

The historical memory of Russians as a source of anti-Western sentiment

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ABSTRACT

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the opposition between European history and Russian imperial history, as well as Soviet history, accelerated the process of losing the myths of historical narrative. The analysis of this experience has become the subject of developments in modern Russia concerning the so-called information-psychological weapons. "Historical politics" should protect the traditional perception of Russian historical myths, social values and national heroes. The dominant is the asymmetric mirror attitude towards the liberal West as the antipode of Russian civilization. This did not prevent Russian dictators from modernizing Russia through cluster westernization. The misunderstanding of the imperial mentality by the elite and society forms the matrix of Russian historical memory. The anti-Western myth has become a mechanism of social consensus in Russia. The degree of anti-Western sentiment varies at the levels of official collective historical memory, the historical memory of social cohorts, and individual historical memory. The greatest dissonance is observed between individual and collective memories. The Second World War remains at the center of Russian historical memory. This story is used to legitimize the policy of modern Russia. Historical memory has become an instrument of geopolitical revenge for the Russian authorities. The resumption of control over the territory of Ukraine was the idea of returning to the myth of the "Kyiv roots" of the Russian empire. Sociological data show that a significant part of Russian society remains Soviet people in terms of the type of thinking. This phenomenon manifests itself despite the wide availability of information about the cost of revolutions and Stalinism. The society which is in a transitive state, continues to identify itself with the Soviet historical memory. Russia and the West claim the monopoly of their principles of the universality of the values of their own civilization. This is the root cause of anti-Westernism and Russophobia. Freedom from the West, including in the sphere of historical memory, is gradually becoming an attempt to gain freedom from freedom.

KEYWORDS: anti-Western sentiment, historical memory, historical politics, Russia.

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Introduction. Historical science is different from historical memory. Memory is a subjective phenomenon. The German sociologist Max Weber developed the concept of rejecting value judgments as the basis of a scientific picture of the world in the humanities (Volker, 2010). In the 20s of the 21st century, there is a departure from this tradition in the sphere of propaganda, wars of historical memory, postmodern post-truth. Actually, this trend became noticeable in the late 1980s. During the years of perestroika, comparative studies of the history of the USSR with European history became an important social engineering project to change the stereotypes of perception of Soviet history of 1917–1991, and then most of the thousand-year Russian history.

The analysis of this experience has become the subject of developments in modern Russia of information and psychological weapons. At the strategic level, these technologies of the “politics of history” are designed to protect the traditions of perception of Russian historical myths, social values and national heroes. Accordingly, uncontrolled public discussions on these topics or attempts to discredit them are viewed in Russia as psychological special operations that can contribute to a gradual change in the entire coordinate system of collective historical memory. Russian illiberal elites and public opinion led by them perceive the protection of traditional (pre-postmodern) historical memory as an outpost of protecting mass consciousness from external information influence in the context of so-called network wars or hybrid wars.

Analysis of the main research problems. Historical memory is the basis of the identity of any society. A. Etkind in the monograph “Internal colonization. Imperial experience of Russia” analyzed the process of formation of the official imperial historical narrative (Etkind, 2013). A monographic project for the creation of “the history of people, not the history of processes and forces”, implemented under the editorship of the Russian historian A. Zubov in the book of the group of authors “History of Russia. 20th century: 1939–2007” ends with a quote from the Russian philosopher Ivan Ilyin: “We, the Russian people, are called not only to know the history of our fatherland, but also to see in it the struggle of our people for its original spiritual face” (Russian history, 2011, p. 614). Of course, such originality remains a phenomenon of an asymmetrical mirror attitude towards the liberal West as the antipode of Russian civilization.

In its extreme forms, such a Russia–West opposition can lead to what Vladimir Kantor formulates as “rejection of Europeanism – a path beyond history” (Kantor, 2004). However, Russia’s greatest dictators have forcibly modernized Russia through its limited cluster westernization. However, it is symbolic that the Stalinist struggle against cosmopolitanism unexpectedly found itself in the same diagnosis of that historical era as the conceptual developments of the ideologists of the “eternally yesterday” (in relation to Soviet memory) representatives of the white movement. In 1948–1954 Ivan Ilyin (1883–1954), the ideologist of the Russian All-Military Union, systematized Russia’s historical claims to the West in a series of articles. “Western Europe does not know us,” wrote I. Ilyin, “because the Russian language is alien to it. Russian (Orthodox) religiosity is alien to Western Europe, the Slavic–Russian contemplation of the world, nature and man is alien to it. A Russian person lives, first of all, with his heart and imagination, and only then with his will and mind. (Ilyin, 2011, p.84–85).

Ludmila Dymerskaya-Tsigelman analyzed interesting characteristics of the spiritual origins of National Socialism and Russian communism in reflections on this topic by Thomas Mann and Nikolai Berdyaev (Dymerskaya-Zygelman, p. 1). On the example of these thinkers, significant for German and Russian cultures, we see the consonance of the conceptual ideological matrices of totalitarian regimes.

However, the historical origins of these regimes in Germany and Russia are, of course, different. The Eurasian civilization specificity is organically superimposed on the Russian tradition of authoritarianism or totalitarianism. “People,” writes Russian sinologist V. Malyavin, “tend to turn history into an illustration of their fictions about themselves” (Malyavin, 2015, p. 18). According to this researcher, the fundamental difference between Russia and Europe is that Europe “was able to develop – the only one of all world civilizations – a consistently critical, in essence, transcultural self-awareness” (Malyavin, 2015, p. 20). Therefore, sums up V. Malyavin, “Russian history is the result of a systematic misunderstanding by the educated elite of society of the foundations of the Russian way of life” (Malyavin, 2015, p. 21). In particular, “history in Eurasia does not have a linear development, it consists of single, but enduring events, self-sufficient cycles that occur outside of chronology, in fact metahistorical” (Malyavin, 2-15, p. 67). In addition, the author aptly notes, “Russian history is the result of a systematic misunderstanding by Russian society of its own foundations” (Malyavin, 2015, p. 121). At the intersection of such dialectical tendencies of misunderstanding by the elite and society of their own foundations, a matrix of Russian historical memory is being formed.

The historical justification for the phenomenon of Russophobia in the West was presented by Leonid Luks in an article devoted to the problem of perception of the image of Russia by Western public opinion in the period from the victory over Napoleon to the Crimean War (Lux, p. 1). The Russian Empire broke the racist colonial narrative of the West that was taking shape in the middle of the 19th century. The anti-Western myth has become a mechanism for social consolidation in Russia. Ivan Ilyin summed up that “Europeans need a bad Russia: barbaric, in order to “civilize” it in their own way; threatening with its size, so that it can be dismembered; aggressive, in order to organize a coalition against it; reactionary, in order to justify the revolution in it and demand a republic for it; religiously corrupted in order to break into it with the propaganda of reforms or Catholicism; economically untenable to claim her unused spaces; on its raw materials, or at least on lucrative trade agreements and concessions. But, if this rotten Russia can be strategically used, then the Europeans are ready to make alliances with her and demand military efforts from her to the last drop of her blood (Ilyin I., 2011, p. 44). Proceeding from this, I. Ilyin stated that “we are not students of the West and not teachers. We are disciples of God and teachers to ourselves” (Ilyin I., 2011, p. 136).

Presenting main material. The degree of anti-Western ideas is different at the hierarchical levels of historical memory. There are three levels of historical memory: the first is officially constructed in the form of collective historical memory, the second is group collective memory, the bearers of which are certain social cohorts, and the third is individual historical memory. The greatest dissonance is observed between individual and collective historical memory. Individual historical memory is based on personal experiences and experience. Collective memory is not just the sum of individual memorial practices, but is the product of targeted propaganda efforts. The orbits of individual and collective historical memory are closest in authoritarian and totalitarian states. The past cannot be completely lived through. “Nothing is remembered so clearly as an imaginary event that happened to someone else. The

past is not so much remembered, – writes the Russian sinologist V. Malyavin, – as they are commemorated. And the monuments are actually facing the future.” (Malyavin, 2015, p. 79).

The tendency to dissect the practice of the collective memory of the Russian society about the Second World War in accordance with the current demands of the political situation remains dominant what is seen in Vladimir Medinsky’s book “War. Myths of the USSR. 1939–1945”. The book was intended to dispel Soviet and post-Soviet myths about the war (Medinsky, 2013). The Great Patriotic War is presented as the main event of the twentieth century. In the historical memory of most Russians, there was an idea that Hitler had to fight not with the regime, but with the people. Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences A. N. Sakharov, in the appendix to this edition, outlines the anti-Western attitude of Russian historical science. Although “the regime established by Peter the Great in Russia was far from the most humanistic, Russia still had access to Europe through the Baltic, and it was the largest geopolitical victory for hundreds of years that advanced Russian civilization” (Sakharov, 2013, p. 666). In Hitler’s mind, the Russian Empire was the creation of the German elite. She was for him a German state with a non-German population. This was an argument in favor of the opinion that “the Aryans, being in the minority, could conquer most of the lower races” (Sakharov, 2013, p. 356). However, this view did not take into account the specifics of the relationship between Russians and their authorities. From above comes the identification of the sovereign and God, from below the sovereign is identified with his people (Sakharov, 2013, p. 409). This was noticed back in 1839 by the French marquis de Custine. Western absolutism in legal terms talked about the succession of power, Russian absolutism focuses on the ability of the emperor to retain power, that is, to be a despot. In the view of Russian public opinion, Western civilization offers fake truth and fake justice. The West needs Russia as a “good barbarian” to fight “bad barbarians” (Sakharov, 2013, p. 434).

Soviet propaganda resented the separation of Russian history from European history. The main myths are ideas about the specifics of Russian feudalism, estates, free cities, the Renaissance, the Reformation. It turned out that there was nothing in common between European absolutism and Russian autocracy. From this point of view, the whole of Russian history is an alternation of the domination of the Avar, Khazar, Varangian, Mongol-Tatar, dogmatic Byzantine influence and, from the era of Peter the Great until the revolution of 1917, the beneficial European influence and the domination of the Baltic Germans. Only the conceptual question remains open, what kind of dominance and influence turned out to be decisive for the fate of Russia. The liberal public draws on this basis the conclusion about the primordial love of the Russian people for a slave state and that Russia was and remains a predominantly Asian country. An alternative option considers Kievan Rus, which stood as a dam in the path of a formidable migration flow from the depths of Asia, was forced to continuously repel all new hordes of nomads.

The Russian patriotic public, on the contrary, convinces public opinion that history is the true defender of Russia, for over the centuries it has tirelessly resolved in favor of Russia all the trials to which it subjects itself. After the victory in the Great Patriotic War, the official History of Diplomacy constructed the opinion of Bismarck, who allegedly said that even the defeat of Russia “will never lead to the decay

of the foundations of Russia's strength, which is based on millions of Russians themselves. These latter, even if they are dissected by international treaties, will just as quickly reunite with each other, like particles of a cut piece of mercury. This is the indestructible state of the Russian nation, strong in its climate, its spaces and its limited needs" (Sakharov, 2013, p. 103).

The history of the Great Patriotic War is used to legitimize the policy of modern Russia. The scope of European collaborationism and the far-reaching consequences of the collaboration of democracies with the Nazi regime are shown. Today's version of the "Great War brings some of the participants back to the front lines by reminding them which side they were on" (Shumeiko, 2007, p. 103). This is the basis of Russian propaganda after the start of the active phase of the offensive against Ukraine after February 24, 2022.

Each foreigner observed Russia from his own national and social point of view, noting first of all those features that contrasted with the situation in his own fatherland. Whereas in the West the Colignys and the Guises, the Red Rose and the White Rose, the Guelphs and Ghibellines could take pleasure in slaughtering each other and measuring their strength against the crown without questioning the existence of society as a whole. Russia could not grant such liberties to its ruling class if it only wanted to live. Oprichnina was an exception and a vivid manifestation of the crisis of the top due to Russia's overstrain in the Livonian War. When the contradictions escalated to the limit, Ivan the Terrible, relying on the local nobility and the old Moscow boyar families, showed these sovereigns of the Russian land that they were just as unwitting servants as the other feudal strata. Statehood strangled everything that was free in Russian life. Instead of citizens, workers and soldiers were needed. In the West, relations between the lord and the vassal, between the sovereign and the estates, between the king and his mercenary army were built on a legal basis. There was a social norm of civil and military duty. There was no such measure in Russia. Here the duty to the state is unlimited in principle, but in practice it is determined by the needs of defense. Whenever a foreign army invaded Russia, the war inevitably developed into a people's war.

Winston Churchill found that Russians have always sinned with idolatry towards their state. These words are characteristic of an Englishman proud of the Magna Carta, accustomed to looking at the state as a means of general welfare, as a kind of joint-stock company, for which its shareholders bear only limited responsibility. The Russian Empire of the times of Catherine II was neither backward nor dependent. The Russia of Nicholas I was already backward, but still in fact independent. The Russia of Alexander II tried to get rid of backwardness with the help of foreign capital, with each step it becomes more and more entangled in the nets set by him. Under Nicholas II, Russia was already completely dependent on Anglo-French capital. In revolutionary epochs, the more decisive the break with the accursed past, the more the people get the opportunity to rely on their glorious past in the struggle for a brighter future. Approximately such a picture of the historical memory of Russian society works on the image of Russia rising from its knees and returning as a pole of power to the multipolar system of international relations.

The presidential elections on March 18, 2018 showed the harmony of the historical perception of the past and, accordingly, the future of Russia by V. Putin and his voters. Putin has repeatedly spoken about the continuity and integrity of Russia's thousand-year historical path. Weak countries always hit, if a fight is inevitable, hit first. These theses define the semantic specificity of the historical memory of modern Russia, which, in its own version of events, is only defending itself from "globalizers" who seek

to deprive Russia of sovereignty and national resources. However, Russia's great-power foreign policy is being undermined by liberal domestic economic policies with only a few elements of state capitalism as a response to Western sanctions.

The conflict of interpretations of strong and weak characteristics of the historical memory of Russian society is becoming a separate instrument of information wars with those who want to build a new global order at the expense of Russia. Cognitive victory in this information war becomes a matter of a kind of auto-training of the public consciousness of Russians, as well as its protection from the influence of the global information space, in particular through control over the activities of non-profit organizations that act as foreign agents.

Historical science in Russia is actively used for ideological and propaganda purposes. On February 21, 2014, Vladimir Putin met with a group of authors who were developing the concept of a new unified Russian history textbook filled with messianic meaning. The bonds of the "Russian world", along with language and culture, faith, patriotism, are sterile historical memory. Russia positions itself as the last civilizational "bastion" of traditional Christian values. Historical memory has become an instrument of geopolitical revenge for the Russian authorities. The resumption of control over the territory of Ukraine was the idea of returning to the myth of the "Kyiv roots" of the Russian empire.

Revanchism relies on attempts to use a monopolistic interpretation of history as a basis for restoring Russia's status as a great power. The Russian elite convinced society of the need for such a political course. The Kremlin's political technologist Vladislav Surkov disguised the process of authoritarian transformation of the Russian political system under the guise of "sovereign managed democracy". In his opinion, this form of government corresponds to the ideals of the Russian "deep people" (Surkov, 2019).

The transformation of history into a totalitarian ideology justifies imperial revanchism. Vladislav Inozemtsev analyzes this feature of modern Russian ideology (Inozemtsev, 2022). An extreme manifestation of neo-fascist ideology can be found in the article by political technologist Timofey Sergeitsev "What Russia should do with Ukraine". According to the author, Russia should forcibly deprive Ukraine of its identity and forcefully turn away from European integration (Sergeitsev, 2022). In the left-wing liberal circles of American professors, the Russian war against Ukraine is defined as a fascist-type war (Snyder, 2022).

Conclusion. Russian elites, imitating reforms and outward signs of democratic procedures, are actually building a world of their own well-being next to the socio-economic ghetto in which the rest of society resides. Sociological data show that a significant part of Russian society remains Soviet people in terms of the type of thinking. This phenomenon manifests itself despite the wide availability of information about the cost of revolutions and Stalinism. The society, which is in a transitive state, continues to identify itself with the Soviet historical memory. This applies not only to the policy of remembrance of the Second World War. The world is drawn into post-truth and populism, speculations on the issues of sovereignty restrictions of globalization, xenophobia and intolerance, sharp changes in the economic situation that negatively affects incomes at the social poles of society. This process provokes the deconstruction of the

myths of collective and individual historical memory. Russia and the West claim the monopoly of their principles of the universality of the values of their own civilization. This is the root cause of anti-Westernism and Russophobia. Freedom from the West, including in the sphere of historical memory, is gradually becoming an attempt to gain freedom from freedom.

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