Episode 39 (Video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkJgdHm66lE>, accessed March 5, 2018.

10 Mul'tlichnosti. Episode 4 (Video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mslpL2XftI4>, accessed March 1, 2018.

in the show "*Bol'shaya raznitsa*" (episode 23)[11]. The hosts of the other show, "*Projektorparishilton*", in an episode in June 2009, are discussing tensions around new credit requested by Lukashenka from the Russian government, when one of them says: "Alexandr Grigorievich [i.e. *Lukashenka*], those who know you, do not invite you to visit them"[12]. They then conclude that Belarusians, in their search for money, can only go to the penguins in Antarctica. In this joke, penguins are the only creatures on Earth that can be deceived by Belarusian financial credibility. It should be noted that the discursive move from Lukashenka as an object of mockery to the state and its people (e.g. from Lukashenka being an unwelcomed guest as a politician to Belarusians who should go to Antarctica with the hope of persuading penguins to economic collaboration) has an important function in this joke. In this way, the object of mockery is gradually expanded from the Belarusian leader to the Belarusian state and Belarusian people.

It cannot be denied that the continuous Russian financial support of Belarus does have a place in the economic relationship between Russia and Belarus, but what is important here is how this fact unfolds and is interpreted by popular culture. Not only is it constructed as an extreme economic dependency and disparity to such an extent that Russian game shows become a source for Belarus's budget improvements, but also Russia is represented as the only possible choice, the only possible salvation from poverty and backwardness. In two of the episodes of "*Mul'tlichnosti*"[13], the personage of Lukashenka comes back to Russia after his attempts of searching for support elsewhere.

Another dimension of Russia's superiority can be found in the portrayal of Lukashenka's personality. In cartoons and evening show narratives, he is presented as a person with little knowledge and limited intellectual abilities, uncritical of himself and sometimes not well-mannered. The cartoons portraying his participation in different popular TV shows, such as "What? Where? When?" (episode 37)[14], "The Voice" (episode 42)[15], and "Who Wants to Be a Million-

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11 Bol'shaya Raznitsa, Episode 23 (Video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9BImGLSonsg, accessed March 1, 2018.

12 Projektorparishilton (Video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45RoZFG_klk>, accessed March 5, 2018.

13 Mul'tlichnosti. Episode 15 (Video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fqfAtrZxAmY, Mul'tlichnosti>. Episode 22 (Video), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPsExmNAp_Q>, accessed March 5, 2018.

14 Mul'tlichnosti. Episode 37 (Video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPrSJygfDHs>, accessed March 1, 2018.

15 Mul'tlichnosti. Episode 42 (Video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5gxAkFOoAmk>, accessed March 1, 2018.

aire?" (episode 4)[16] use the same pattern. Lukashenka is never able to give the right answers to even very basic questions, but he boasts a lot of his abilities and values himself highly. He is presented as a cunning peasant that usually compensates for his bad education either with various tricks and deception or by manipulating someone's feelings. He is typically portrayed as speaking about feelings of brotherhood between Russia and Belarus whenever he asks Russia for money. Although this reference to the historically strong and special ties between Russians and Belarusians has a direct relation to Lukashenka's real speeches, in this particular context it also allows for the construction of Russia as the intelligent counterpart that sees through the cheap, deceptive tricks yet remains benevolent and prepared to help the Belarusian younger brother. This discursive construction occludes Russia's own political interest in preserving the *status quo* in Belarus and masks the power it exercises over the Belarusian state by presenting its involvement as a form of aid.

Significantly, Lukashenka is never portrayed as communicating directly with the president of Russia (either Medvedev or Putin) on equal footing and professionally. At the same time, the personage of Lukashenka interacts with American president Obama, American foreign secretary Hillary Clinton, and the British queen Elizabeth II, although this is not the case in reality, providing that his legitimacy is unrecognized by the EU and the USA and he and some other governmental officials in Belarus were under sanctions at the time. In episode 22, "*Skolkovo*"[17], Lukashenka conceals his personality by pretending to be a journalist first from Mahileu (a regional Belarusian town, called Mogilev in Russian), then from Kyrgyzstan, and finally from Moldova, attending a press-conference by President Medvedev. This is not only a reference to Lukashenka's tricks to get money from Russia, but an explicit construction of hierarchy – who can approach the Russian leader and how should it be done.

In episode 16, "*Den' Militsii*" ("The Police Day")[18], the personage of Lukashenka addresses Medvedev, who is never shown but is presumably among the audience, in a scene during a concert celebrating the day of the police. Lukashenka apologizes for the critical statements he had made previously about Russia. It is the host of the evening, Malakhov, who is portrayed as communicating with Lukashenka directly in the scene. He asks different kinds of tough questions and demands that Lukashenka make a choice of whom he will be friends

16 Mul'tlichnosti. Episode 4 (Video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mslpL2XftI4>, accessed March 1, 2018.

17 Mul'tlichnosti. Episode 22 (Video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6rh_Rvj7fOU>, accessed March 1, 2018.

18 Mul'tlichnosti. Episode 16 (Video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sb5A4Yjjr2E>, accessed March 1, 2018.

with – Russia or Europe. Interestingly, this comic episode was transmitted before the presidential election in Belarus in 2010. This was the period during which some EU politicians, such as the Ministers of International Affairs of Germany and Poland, Guido Westerwelle and Radoslav Sikorski respectively, came to Minsk to meet Lukashenka personally and promised significant financial support for the country on the condition that an open, democratic election was conducted.

A number of important analytical points should be made in this respect. First of all, the dichotomous view of international relations made up of two poles, with Russia on one side and the EU and/or the USA on the other, underpins all the scripts presented here of Lukashenka searching for money. Secondly, this dichotomous choice reveals world politics being imagined in terms of the Cold War era, with the explicit idea of enemies and alliances of protection. The represented dialogue between the personage of Lukashenka and the compère Malakhov is based on the assumption that collaboration between Belarus and Europe closes any possibility for cooperation with Russia. It also shows that dichotomous thinking about geopolitical power has long been present in Russian popular culture, before any explicit political actions such as Russian aggression in Ukraine.

Between Traitors, Thieves, and Old Little Bothers: Representing Russian-Ukrainian Relationships in Russian TV Humour on Ukrainian Political Leaders

Judging from the coverage on TV, Ukraine does not seem to be as interesting as Belarus as a recipient of mockery and humour. This might be based on the fact that there is no one political figure that would stand for the whole country in Ukraine. In other words, there is no Lukashenka-like figure that would provide consistency, continuity, and simplicity for media representations. In TV programmes, the Ukrainian political spectrum is represented by Iulia Tymoshenko, Arsenii Iatseniuk, Viktor Ianukovych, and Viktor Iushchenko.

In the period of time under analysis (2008-2013), the Ukrainian theme became most popular in the winter of 2009/2010 (e.g. *Mul'tlichnosti* December 2009, January 2010)[19] and almost disappeared starting in the autumn of 2010. From October 2010 to the end of 2012, for example, *Mul'tlichnosti* only aired three episodes in which Ukraine was depicted. The popularity of the Ukrainian

19 Mul'tlichnosti (Video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RbXpnboI7M>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iT6nVv58OBc>, accessed March 5, 2018.

theme coincided with the presidential election in the country. A whole episode of *Mul'tlichnosti* was dedicated to the Ukrainian elections[20]. This episode was broadcast on the evening of January 17, the day on which Ukrainians cast their ballots. Iushchenko, Ianukovych, Tymoshenko, and Iatseniuk are shown together in court where an imaginary jury, obviously impersonating the Ukrainian people, has to pass its sentence. Tymoshenko expects to win more votes even while she worries about her lack of popularity among the Ukrainian people. Ianukovych boasts about his popularity among the people of one specific region of Ukraine, Donbas, and regrets that the whole country is not like Donbas. In this manner, Ianukovych is portrayed as a "regional choice", which can prove to be problematic when it comes to the second round of the elections. The choice of clothing is emblematic in representing the Ukrainian political figures – Iushchenko wears a traditional, embroidered Ukrainian shirt (*vyshyvanka*), which represents his connection to popular peasant culture and thus implies his populism and nationalism. Ianukovych is dressed in a simple, striped T-shirt that probably emphasizes his working class background. Tymoshenko wears a fashionable dress and her recognizable hairstyle (she also underlines that the visit to the hairdresser cost her a lot of money that she will not be paid back since she had not received as many votes as expected). Iatseniuk, meanwhile, wears a suit and tie, which is the least noticeable costume in comparison with other candidates in this context, and thus presents him as Mr. Nobody, a boring figure without personality.

The second round of the elections, with candidates Tymoshenko and Ianukovych, was held on 7 February. Yanukovych received the majority of votes and became the president. Interestingly, this victory was not directly reflected in the TV programmes under analysis. On February 13, 2010, the programme *Mul'tlichnosti* mentioned it indirectly through the figure of Iulia Tymoshenko, who was portrayed as suffering because the "people do not love her"[21]. Remarkably, Tymoshenko always gets a strongly gendered representation based on stereotypes of women as beautiful, emotional, and concerned with their appearance and the opinion of others. It is worth pointing out that this gender bias is characteristic not only of the representations of Tymoshenko in the analysed segments, but is also common of her representation in Ukraine and in the international press and similar to the representation of other women in politics (Kis' 2007; Voronova 2014; Zhurzhenko 2008). In this respect, humour-

20 Mul'tlichnosti (Video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQoPCGowmlo>, accessed March 5, 2018.

21 Mul'tlichnosti (Video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X3E_1Woud_E>, accessed March 5, 2018.

istic media follow suit and play on stereotypes. However, this gendered representation paradoxically allows, in our view, the portrayal of Tymoshenko's character to be more complex than the male leaders. She is presented as wise, keen, intelligent, and subjugated at the same time. Her gender makes her different from the other candidates since she deviates from the stereotypical image of a political leader (who is a man), on the one hand, and from the stereotypical image of a woman (a docile subject that depends on men), on the other. Thus, Tymoshenko's gender allows the TV producers to portray her both as strong and weak at the same time. She is shown as a ruthless politician who has her own agenda but still, as a woman, she is seen as not quite equal to her opponents, who are all men. In this context, her mere existence on the political scene is pictured as a source of humour.

Ukrainian politicians are portrayed as petty thieves that steal resources (gas) from their bigger and richer neighbour Russia (*Mul'tlichnosti* November 15, 2009; December 13, 2009; December 28, 2009)[22] in a highly unprofessional manner. They are lazy and preoccupied only with their small worries about keeping power and establishing alliances with those who would guarantee them in securing their power. Thus, Iushchenko's and Tymoshenko's attempts of establishing contacts with NATO, the USA, and the EU are represented as a pursuit of their own personal interests, which are at the same time a betrayal of the larger geopolitical interests of Russia. Iushchenko and Tymoshenko are presented as unreliable people without any ideals or values except money. In one of the episodes, Iushchenko and Tymoshenko sing the song "We need to become a NATO member" in which they explain that if this happens, NATO will give them money and they will become rich. They are also ready to sell the whole country "in retail" to the EU (*Mul'tlichnosti* 28.12.2009)[23]. Tymoshenko and Iushchenko continuously nag Barack Obama for money (e.g. *Mul'tlichnosti* 13.12.2009)[24]. They also ask Russia for money and are even ready to sell the Crimean city of Sevastopol, but Russia refuses their offer (*Mul'tlichnosti* 28.12.2009)[25]. Sometimes they are shown in the company of Belarusian president Lukashenka and Georgian president Saakashvili, who are also presented as beggars in this context. Interestingly, Ianukovych is not portrayed in this way. Only those who seek the help of other geopolitical players beyond Russia

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22 Mul'tlichnosti (Video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RbXpnboI7M>, <https://www.youtube.com/).watch?v=iT6nVv58OBc>, accessed March 5, 2018.

23 Mul'tlichnosti (Video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iT6nVv58OBc>, accessed March 5, 2018.

24 Video on Youtube is no longer available.

25 Mul'tlichnosti (Video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iT6nVv58OBc>, accessed March 5, 2018.

are presented as thieves and traitors. While Ukraine is portrayed as governed by people who have no interests except their own, leaders of the USA, the EU, and Russia, on the other hand, are presented as equal partners who have their own geopolitical interests.

Distinguishing features in the portrayal of Ukrainian political figures are provincialism, orientalism, and an unwillingness to see them as distinct subjects, which is represented by underlining their dependency on Russia. These traits are chiefly revealed through representations of Iushchenko and Tymoshenko. They are most often shown as funny neighbours and petty thieves who are continually trying to steal something (i.e. gas) from their wealthy and big neighbour (Russia). Iushchenko is portrayed as a stereotypical peasant interested only in singing and enjoying his life, which is a popular representation of Ukrainians in Russian literature starting from the 19th century (Thompson 2000). Tymoshenko is also portrayed as a provincial type of lord who is nevertheless dependent on the benevolence of more influential lords (Russia or the USA).

In *Projektorparishilton,* one of the hosts, Oleksandr Tsekalo, is of Ukrainian origin (he was born in Odessa). This mere fact is constantly the target of jokes from the other programme leaders. They make fun of his laziness, slowness, and at times he is even discarded as an "alien" (*inoplanetianin*) because of his origin.[26] Tsekalo's lack of humour is constantly underlined by other programme leaders who demonstratively do not laugh when he is making jokes. In this way, "un-laughter" (Smith 2009, 158; Zimbardo 2014, 64) becomes the instrument of bordering which reveals unequal power relations – those who do not laugh are deciding what is funny and what is not and make a signal to the audience how the joking subject should be interpreted. In this context, it is worth mentioning an instance when a Russian joke about Ukraine caused an international scandal. This occurred when Ivan Urgant, the host of the show *"Vechernij Urgant"*, who is also one of the hosts in *Projektorparishilton*, while chopping some herbs during one of his culinary shows, said, "I am chopping [them] as a red commissar chopped the residents of a Ukrainian village". In Ukraine, there was a wave of outraged responses in social media with demands that Urgant be banned from entering Ukraine. The right wing party Svoboda even initiated the collection of signatures for such a ban at the state level. When Ivan Urgant realized that his joke was a serious offence to Ukrainians, he said, significantly not without some contempt and irony, that he was sorry for his joke and that he did not realize that it would mean so much to Ukraine, a country that he

26 *Projektorparishilton* [video] (2017), accessed February 21, 2018. <http://www.1tv.ru/shows/prozhektorperishilton>.

"loves dearly".[27] This incident illustrates yet another instance of the phenomenon of "un-laughter" (Smith 2009, 158; Zimbardo 2014, 64), which can occur in cases of radically unequal power relations between those who laugh and those who are laughed at. In a situation of "un-laughter", humour functions as a method for heightening group boundaries between those who laugh and those who refuse to join in the laughter, not least because they or their values are the object of ridicule and the laughter normalizes their denigration. In this case, it was Ukraine which through "un-laughter" was trying to reclaim its status of a subject (not object) of the laughter or, in this case, of "un-laugther".

Moreover, it is noteworthy to add that representations of Ukrainian politicians disclose an interesting characteristic of Russian-Ukrainian relations. On the one hand, they show a great degree of resentment originating in the apprehension that Ukrainians do not wish to acknowledge Russian supremacy, which is why Ukrainian leaders are presented as traitors. On the other hand, this reveals that Russia's self image is dependent on such an acknowledgement. Such an ambivalent relation is typical in colonizer-colonized relationships, as suggested by proponents of the postcolonial critique (e.g. Said 1978, Gandhi 1998, Harper 2002).

Concluding Remarks: Humour as a Tool of Hegemony

As a result of the above analysis, we would like to argue that the representations of Belarusian and Ukrainian leaders in Russian humour illustrate striking similarities. Although the countries have chosen different political paths, the Russian approach to them has been relatively uniform until 2013. It seems to be built on the old, Cold War imagination of a world that sets Russia and the West against each other and where the West contests the Russian zone of influence to which Belarus and Ukraine belong. Both countries are presented as a field of geopolitical struggle in which the main actors are Russia, the EU, and NATO, while both Belarus and Ukraine are just pawns in the big game. They are not subjects but rather the objects of big politics. The Russian humour analysed here clearly shows that the relationship between Russia and Belarus and Ukraine has a post-colonial character. The two countries are formally independent but still depend on Russia in political, economic, and cultural spheres.

27 "Urgant priznal svoiu shutku glupostiu i publichno izvinilsia pered ukraintsami" Zerkalo Nedeli, 18 April 2013, available <http://zn.ua/UKRAINE/urgant-priznal-svoyu-shutku-glupostyu-i-publichno-izvinilsya-pered-ukraincami-120969.html> (accessed 29 December, 2016).

The scrutinized jokes disclose the maintenance of a colonizer-colonized relation in the cultural and mental spheres. They display a clear hierarchy of power, with Russia presented as superior and its neighbours Belarus and Ukraine portrayed as peripheral and inferior. Russia is represented as a modern, wealthy, and technologically advanced country with modern, educated leaders, while Belarus and Ukraine are backward and have leaders that are uneducated or at least unsophisticated, lazy, unreliable, cunning, and prone to thievery. Russia endures disobedience from these leaders in the way adults endure naughty children. When the leaders behave in line with Russian interests, they are encouraged and pardoned even if they are not quite good enough (such as in representations of Lukashenka or even Ianukovych). If the leaders do not follow Russian geopolitical interests (as in the case of Iushchenko and Tymoshenko), they are portrayed as not only anti-Russian but also as traitors of their own people from whom they are stealing instead of serving.

Since humour may be used to create a sense of community, to build solidarity through in-group inclusion and out-group exclusion, in this context it is important to discuss what function the comic representations of Belarusians and Ukrainians may fulfil when presented to a Russian audience and what effect they may have on Belarusian and Ukrainian audiences.

In the Russian context, the analysed comical representations must be perceived as reiterations of the ethnic stereotypes of Belarusians and Ukrainians that had already previously been established in Russian culture and politics (e.g. Thompson 2000; Shkandrij 2001; Nilsson 2010). Moreover, the content of these stereotypes is typical for expressions of superiority being lauded over colonial subjects, who are usually seen as backward, lazy, childish, cunning, unreliable, etc. (Weaver 2014, 215-218). Thus, the humour in this context serves to conserve the existing stereotypes, to maintain the Russian feeling of superiority over its neighbours and endorse among the Russians the ruling logics of domination. Moreover, it bolsters nationalism and upholds the image of Russia as a powerful state entitled to play an important role in world politics.

At the same time, this humour covers up the dark aspects of Russian politics and life in Russia. Emphasizing the backwardness of the neighbours can make the audience forget the backward parts of Russia and, by mocking the Belarusian and Ukrainian leaders, may divert the audience's attention from Russian leaders who deserve mockery as well. Furthermore, this humour tries to conceal Russia's imperialist stance by presenting it as a benevolent power that is ready to support and help its neighbours. Thus, representations of Belarus as a country that does not produce or have anything valuable (the quality of Belarusian products is deprecated in the cartoons and shows) allow the audience to perceive Russian credits as an act of sheer altruism, which strengthens the

circulation of the idea of Russia's generous and disinterested support of Belarus, and obliterates its political threat for Belarusian independence as well as its own interests in the region. In fact, this perception of Russia as a benevolent power can emerge both in Russian as well Belarusian and Ukrainian audiences as an effect of the humorous representations. Russian humour here becomes a tool of hegemony, i.e. the power of the ruler to convince subjects that their interests coincide with the ruler's. The outmost sign of the successful hegemony of a colonial power is when a colonized people see the imperial power as synonymous with the greater good, stability, and advancement (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2013: 134) and when they internalize a conviction of their own cultural inferiority in relation to the civilization of the empire. A number of researchers (Korek 2009; Grabowicz, 1995; Oushakin 2013; Ousmanova 2007; Pavlyshyn 1992; Riabchuk 2009, 2012; Shkandrij 2009 and 2015) have pointed out that Belarusian and Ukrainian societies, to a large extent, display these features, typical of other colonized societies, even after their declarations of independence. Seen in this context, the Russian political humour mocking Belarusian and Ukrainian leaders supports and maintains Russian hegemony in these two states. It feeds the inferiority complex of Belarusians and Ukrainians and pictures Russia as a benevolent empire and saviour in troubled times. Moreover, in many instances, visible especially in the Ukrainian case, Russian humour aims at increasing distance and raising boundaries between people and the leadership in these two countries by presenting the leaders as unreliable, selfish, and ridiculous, or even as thieves or traitors. Thus, the potential laughing in-group constructed by this form of humour is Russians together with imagined Belarusian and Ukrainian audiences while the leaders of these two countries are constructed as out-group. How influential is this operation in terms of hegemonic control? Since our analysis above was focused on representations and not reception, we do not want to jump to conclusions on that matter. However, we would like to point out that in our research material, we saw some noticeable signs of critical positions towards this kind of Russian humour (e.g. Ukrainian outrage against Urgant) expressed in "un-laughter" – the refusal to laugh in the face of structural inequality and domination (Smith 2009). This observation has also been made in an earlier study by Minchenia (2016), which analyses the Belarusian Internet audience's reception of Russian cartoons and shows mocking Lukashenka. The construction of Belarus as dependent on Russia, underpinning the analysed data, fuels a range of emotions associated with un-laughter that aims at balancing the power differential by pointing to Russia's own interests and influence on preserving the Belarusian political situation unchanged.

To sum up, in our study we concentrated on demonstrating how humour is used by Russia as a tool for hegemonic control in relation to its neighbours Belarus and Ukraine. However, we also noticed that humour of this type does not exist without resistance, a fact that needs further exploration and presents an excellent opportunity for future research.

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CHAPTER 10

The Cosmic Subject in Post-Soviet Russia: Noocosmology, Space-Oriented Spiritualism, and the Problem of the Securitization of the Soul

Natalija Majsova

Introduction

The relationship between state security, the Russian security services and the discourse of normative spiritualism has a long history. In her work on the status and historical development of the notion of state security and its agents in Russia and in the Soviet Union, Julie Fedor (2011, 4) even introduces the notion of "spiritual security" as an important aspect of the situation Soviet Union commonly described as chekism, referring to the clear and strong control exerted by the secret police (the Cheka) over all spheres of society. Moreover, this concept was used by Patriarch Alexii II in his speech at the consecration of an Orthodox Church on the territory of the Lubianka headquarters of the Russian Federal Security Services (FSB) in 2002. According to Fedor, this event, attended by the FSB director Nikolai Patrushev, testified to "the emergence of a new paradigm of security in contemporary Russia, whereby spirituality and security go hand-in-glove" (Fedor 2011, 160). "Spirituality" is a very broad and vaguely defined term, and the doctrine of the Russian Orthodox Church is only one of its many aspects. Apart from religion, it may refer to ideas, moral norms, sets of psychological traits and normative convictions, insofar as they may be attributed to Russian culture and its customs and traditions. The links between state security, the security services, and spirituality are also very variegated, reaching from normative political documents, such as the Russian State Security Policy, to speeches by politicians and public intellectuals, and to numerous self-help initiatives, from manuals to initiatives aimed at laymen desiring a better life. This chapter will examine one of such initiative, noocosmology, a teaching designed by former FSB agents.

Although essentially a self-help manual that resembles new religious movements such as scientology, the authors of the noocosmological doctrine aim to present it as a recent, 21st century development at the intersection of Russian humanities, social sciences, and nationalist political aspirations. Drawing on the works of the Russian cosmists, the core texts that establish this cultural

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phenomenon and situate it in terms of aims, ambitions, methods, and scope (available at *Noocosmology* 2014) appear to be providing a new worldview to be adopted worldwide. With many references to questions of contemporary global and state security, the noocosmologists re-read certain ideas reminiscent of the Russian cosmists[1] (particularly Vl. Vernadsky and K. Tsiolkovsky), citing also a wide array of Western philosophers (from Socrates to Nietzsche) in order to offer something that they term both "science" and "worldview", which, so it seems, once again endows Russia with a special, educational if not messianic role in the global community. It justifies its cause on an allegedly scientific basis; the founders of noocosmology state:

> Binding concepts of other sciences, Noocosmology (New Russian Cosmology) is leading towards new discoveries and deeper knowledge about Cosmos. Following metaphysical tradition of Russian cosmists, Russian military specialists of the troop unit #10003 under the command of general-lieutenant Alexey Iu. Savin has developed method of metacontact (channeling) with the highest spiritual beings of our Universe. Due to this channel, Noocosmology receives knew knowledge, yet unknown on our Earth.[2] (Noocosmology 2014)

This definition might be described as thought-provoking and alarming: on a very general level, it creates links between military structures and authority, metaphysical spiritualism, and scientific inquiry. This alliance is particularly unconventional if we take into account that the teaching's founders insist on presenting it as a "science". Taking this as the starting point, the main aim of this text is to re-examine the simple question "What is noocosmology?" How does this orientation of thought, which conjoins questions of humanity's place in the cosmos and issues of contemporary state security, try to position itself as a scientific discipline, as its founders claim, rather than as a teaching that could be discussed in the context of the esoteric and the occult, or as a novel elaboration on the state security programme?

Taking into account the abundant references that its founders make to Russian thought (e.g. the legacy of the Russian cosmists), would it be appropriate to say that it is a markedly Russian cultural peculiarity and, if so, in which

1 The cosmists are a number of thinkers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries who envisaged human expansion beyond the atmosphere of the Earth in the near future, and believed this expansion would entail a radical transformation in human consciousness and in relations between humanity and the universe (Earth and beyond).

2 All direct quotes from the noocosmology.com website are all original translations, found on the English version of the website.

respects? In order to clarify this dilemma, I first contextualize it within post-Soviet Russian approaches to the mythology of Soviet outer space supremacy. Then, I will give an overview of other recent conceptual views on relations between the human and the cosmos that provide insights, relevant to the contemporary social sciences and humanities, namely, astrosociology, cultural history and cultural studies of outer space, and post-gravity art. In this context, I will discuss the main presumptions, agenda, and epistemology of noocosmology through an analysis of its core texts. In doing so, I will argue that one of the most problematic aspects of the noocosmological doctrine is its conception of the ideal human subject and its role in society. The explicitly passive, obedient and unimaginative subject addressed and promoted by the noocosmological teaching has uncanny implications for the concept of "spiritual security". At the same time, the esoterically infused, nationalist, and utopian teaching will most likely not appear convincing, logically coherent, and generally appealing to a critical reader. This might turn the noocosmological project into a welcome resource for a systematic critique of the alliance between state security apparatuses and spiritualist doctrines.

A Re-Ignited Interest in Space and Nostalgia for the Future: the Soviet Space Myth in Post-Soviet Russia

The noocosmologists' turn to the works of the Russian cosmists should be contextualized in the broader framework of the so-called "space age" – the first examples of spaceflight in the 20th century and the socio-cultural and scientific developments that had led up to them. Over the past two decades, both non-Russian and Russian scholarship has demonstrated an ever-increasing interest in the Soviet space programme. Non-Russian scholarship has focused predominantly on the historical, political, and socio-cultural coordinates of the popularization of an outer space-directed imagination in the Soviet Union on the one hand (e.g. Andrews and Siddiqi 2012; Maurer et al. 2011; Strukov and Goscilo 2016), and on the so-called post-Soviet nostalgia on the other (e.g. Siddiqi 2011a; Boym 2001; Lewis's latest work, available at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C).

In the Russian context, reignited interest in outer space and the history of Soviet space exploration seems to be taking on a different tone. First of all, and understandably, it is not restricted to scholarship alone, but also pervades popular culture and popular-scientific accounts. For example, contemporary Russian interest in the Soviet space programme is, among other forms, discernible from the commonly established, acknowledged, and hailed continuity of the

Soviet and post-Soviet Russian space programmes. The Russian space agency (*Roskosmos*) has, since 2011, been issuing a monthly magazine called *Rossiiskii kosmos* (*The Russian Cosmos*), meant to educate and inform the general public on developments of the Russian space programme as well as space-related cultural artefacts. The journal is written in a tone that sets a clear distinction between *Russian* outer space related endeavours, and those advanced by other states. Moreover, it strongly emphasizes that non-Russian space programmes tend to be utilitarian and profit-oriented in nature, whereas Russian space exploration has always focused on scientific progress (*Rossiiskii kosmos* 2014). A similar narrative is detectable in television documentaries and "artistic reconstructions" on the Soviet space programme (such as the film *12-e aprelia: 24 chasa* [2011, dir. Roman Kaigorodov]).

Acknowledgement of the fact that space conquest has been mythologized and strongly linked to the idea of scientific progress and social and human enhancement as advocated by the Soviet communist party here does not undermine "objective" conclusions about the greatness and revolutionary nature of the achievements of the Soviet space programme. Ideology is supposedly cast aside to emphasize seemingly "objective" greatness, which is based on science; the heirs of Soviet space engineers and cosmonauts are therefore no longer explicit bearers of the Cold War political agenda, no longer participants in the race for space with the USA, but merely workers and engineers; they are not even scientists with a vision, but professionals with technological knowledge and the ability to advance this knowledge in order to keep the space programme "going". In part, this orientation toward the past that is exhibited by Russian popular and popular scientific discourse on the current space programme, termed by Siddiqi (2011, 283) as a certain "nostalgia for the future", which is the utopian yet convincing future envisaged in the times of the USSR, is resolved with resort to the humanities.

Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, many "historical facts" from the recent past of the post-Soviet terrain have been put into a radically different context via various studies in the humanities and social sciences. In the 21st century, one could talk about a significant expansion of the discursive horizon of publications by Russian-based scholars doing research in various disciplines within the humanities, from philosophy to sociology, psychology, linguistics, etc. The philosophical dimension is perhaps of most crucial importance to this discussion. As the rigid ideological framework of Marxism-Leninism finally disintegrated together with the supranational formation it was based on, intellectuals and scholars – similarly to what took place in the 19th century – got a sort of a *carte blanche* to interpret their research material with reference to various theoretical and philosophical concepts, frameworks, and

lines of thought. At least in the 1990s and early 2000s, syncretism and eclecticism were hardly considered problematic. Various attempts to interpret, reinterpret, and reframe the recent past, and, in some cases, speculate about what the future might bring, flourished. Often enough, such analysts combined certain "foreign" philosophical theses with the theoretical and philosophical thought of Russian pre-revolutionary thinkers.

The history of the Soviet space programme and its ideological connotations proved to be a particularly useful case in this regard. Scholars working in the Russian context have seemingly exorcised the myth of Soviet supremacy and greatness from the space programme, debunked it as an empty ideological construct, at the expense of implanting a different ideational "core" into Soviet cosmic aspirations. Post-Soviet humanities dealing with cultural cosmology or the cultural imagination of outer space exhibit notable interest in the writings of the Russian cosmists. It is telling that, since the early 2000s, readings of Fiodorov's and Tsiolkovskii's[3] works regularly take place in Fiodorov's memorial house in Moscow; recent works devoted to cosmism as a philosophy, such as Alekseeva's *K.E. Tsiolkovskii: Filosofiia kosmizma* (*K.E. Tsiolkovskii: The Philosophy of Cosmism* [2007]) are easily accessible in bookstores and online. While Soviet interpretations of the influence of the cosmists on the Soviet space programme tend to highlight the importance, impact, and continuity of the thought of Fiodorov and Tsiolkovskii (cf. Schwartz 2010), the first an eccentric librarian who dreamed of a future utopia in outer space, both patriarchal and asexual, and the resurrection of the dead, the second the "grandfather of Soviet rocketry", post-Soviet accounts tend to rediscover and popularize a much wider range of cosmist thinkers, and link them to certain ideas in the contemporary environmental sciences, seeing them as forerunners of ideas such as sustainable development.[4] Cosmism has become the subject of many artistic initiatives, from Anton Vidokle's film project Immortality for All: A Film Trilogy on Russian Cosmos (2014-2017) to the neocosmist manifesto Neocosmism 2017). Moreover, in 2013, Russian President Vladimir Putin embraced the legacy of Tsiolkovskii by proposing to name a new town, which is to be built near the Vostochnyi cosmodrome, in the scientist's honor (Cosmizm 2017). While some

3 Nikolay Fiodorov (1829-1903), an eccentric Russian religious thinker who preached asceticism and believed in the possibility of resurrecting the dead and human expansion to other planets, is generally recognized as the founding father of Russian cosmism. Konstantin Tsiolkovskii (1857-1935) was Fiodorov's student, and is considered to be the "grandfather of Soviet rocketry" due to the pioneering technological solutions he provided to questions related to space travel.

4 Certain contemporary re-articulations of Russian cosmist thought will be discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs.

of these initiatives are indeed historical commemorations, the contemporary developments at the crossroads of art and science, such as the neocosmist initiative, go beyond nostalgia for the Soviet future, trying instead to re-imagine the potential impact of the cosmist teachings on contemporary reality. The noocosmologists, too, attempt to link cosmist thought to contemporary political and socio-cultural issues,[5] making a step toward a new, contemporary agenda, barely veiled by the language of research.

Russian cosmism has, since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, seen a reawakening in several modes, which might be interconnected, but nonetheless each one remains distinct. One mode, fairly common in both foreign and Russian scholarship, is the increase in historical and historiographical research devoted to cosmism and space-related aspects of late 19th and early 20th century Russian symbolism and the Russian and Soviet artistic and social vanguards. Another mode is the increased attention cosmism is being given as a fully formed philosophical system – a reading which is highly problematic, yet advanced by many Russian scholars and some space-enthusiasts in the USA (e.g. Harrison 2013, who even elaborated a so-called American version of cosmism). Apart from these academic discussions, cosmism has found several points of entry into popular and popular-scientific discourse, for example in the form of the aforementioned reading clubs dedicated to Fiodorov and Tsiolkovskii.

Noocosmology could be seen as another variant of these reappropriations of cosmist ideas, as an attempt to elevate them to the level of both a science and a worldview. This bold gesture seems to place the teaching into the context of the contemporary social sciences and humanities; however, as I will argue in the following paragraphs, it actually fails to adhere to the main principles of scientific inquiry. Furthermore, it advocates an eclectic, unsystematic approach to the relations between ontology, science, and popular imagination; and an implicit and non-reflected position of enunciation,[6] the understanding of which requires the appropriation of a certain subjectivation strategy, an implicit jumbling of various types of discourse, and an attempt to incorporate all of them into a so-called new science. In other words, the reader is forced

5 Such as debates on climate change and the beginning of the anthropocene, a new geological age, marked by the impact of human presence and activity on Earth, to the Russian search for a new identity and attempts at reconstructing the dominant historical narrative cf. Cosmizm (2015).

6 The position adopted by the speaker resembles that of a god-like third-person narrator. He seems to have access to unquestionable truth, to knowledge that corresponds to objective reality and that the reader may only gain through unquestioned belief in what he or she is reading.

into the position of an obedient soldier who does not question the assumptions or the agenda of noocosmology, but merely blindly follows the "rules" set by its agenda. To be a subject in the noocosmological framework essentially means turning into a part of the mechanism of the universe as envisaged by its agenda.

Noocosmology in the Context of Contemporary Space Oriented Projects within the Humanities and Social Sciences

Although noocosmology is, as acknowledged in the definition provided by its founders, a development of Russian scholarship that explicitly draws on the work of the Russian cosmists,[7] it is by no means the only contemporary initiative that aims to takes on questions discussing the relationship between humanity and the cosmos from the perspective of the humanities and social sciences. In order to point to its specificity, I will contextualize it in the framework of projects concerned with similar questions, such as astrosociology, cultural studies and cultural history of outer space, and post-gravity art, which have appeared worldwide over the past few decades. I will then argue that the most problematic point where noocosmology deviates from these other conceptual, scientifically informed accounts, is its conceptualization of human subjectivity, and the space it allocates to human agency, which, at the same time reflects its connection to the broader notion of spiritual security in the context of the Russian security dispositive.

The tendency toward a certain conceptual and disciplinary fragmentation that has marked the humanities and social sciences of the late 20th and early 21st centuries has not eluded outer space. Today, there are (at least) four conceptual initiatives with academic aspirations dedicated to studying and rethinking the relationship between humanity and the cosmos, the history and future of these relations, and possibilities of new paradigms. Apart from the Russian project of noocosmology, at least three other attempts at consolidating and guiding the present and future of outer space oriented thought within the social sciences and humanities have been made in the late 20th and early 21st centuries: astrosociology, cultural studies of outer space, and post-gravity art. Of course, it is not the fact that these fields exist *per se* that concerns us here: if noocosmology, as I stated above, interchangeably designates itself as a

7 There are numerous discussions on whether it is adequate or factually precise to treat the cosmists as a unified movement or even a group of scholars (e.g. Young 2012, 12-35), but noocosmology does not seem to find the signifier "cosmists" problematic.

"worldview", a "science", and even an "objective reality", these three other disciplines should be approached with a similar question in mind: which position of enunciation do they subscribe to? Do all contemporary space-oriented conceptual projects within the humanities and social sciences share this syncretism of agendas?

The first post-Cold War reflections on the beginning of the space age that gravitated toward a distinct grouping appeared in the 1990s, under the aegis of so-called post-gravity art. Post-gravity art, i.e. art in zero gravity conditions, envisaged by Slovenian artists Dragan Živadinov, Miha Turšič and Dunja Zupančič, may best be described with a summary of its central project. *Noordung 1995::2045,* as the project is called, is a 50-year-long endeavour that started in 1995. It is a performance that engages an ensemble of Slovenian theatre actors who meet every ten years on April 20[8] for transmedial performances, to be gradually – after their deaths – replaced by machines: mini-satellites (*umbots*) to be released into the Earth's orbit.[9] The concept of post-gravity art is heavily inspired by visions of the Russian supremacists and constructivists who were fascinated by the cosmic perspectives of technological progress and contemplated ways of creating art in outer space (*Postgravityart* 2014).

While post-gravity art is not a scientific discipline, it is nonetheless important for our discussion because it is one of the ways contemporary humanities and social sciences deal with exceptional events, such as the first examples of spaceflight. Operating from a position that does not strive for objectivity or "final solutions", and does not rely on language alone, post-gravity art is a performative intervention, primarily concerned with a question, highly relevant in many disciplines of the humanities today, on what it means to be human in the space age. It proposes "culturalizing" outer space by inhabiting it with

8 The date, German Nazi leader Adolf Hitler's birthday, was not chosen at random. One of the aims of the performance is to provide new, positive connotations for this date, which would counter the horrifying legacy of World War II, which is associated with Hitler's name.

9 The fifty year theatre projectile *NOORDUNG::1995-2015-2045* premiered on April 20, 1995 in Ljubljana. Because the original scenography and costumes had been destroyed by a fire in SNG Drama Ljubljana in 1997, the first repeat performance on 20 April 2005 moved from the original stage to the hydro laboratory in Star City, Russia, to the model of the International Space Station (ISS). A group of artists Zupančič::Turšič::Živadinov began to develop postgravity art, art that emerges in conditions without gravity. The second repeat performane took place in KSEVT Vitanje, the Cultural Centre of European Space Technologies, on April 20, 2015. All actors participate in all of the repetitions of the theatrical performance. If an actor dies, he or she is replaced by an *umbot* that continues to play his or her part in the performance. Female actors are replaced by *umbots* that perform melodies, and male actors are replaced by *umbots* that provide rhythm. The performance held on April 20, 2015 involved one melodic *umbot* that replaced the actress Milena Grm who passed away in 2011.

signifiers from Earth, yet not of earthly logic. Intuitively drawing on the aspirations of the predominantly Russian avant-gardes, who were the most cosmic-oriented,[10] post-gravity art explores the idea of life, culture, and subjectivity that is no longer confined to the human form or to anthropocentrism.

Post-gravity art proposes a model of subjectivity, of how to be an agent, that relies on the signifier rather than on the human as it is traditionally understood – superior to other modes of life and meaning-making. In this sense, and in somewhat poetic terms, it may be concluded that it aspires to loyally follow the consequences of the first examples of manned spaceflight, if these are to be read with Tsiolkovskii, and, later, Jacques Lacan (1993, 83), as an event "of discourse, where discourse touches the real, and thought is left silent". Post-gravity art might be a performance and an aesthetic meditation, but it seems to be closely following the logic of the signifier in the realm of space exploration set out by Tsiolkovskii who, according to the Soviet film *Chelovek s planety Zemlia* (The Man from Planet Earth) (1958), directed by Boris Buneiev, stated "mathematics says we do not need one hundred years to go to space, it says we can do it now, today". Post-gravity art is also related to the realm of philosophy perhaps best exemplified by Lyotard's (1993, 38-46) "incredulity toward metanarratives", which leaves science in the same position as aesthetics, namely, tied to its ability to *perform* rather than to explain and provide reasonable solutions to crises of the current situation. Post-gravity art therefore deals with the question of how to be (human) in the space age and in space by embracing technology, not thinking about it in opposition to culture or humanity. It redefines the coordinates of what it is to be a subject by embracing the prospects of technological progress and its indivisibility from the question of being and being human.

Needless to say, the radical loyalty, or, as Badiou puts it (2005, 232-237), "fidelity to an event", that is exhibited by post-gravity art is currently not the most widely accepted interpretation of the legacy of manned spaceflight. A more widespread critical reading views human space aspirations as a progression from militarization to economic exploitation, to be potentially followed by culturalization that is, at this point in time, far from reality. From a Marxist perspective, Shukaitis (2009, 98-105), for example, gives a concise history of ideas related to space conquest in the 20th century, pointing out that – both in terms of popular cultural representations and actual space programmes – the Cold War space race might have first been followed by a reproach from environmentalists (why go to space when there are so many problems on Earth?) It was then replaced by a mythology compatible with capitalism, which conjoins the

10 The cultural context of Russian cosmism and the cosmic aspirations of the Russian avant-gardes will be examined in more detail in the following sections.

ideas of outer space with solutions to capitalism's structural crises (mining, etc.), and that of consumerism (space tourism).

This narrative is well supported by the second space-related project I would like to mention, namely astrosociology, which is a "subdiscipline of sociology" conceived by Jim Pass (2006, 2011) in the late 2000s as a discipline to explore the relationship between humanity and space. The discipline draws on space-related materials produced within other sciences, such as law, sociology, and psychology, and it basically amounts to a certain "here-and-now space pragmatism": postulating axiomatically that humanity is bound to expand into outer space, it tries to present and evaluate various modes of existence in space (e.g. the optimal composition and conduct of a human colony on Mars). In contrast to post-gravity art, it does not at all consider manned spaceflight exceptional, and does not have performativist aspirations. It attempts to couple spaceflight with the narrative of technological progress and its inevitability, as well as with the all-pervasiveness of capitalism, which amounts to an end-of-history of sorts. The limits of its ability to explain all, to function as a "great theory of everything" are perhaps its implicit aversion to philosophy and the humanities: astrosociology grounds its analyses in traditional, objectivist accounts, which prefer quantifiable empiricism to thought experiment. It is possible to notice certain similarities between astrosociology and noocosmology: like noocosmology, astrosociology relies on an objectivist position of enunciation, attempting to provide "verifiable", "scientific" data. Likewise, it prefers speculation on the basis of this data to philosophical reflection. Perhaps the greatest difference would be that whereas noocosmology is methodologically based intuitive eclecticism, astrosociology relies on quantifiable data, empirical observation, and takes no issue with the existing coordinates of reality (political, economic, and social structures).

Toward the end of the first decade of the 21st century, a different approach in social sciences and humanities joined the discussions foregrounding the nexus of outer space and society. For instance, Alexander C.T. Geppert's team of cultural historians from the Emmy Noether Research Group *The Future in the Stars: European Astroculture and Extraterrestrial Life in the 20th Century*, based at Freie Universität, Berlin, produced a number of publications on the cultural history and construction of European astrofuturisms in the 20th century. Apart from cultural histories of space exploration, culture-oriented discussions, such as monographs authored by e.g. Marie Lathers (2010) and Dario Llinares (2011), and edited volumes, such as the one edited by Eva Maurer, Julia Richers et al. (2011), also focus on the role culture played and plays in our presumptions, attitudes, and actions directed into outer space. If we provisionally group these approaches under the umbrella term "cultural studies of outer

space", we can characterize them as approaches that ground outer space in its cultural and socio-political coordinates. This allows them to reveal how space exploration is conditioned, what is at stake in this conditioning, and how "earthly" a lot of the space aspirations of the past century have actually been. This position of enunciation is closest to the so-called analytical position, where neither a relapse into objectivism or into subjectivist solipsism are deemed acceptable, no more than the so-called worldview stance that conflates both.

In sum, all of the three academic approaches to the legacy of the beginning of the space age are in a way reminiscent of noocosmology: not only due to their object of study, but also in their approaches to it. In contrast to noocosmology, as I will point out in the following paragraph, however, these approaches tend to remain coherent in the epistemology and goals of their projects. In the case of post-gravity art, the main question is that of subjectivity and performativity in outer space; in the case of astrosociology, the question is that of economic sustainability; cultural studies of outer space demonstrate how "earthly" space programmes and aspirations really are. Noocosmology, on the other hand, conflates all of these dimensions, veiling them with a notion of a so-called metaconnection between the human, the world, and the universe; between ancient Greek philosophy and Russian cosmism; between cosmism and (Russian) security studies; and between science and worldview. It is this conflation that is at once alarming (particularly with the overt reliance on ideas based on the authority of military secret services), and worthy of analytical attention.

Scrutinizing Noocosmology: Form, Structure, and Content

While noocosmology is a very recent and underresearched phenomenon, its founders make it clear from the very outset that it is envisioned as a contribution to the academic arena. Yet, the official definition that I have quoted in the introductory section, and which is provided as generally accepted[11] and non-negotiable on the main website of this "discipline", raises certain questions. It

11 No particular author is cited at this point, so one can assume that there is a general consensus regarding the definition at least among the founders of noocosmology. According to the website, these are General Lieutenant in the reserve, academician Aleksey Iu. Savin, General-major in reserve, Federal Protective Service of the Russian Federation Boris K. Ratnikov, Professor Eduard E. Godik, Doctor of Physics and Mathematical Sciences, Consultant in innovation technologies, Veteran of the 9th Administration of the KGB, President of the National Association of Bodyguards (NAB) of Russia Dmitrii N. Fonarev,

does not seem to do away with the very basic "What is noocosmology?" question. Rather, the cited definition points to an internal discrepancy between its scientific, or at the very least academic, form and its contents. The content aligns noocosmology closer to mysticism and esoterism, or even new religious movements (NRMs), with its references to higher intelligence, and new knowledge available through contact with spiritual beings, etc. This opens up several possible starting points for inquiry into the phenomenon. It could, for example, be discussed in the context of the esoteric and occult in Russian culture. Recent scholarship (both in Russia and abroad) has convincingly argued for links between the rise of occult and esoteric doctrines in Russia (and the former Russian empire) and crises in trust for current dominant political structures and their doctrines (cf. Burmistrov 2012, Menzel 2012, Belyayev 2012). Yet noocosmology seemingly defies this trend, advocated by, as will be developed further, professionals who are or have been important members of Soviet and Russian security services (see the *Biographies* section of *Noocosmology* [2014]). As will be shown in this text, noocosmology does not seem to aspire to present itself as any sort of "alternative" doctrine that would require a radical change in worldview for it to be accepted.

Alternatively, one could analyse noocosmology in the context of NRMs in Russia, which have a rather unfavourable status, as has been argued by, for example, Foxlee and Williams (2009, 211-225) and Williams (2009, 227-247).[12] The very definition of noocosmology cited above, with its many references to conjoining science, religion, and philosophy, and its ability to provide access and contact with higher spiritual beings, hints at the fact that it might be an emergent local variant of teachings such as scientology.[13] However, noocosmology is not initially positioned as a spiritual teaching. Rather, it is situated as intervening into the field of the academia, and it appears that there is an attempt to position it as a science with a certain Russian philosophical heritage.

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and Arkadii Aseiev, Founder of the Noocosmology website with a PhD in Technical Sciences, research associate of the Kurchatov National Research Institute, Moscow.

12 The position of NRMs in Russia was to a large extent made worse by a new law on religion adopted in 1997 that favours the Russian Orthodox Church and does not acknowledge religious movements that have not been present in Russia for at least 15 years, denying them rights and status.

13 It is worth mentioning here that The Church of Scientology never managed to grow popular in Russia: it encountered many problems with the local authorities, who accused it of various types of misconduct, such as tax evasion, and was subject to stark media and governmental attacks that eventually led to it being labelled as a totalitarian sect that induces psychological harm (Krylova 2001 in Williams 2009, 245). After its introduction in 1992, it had to close its Hubbard Center in Moscow in 2001 (Krylova 2001 in Williams 2009, 246).

This is why I would like to grant some attention to the basic assumptions, scope, and aims of this self-proclaimed scientific discipline. The analysis, reliant on the core texts of the noocosmological initiative, which are available at its main website <http://noocosmology.ru>, will revolve around three dimensions of the project: its formal characteristics, its contents, and its scope and aims, or, in other words, its trajectory.

Let us first return to the definition of the project available at its main website: according to it, we are dealing with a "new metaphysics", which draws on concepts from other sciences in order to provide new discoveries and deeper knowledge about the cosmos, using a special method, "metacontact", developed by Russian military specialists (Noocosmology 2014). Despite these overt references to metaphysics, which seem to be understood in the manner of 19th century philosophy, as in aiming at something transcendent, beyond the realm of human reason and understanding, in terms of form noocosmology is clearly mimicking modern academic disciplines, providing us with a set of definitions, assembled in a glossary, as well as a set of foundational texts, available on the website. It positions itself as an emergent science: the project, mainly accessible at <http://noocosmology.ru>, was first mentioned in 2012 and yet, despite its novelty, it appears to have engaged a number of Russian academics from various disciplines (physicist Godik, ecologist Aseiev, security studies expert Savin). The advocates of noocosmology regularly publish in the *Voprosy bezopasnosti* [*Security Issues*] scientific journal,[14] have authored and co-authored monographs (mainly in the field of security studies, focusing on the Soviet and Russian secret services and their interest and achievements in metaphysics, e.g. *Metacontact* (2013), written by Fonarev, published by Romanian Arad Press), and try to keep in touch with a more general audience via seminars, video lectures and other relevant published materials, and a general call for contributions, questions, and expressions of interest in the project:

The website includes a list of the founding members of noocosmology, which is a transdisciplinary group of scholars that includes philosophers (Vladimir G. Azhaka), sociologists (Anton A. Savin), a psychologist and psychoanalyst (Valentina I. Sidorova), and several intellectuals with a background in security services (Boris K. Ratnikov, Dmitrii N. Fonarev, Alexei Iu. Savin). The website also includes a list of partners, which involve, tellingly, the main Russian website on Russian cosmism, a project on Global Evolutionism, Systems Theory, Holism, and Panpsychism, and several security service websites, such

14 The journal first appeared in 2012, and was published as *Natsional'naya bezopasnost'* [*National Security*] until 2014. It is abstracted in ERIH Plus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, as well as the Russian Research Index (RINTS).

as *Grey Shadows,* an association of bodyguards, and the *Qsec. Security Issues* web portal and scientific journal. Furthermore, there is a section with a general description of the discipline, a section entitled "Science" with links to most of the relevant articles and specified as being scientific on the website, and a glossary of terms. As close as this type of structure might be to an emergent scientific project and research spectrum, noocosmology does not, at least on the website, exhibit any sort of links to or collaboration with scientific institutes apart from the abovementioned security studies web portal.[15] Furthermore, it does not particularly advertise any possible research and scientific engagement on the part of its founding members, apart from their recent publications, the nature of which remains slightly unclear: although being classified as scientific, these texts do not adhere to the standards of scientific publications in terms of the verifiability of their findings or the coherence of their methodologies, and are rather popular-scientific books, aimed to convince a wider audience. Some of this lack of clarity may, of course, be explained by the novelty of the project and its attempts to establish itself as an independent discipline; however, certain peculiarities in discourse point to the potential insufficiency of this explanation:

Let us take the above as a cue to turn from the most evident characteristics of noocosmology, its form, to its content and structural relations. Although one might speculate that the ambitions of the project are not restricted to, or not primarily meant to be, scientific and research-based in nature, this point is not entirely self-evident, if one follows the definition provided, which states that "uniting and integrating the ideas of other sciences, it is able to lead to new discoveries, to let man approach knowledge in the sphere of the cosmos[16]" (*Noocosmology* 2014).

The English version of the website also summarizes the site's "mission", which is:

> to spread scientific approach towards understanding of Integrity of Man and Cosmos using young science – Noocosmology; to form new type of conscious/ness/ in the society, which will help to unite all people in the

15 For the purposes of this text, security studies is understood as it is conceived in Russian scholarship, i.e. in the *Voprosy bezopasnosti* (*Security issues*) journal. The journal discusses security as a psychological, sociological, economic, and (geo)political category, relating it to human "wellbeing" and "natural instincts" (*Voprosy bezopasnosti* 2015).

16 Ноокосмология – это современная научная система мировоззрения, которая способна объяснить единство человека с Космосом. Объединяя в себе представления других наук, она способна привести к новым открытиям, приблизить человека к познаниям в области Космоса.

> world and show them the way to happiness, which allows preserving our planet from destruction by people (Noocosmology 2014).

Evidently, the key signifiers used in the definitions above are "worldview", "science", "oneness"/"integrity", and "way to happiness". The definitive articles (excerpts are given below), which are meant to position noocosmology as a fully-fledged science, that this axiological stance implies the possibility of an unquestionable definition of, for example, happiness, and the possibility of a science that merges with "worldview". A number of intellectuals have critiqued this view of science, including Freud (1933), whose interpretation of worldview, or *Weltanschauung,* reveals that it is a homogenizing, totalizing gesture of the Master signifier, which is not in the least similar to the research ethics of science. According to noocosmologists, noocosmology:

> synthesizes the fundamental ideas of various natural, social, and technical sciences, and presents an interdisciplinary direction of scientific inquiry, which is of worldview, natural scientific, and general scientific importance. Noocosmology should be viewed as a general scientific problem that greatly surpasses the framework of any particular science[17] (Noocosmology 2014).

In the context of the abovementioned conflation of science, objective reality, and worldview, this explicit stress on the fact that noocosmology should be regarded as a "scientific problem" is highly problematic. The structure of the argument is reminiscent of scientological argumentation, which merges religious (or rather quasi-religious) structures and authority with references to science. Noocosmology posits itself as a science, but it does not address a scientific research problem. Rather, it seeks to provide a certain roadmap for a future of collective happiness, which requires both individual and collective effort. Furthermore, in order for the roadmap to work, its basic coordinates should not be questioned, as I will try to demonstrate below.

Noocosmology clearly has a specific agenda, which hinges on the definitions cited above, as well as on a set of axioms, principles, and governing laws. The agenda may be rephrased in the following points. Firstly, noocosmology

17 Ноокосмология, синтезирующая фундаментальные представления естественно научных, общественных и технических групп наук, выступает комплексным междисциплинарным направлением научного поиска, имеющим мировоззренческое, естественнонаучное и общенаучное значение.Ноокосмология должна рассматриваться в качестве общенаучной проблемы, далеко выходящей за рамки какой-либо отдельной науки.

strives for oneness, complete integration of a) man and nature; b) discourses of various scientific disciplines; and c) two positions of enunciation: worldview and science. The last of these pairs, namely the conflation of worldview and science, would presumably render subjectivist and analytical, critical positions obsolete. Furthermore, this radical integration seems to hinge on an assumption that it is possible to find a *way*, i.e. a universally valid path that results in happiness, envisaged as something that requires an "expansion of the limits of cognition and knowledge of the Mind and of general processes of evolution to cosmic dimensions"[18] (*Noocosmology* 2014). The main task of noocosmology is defined as "expanding human capabilities, psychologically, spiritually, morally, and energetically preparing man for knowing the cosmos in its primal form."[19] This agenda is mainly backed by loose references to, and isolated quotes from, certain philosophers (e.g. Plato, Schelling, Vernadskii), who are, it appears, quoted on the basis of authority ("great philosopher so-and-so"), in the manner of popular scientific texts. Most systematic references are made to the Russian cosmists who are, in spite of much controversy in recent historical and philosophical debates, regarded as a "tradition of thought", a "group", a set of thinkers representing a clear agenda, which is to show that the human mind has the ability to eventually master nature and gain access to certain "secrets of the universe", such as eternal life and happiness. However, if cosmist texts of the early 20th century may and should be interpreted against the backdrop of the widely spread romanticization of the potential of technological progress, today the texts barely allow for literal, word-for-word interpretation if they are to be treated as philosophical meditations.

Noocosmology exploits its founders' connections to academia and the format of academic discussion and research agenda in order to promote ideas that are in fact highly reminiscent of agendas that are usually discussed in research addressing the tradition of occult, esoteric, and mysticist thought in Russia. The fact that noocosmologists often refer to philosophers such as Vernadskii, Fiodorov, and Soloviov, citing broad summaries of what they consider to be their key ideas, supports this argumentation.[20] Young (2012), Hagemeis-

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18 расширение границ познания Разумного и общих процессов эволюции до космических масштабов.

19 Задача Ноокосмологии – расширить возможности человека, подготовить его психологически, духовно, нравственно и энергетически к познанию Космоса в его изначально виде.

20 Here is a telling example of the noocosmologists' mode of reappropriating the cosmists' ideas: "Plato's ideas were developed in a very original way by Russian cosmists – Konstantin E. Tsyolkovskii and N.F. Fiodorov in the end of XIX – beginning of XX century. They took many approaches from Plato. First, the postulate of genetic entity of man and Cosmos; second, the belief in the probability of the leaning of Cosmos; third, the idea of the

ter (2012), and Laruelle's (2012) discussions of the esoteric and the mysticist nature of the cosmists' ideas also point to an ideational consistency between them and the noocosmologists. The main divergence between the tradition of Russian esoteric and mysticist thought and noocosmology, however, lies in the fact that noocosmology takes no issue with dominant political ideas or academic debates. In this regard, it appears to be a rather conformist project, which transpires through the organic way in which the writings of its advocates fit into journals such as *Voporosy bezopasnosti*, which complies with a rather traditional conception of politics, tying the writing to the nation-state and its cultural and ethnic particularities. This aspect is not explicitly emphasized in the noocosmological project, but it is good to keep it in mind in order to better understand their texts.

The Noocosmological Vision: Metacontact for Happiness, Progress, and Security

The noocosmological project chooses to focus on the cosmists' utopianism and call for "a roadmap to happiness". They also remain in the cosmists' *Zeitgeist*: noocosmologists do not find it problematic, for instance, that many of the cosmists' ideas, namely their visions of how human life in the future (in space, perhaps) might be organized, are, in many respects, anthropocentric, nationalist, and patriarchal.[21] Noocosmologists are not at all concerned with these issues in their attempts to elevate the motivational utopianism of the

harmonic coexistence of Cosmos and man; fourth, the belief that creation by the Lord is not a play, but necessity; fifth, the belief that it depends on a man, would he acknowledge prototype of creation of himself and Cosmos; sixths, the assurance that cognition of Cosmos as first copy of the perfect sample is a step towards learning the heart of the matter. Russian cosmists predicted the future. They anticipated dramatic change, observed by modern generations: change of the scale of creative work, globalization of social processes, required for further evolution of humankind. According to cosmists, the new step of evolution supposed activity on the part of human society. Further the development of Cosmos itself and humankind depends on the creative activity of people, their ability to cooperate, undergo war and quarrels, and influence natural and historical processes. Let's look closer at the thoughts of Vladimir I. Vernadskii; he was thinker, first of all, a representative of Russian cosmists. He combined philosophical and scientific knowledge and created a modern scientific worldview, and invented life in the structural classification of Cosmos. The phenomenon of dissymmetry of the living organisms (principle of Curie-Pasteur) was for him one of the main arguments, proving the universal cosmic origin of life" (Noocosmology 2014).

21 Here, Fiodorov's criticism of Western European philosophy and gender roles, also upheld in Tsiolkovskii's views on the organization of future society, e.g. in Young (2012).

cosmists to the level of a scientific agenda. Their introductory texts (i.e. *Noocosmology as Objective Reality* [Aseiev 2010]) establish a set of "principles" and "axioms" for noocosmology. These categories are enveloped by the two basic "laws" of noocosmology: that happiness is the primary goal and law of all existence, and the premise that "evolutionary progression", i.e. a motion oriented "forward", governs all existence. These two "laws" are not grounded in any particular reference, but, rather, backed by the abovementioned "axioms" and "principles", apparently derived from the idea of "metacontact" that lies at the heart of the project, and from an eclectic collection of references to various influential thinkers of different schools of thought, disciplines, and backgrounds. In the noocosmological glossary of terms, "metacontact", achieved by the technique of "metachanneling", is defined as a:

> technology of interaction with the mental environment inspired by Cosmos, allowing a person in an altered state of consciousness to receive information from space database, accessible to operator. This technology was created by Soviet military scientists in the mid-nineties of the last century. It is based on the deliberate use of hidden resources of subconscious of the modern human.
>
> Using this technology one can get almost any information as thought-form, transferred to verbal speech or automatic writing. Modern official science, recognizing the existence of this phenomenon is not able to explain it rationally; therefore, its position on this issue is based on the silent contemplation of a detached observer. However the closed [sheltered] military institutions and civil specialists in their practical work worldwide use methods based on these technologies. (Noocosmology 2014).

This is key to the evaluation of the entire project. In a similar way to other space-related projects within the academia or in dialogue with academic debates (i.e. astrosociology, cultural studies of outer space, and post-gravity art), noocosmology is grounded in a certain idea, namely, an axiomatic position regarding the future, socio-cultural norms, and ethics. This idea stems from a certain definition of *truth*. Here, knowledge is evidently not the Platonic "true justified belief", but plainly belief in the methods, skill, and accuracy of an agenda set out by "closed military institutions and civil specialists". What is peculiar, however, is not so much the choice of the meaning-assigning authority, but, rather, the authorities' blatant, overt tendency to present a complete, overarching narrative with no potential loopholes: these are rendered impos-

sible by the fact that the narrative is grounded in "secrecy" by the services that have access to metacontact.

This distinct relation to secrecy, coupled with reliance on the authority of military institutions, distinguishes noocosmology from a wide range of NRMs, which, similarly to noocosmology, emphasize the importance of personal development in tune with nature, the harmony of the micro- and macrocosms (humankind, Earth, and the universe), and give guidance for harmonizing one's various levels of energy, aspects of the soul, etc. Noocosmology might offer the same types of explanations about the world, and offer guidance with reference to similar concepts (e.g. the soul, energy flows, and so on), but it is in equal measure built around the idea of metacontact and the work of Soviet and Russian secret services. The Soviet and Russian secret services appear to be elevated to the level of a supreme authority, which has access to knowledge that is so qualitatively distant that it is incomprehensible to the average citizen, similar to the elements of religious teachings such as taboos and commandments.

The average individual is thus left to stare in awe, accept, and obey. In the preface to his book *Metacontact* (2013, summary available at *Noocosmology* [2014]), former KGB associate Fonarev, who is not referenced anywhere as an expert in the humanities, but figures rather as a state intelligence expert, makes a clear point in underscoring the positive role of local secret services in developing the idea and methods of metacontact, and claims that, with the publication of the book, all of these materials are to become accessible to everyone. However, it is unclear how average individuals are to interpret and apply methods previously developed in and for special forces, requiring special equipment and conditions. Furthermore, Fonarev's statement that "there is nothing secret or forbidden" in the book hardly implies that it is meant to serve as a complete archive of the work of Soviet and Russian secret services in the field of paranormal activity. Rather, the book seems to serve as a kind of introduction work for anyone who wishes to become acquainted with links to the paranormal, and for showing the secret services' central, priest-like role in these matters.

Throughout the book, the secret services remain in the function of interpreter of "holy texts" and "hidden higher knowledge" for common people. This is also supported by the clear link to the Russian variant of security studies as discussed in the aforementioned *Voprosy bezopasnosti* journal, i.e. as a discipline primarily concerned with questions pertaining to national and personal safety, and the clear conviction of the founders of noocosmology that humanity needs guidance in his actions. The "axioms" of noocosmology refer to the "Creator", and to "general principles of human morality", whereas the article on

the human soul compartmentalizes the latter, distinguishing between the "animal", "human", and "divine" regions that comprise the soul, and expressing clear preference for a structure that privileges the "divine" – the region of goodness and intellect – rather than of emotions (the "human") or drives, such as lust (the "animal" region). Furthermore, the "principles" of noocosmology emphasize "responsibility" toward oneself and the world, the present and future, warn of the "harmfulness" of "extremes", and state that the agenda of noocosmology should be taken into account in child-rearing (cf. Aseiev and Savin 2015 in *Noocosmology* 2015).

The promise of noocosmology is thus not only tied to a set of strict, instructive principles, but also to an attitude directed toward the community, and to a certain faithfulness and fidelity not only to a set of ideas or guiding principles, but also to a set of state secret intelligence institutions and experts that have founded and adhere to these ideas and principles. In this sense, the references of the noocosmological project no longer appear as an eclectic mix of famous thinkers, but rather as a carefully constructed framework, secured by a double bind of authority: these very thinkers combined with the "work of the Soviet and Russian secret services". Furthermore, the project is not devoid of a populist orientation: apart from the fact that it announces itself as a "worldview" prompted by the beginning of the space age and the extant meditations of a number of scientists and philosophers, the main issues at stake that it provides "answers" to in its recent publications are love, happiness, the meaning of life, and security.

The choice of issues under scrutiny is most likely no coincidence: insofar as it positions itself as a new "worldview", noocosmology has to attract the attention of "everyman", and it seems to attempt to do just that by addressing issues that are broadly discussed in the popular scientific press, which may be found in the "self-improvement", "personality building", or "lifestyle" sections in general bookstores. However, noocosmology does more than simply describe these issues: it claims to guarantee insights into these issues using its innovative method of "channelling" (or "metacontact") that allegedly establishes contact with "Higher Intelligence". Despite the unconventionality of these methods with regard to contemporary scientific standards and conventions, noocosmology tends to position itself somewhere at the crossroads of religion, modern science, and philosophy, cunningly exploiting incoherencies in its form, which is academic, and content, which is esoteric, and, unusually for esoteric and mysticist thought, tied to state structures, such as academic circles, journals, and political concepts such as definitions of security.

Conclusive Remarks: The Noocosmological Subject and the Question of Securitization

In the paragraphs above, I have tried to demonstrate how noocosmology appears to be attempting to place itself into a new, apparently yet unoccupied niche:[22] a worldview that draws its authority from science rather than politics or religion, and that engages individuals while at the same time demanding that they be active, even activist members of the community. I have also pointed out that the project depends on the conflation of promise and trust in secret agents who have access to secret knowledge. With recent history in mind, and accounting for a certain measure of skepticism in the Russian audience to new myth-making, especially when it is attempted with reference to the achievements of agents such as the Soviet secret services,[23] it is relevant to now address the following question: How does this project conceptualize subjectivity, i.e. what kind of agency is granted to human beings within the noocosmological project?

The question may, of course, legitimately be posed to all of the space-related reflexive projects mentioned in this contribution: post-gravity art, cultural studies of outer space, and astrosociology. All of these projects revolve around the pivotal event at the dawn of the space age, as I pointed out with reference to two factors. Firstly, all of the initiatives somehow embrace the beginning of the space age, operating from a point where spaceflight has already become reality. Secondly, the case of post-gravity art demonstrates that the dawn of the space age may be seen as a pivotal, revolutionary event (or one of such events) that redefines the coordinates of the subject, uncoupling it from "being human".

Noocosmology offers an altogether different story. There are two notable differences between the 19th and early 20th century Russian cosmists' ideas: one is the noocosmological insistence on the scientific nature of their framework. This statement somehow distances the field from esoteric and spiritualist discourse, but, again, only does so in form and format, and not in content.

22 The reasons why this niche is unoccupied are manifold; one of them is the circumstances that NRMs such as scientology are forbidden in Russia.

23 This estimation has been made with reference to the abundance of post-Soviet Russian and late Soviet popular culture that seems to use this incredulity toward mythmaking as its driving force. In relation to secret services and the Soviet space programme, Aleksei German's film *Bumazhnyi soldat* (*The Paper Soldier*) (2008) and Aleksei Fedorchenko's mockumentary *Pervye na Lune* (*First Men on the Moon*) (2005), as well as Viktor Pelevin's novel *Omon Ra* (1991) are worth mentioning. Of course, I am far from claiming that all Russian popular culture consumers are necessarily critical in their perceptive.

The second difference is noocosmology's insistence on the importance of the issue of security, which is facilitated by two factors. The first is a strong reliance on the tradition of the Soviet secret services' preoccupation with finding ways to establish contact with "higher intelligence": this circumstance creates a narrative that connects the (state) military secret services with access to superior, higher knowledge. If this connection is supported by the very framework of the teaching, it establishes an association between state military structures and knowledge, which is inaccessible to average civilians, and elevates state military authority to the level of an ecclesiastical structure. In turn, the role thereby accorded to the average civilian is that of an obedient, passive subject, whose main concern is making sure that he or she is playing an adequate role in the collectively conceptualized cosmos. Positioning this idea alongside noocosmology's insistence on the cultural particularity (if not superiority) of the Russian metaphysical tradition is the key that opens up the most controversial aspect of the noocosmological project. Namely, its structure and contents not only support, but elaborate and provide the mechanisms to sustain a conception of security which is centred around the nation state and ensured by military structures with direct access to "objective reality".

It follows clearly from my analysis that noocosmology envisages a transformation of the global order: after all, it aims at providing a roadmap to happiness for all, of all life. This transformation does not have much to do with the exceptionality of spaceflight as postulated by, e.g. Lacan and post-gravity art; it seems that spaceflight and the promise of technology are interpreted in a rather obscuritanist manner: by establishing a discursive framework that wishes to totalize reality, grasp it with no respect for the limitations of the various modes of knowledge. The subject interpellated by such explanations does not have the option of questioning the basic axioms, epistemology, and the scope of the explanation: he or she is simply expected to believe in it, to take its validity for granted. The subject addressed by noocosmology seems to be nothing but an amazingly passive subject, ignoring any kinds of differences in discourse. This type of subject does not, it appears, find it the least bit problematic to conflate belief, critical evaluation, aspirations, and desires. At the same time, this kind of superficiality at the very heart of the project, as well as its outlined authoritative tone, limit its potential audience to relatively uncritical readers, and not to the scientific community.

In its present state, noocosmology is marked by tensions between form and content on several levels. Its formal coordinates target a broad audience that might be impressed by form, which mimics the conventions of the academic community, whereas its content and agenda are clearly aimed at uncritical readers unconcerned with the standards adhered to by modern science in

terms of methodological rigour and coherence. Secondly, its scientific form is not supported by its superficial and eclectic reference base. It uses references to certain scientists and philosophers in a rather poetic manner, implying that they are brought together by the insights of Russian intellectuals, such as Vernadskii. This implied supposition once again undermines the scientific format of the discussion, and makes one wonder about the reasons for the noocosmologists' persistent references to questions of explicitly political importance, such as security, as well as about the reasons for the rigidity of their eclectic conceptual framework.

In the context of the contemporary debates on the outer space-related issues within the social sciences and humanities, the latter is limited if it aims at becoming an actor in the international research community, for several reasons. It does not provide technical, applicable insights, in the way that, for example, astrosociology does. Furthermore, noocosmology is poetic rather than historically accurate, and therefore the field will find it difficult to address questions currently tackled by cultural studies of outer space. Its poetic and seemingly pro-active approach, however, is not conceptually avant-gardist, such as that of post-gravity art. Noocosmology has a much more esoteric agenda, aimed at providing a set of "new" values for the contemporary age. Furthermore, these "new" values are mere re-articulations of ideas on social order elaborated by the cosmists over a hundred years ago, and nothing in the noocosmological discourse demonstrates that they are now recounted with any less utopianism.

At the same time, noocosmology, which aspires to be perceived as a self-help manual for a better future, and a scientific discipline, is the product of the Russian security services. In this sense, it is a development that might have further repercussions. Fedor (2011, 181) insightfully argues that "the danger is that by cloaking itself in spiritual rhetoric, the FSB /(the Russian Federal Security Service)/ will not only attain moral responsibility, but will effectively place itself beyond the reach of any legitimate criticism, scrutiny or control." The noocosmological project is completely in tune with this prediction. Aside from pointing to a further variegation of the FSB's approach to spiritual security, presenting a slight shift away from the rhetoric of the Russian Orthodox Church, noocosmology may be viewed as the Russian security services' own version of an NRM. Presumably, the fact that the project was conceived and is proliferated by members and former members of the FSB will render it exempt from the persecutions encountered by other NRMs.

The popular resonance of the noocosmological project remains limited for the time being, restricted to internet discussion forums such as livejournal.ru and occasional series of public seminars. At these seminars, which are

conducted across Russia, the authors of the noocosomological teaching educate the interested public on the spiritual meaning of life and the causes of social and personal discontent, presenting noocosmology as a viable alternative social system and spiritual teaching. The international recognition of the project remains even more limited and is restricted to the noocosmologists' claims to have experience with contacting "other forms of consciousness". Boris K. Ratnikov's article "Who reigns the world" is featured on the website of UK-based UFO researcher Tony Topping, who had allegedly had numerous UFO encounters, and has received a certain amount of attention from the British media over the past two decades. Topping presents the noocosmologists as "Russia's psychic spies" (Topping 2014). Ratnikov's article refers to the FSB's method of "metachanneling" in order to ground his vision of the underlying tenants of social structures and antagonisms. Once again, the article elaborates the notion of a higher consciousness ruling the world, a consciousness "of the dead" which contemporary people perceive to be God (Ratnikov 2014). According to Ratnikov, this information, contained in "ancient manuscripts" was initially disclosed to high-ranking politicians, who did not intend for it to be leaked to the public. From a clearly disapproving standpoint, the article claims that the basic values of contemporary society, such as human freedom, and socio-economic structures, such as capitalist democracy, are parts of this regime "of the dead".

While the critical reader will quickly realize that the noocosmological project is little more than a poorly veiled conspiracy theory, structured to function as a new religious movement (NRM), it also bears some broader significance. It presents a novel attempt of the FSB to formalize and grant the authority of "scientific argument" to a conservative socio-political agenda constructed around "spiritualist" convictions, designed to convince individuals seeking answers to all-encompassing questions about the meaning of life and the fate of humanity. At the same time, it promotes the Russian security services, extending their field of expertise to securing spiritual well-being, and attempting to position them as a spiritual leader, using the heritage of Russian cosmism and the Soviet secret services' authoritative voice and their experience with attempting to contact "higher consciousness" to fill the function played by the Russian Orthodox Church in more mainstream political commentaries on the need for spiritual security.

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