Inventing Tradition? Commemoration Practices of the Victory Day in Contemporary Russia.

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Thanks to my parents

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Abstract

This paper addresses the role of the state in shaping new commemoration rituals. Building a theoretical framework which combines the concept of collective memory with national holidays as social rituals which frame its content, this work considers two practices which take place on Russia's Victory Day, namely the use of St. George's ribbon and the Immortal Regiment. Tracing the historical evolution of the Victory Day, this work argues that under the current Russian regime, it became vulnerable to the intervention of a state which constantly invents new practices to sustain itself. It is argued that the use of the ribbon is an example of invented tradition, as it was introduced to meet the short-term political objectives of the regime and lacks a chain of direct continuity with the Great Patriotic War. In contrast, the case of the Immortal Regiment is more complicated because it was started as an initiative from the civil society and was appropriated by the state at a latter date, ultimately changing the meaning and purpose of the commemoration. Thus, it is argued that the Immortal Regiment was not originally an invented tradition, but a commemorative practice free from state intervention.

Introduction

The Cathedral of the Armed Forces of Russia which was established in 2020 and devoted to the "75th anniversary of the victory over Nazism and military feats of Russian people in all wars"[1] is a manifestation of the cult of the Great Patriotic War (GPW) in contemporary Russian society. The most astonishing part of this cathedral is its murals. For example, there is a mural which portrays the Victory Parade in May, 1945, where the column of soldiers carry the portrait of Joseph Stalin with a depiction of Mary and Jesus above them.[2] The cathedral is surrounded by the memorial complex "the Road of Memory" which is devoted to the GPW. This complex regularly holds reconstructions of important battles of the Red Army during the GPW. For example, the reconstruction of the battle for Reichstag is meant to be "one of the most important activities which is aimed at reminding the deeds of the fathers and grandfathers who took part in the GPW."[3] The merging of religion with a depiction of a glorious military past suggests that victory over Nazism has become a form of state religion in contemporary Russian society.

It might be evident that the topic of the GPW is cultivated by the Russian regime as it invests in production of films about the GPW, rewrites history textbooks, and passes laws which are aimed to protect the official interpretation of the GPW. A symptomatic case is the recent amendment to the law on "rehabilitation of Nazism." Regardless of a possibility of a legal prosecution for denying the Holocaust, this law also provides for the imprisonment of up to five years for those who commit the following offence: "dissemination of information expressing clear disrespect for society with regard to the days of military glory and memorable dates of Russia related to the defense of the Fatherland, as well as desecration of the symbols of Russia's military glory, insulting the memory of the defenders of the Fatherland, or humiliating the honor and dignity of a veteran of the Great Patriotic War"[4] Therefore, it can be noted that the official narrative is

[1] https://hram.mil.ru/. Accessed June 8, 2022.
[2] See appendix, picture 1
[3] rbc.ru. Last modified February 22, 2017. https://www.rbc.ru/politics/22/02/2017/58ad6ecf9a79474997ccbd75.
[4] Russian Fedration. Russian Duma. *The Law on Rehabilitation of Nazism*. Law. Adopted 10 February 2021. http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_10699/be763c1b6a1402144cabfe17a0e2d602d4bb7598/.

carefully guarded by the whole complex of measures, including law, mass culture, school education and religion. This argument may be also confirmed by the sensitivity of the Russian state when it comes to alternative versions of the GPW, especially those which present the Soviet Union in a negative context. Russian officials are constantly proclaiming the necessity of "combating falsifications" of history, especially with regards to the GPW. For example, the former minister of culture, Vladimir Medinsky became a leader of a special governmental commission which investigates cases of "falsification" of history He claimed that a "total revision of history and its falsification are conducted to change the role and position of Russia in world politics."[5] Indeed, the significance of the GPW for Russian society is hard to overestimate, as it became the primary social "bond" for uniting Russians and providing them with a coherent sense of identity.

This work takes a step further in consideration of dynamics of the collective memory regarding the GPW in Russia. In particular, this work concentrates on the Victory Day, which remains the most popular national holiday among Russians,[6] as well as new commemorative practices associated with it, namely the movement of the Immortal Regiment[7] and the use of St. George's ribbon[8]. In this respect, the paper will consider the following research question: do the St. George's ribbon and the Immortal Regiment result from a continuous transmission of collective memory regarding the GPW across generations, or as an outcome of a deliberate state policy employed to provide another source of legitimation for the regime? It will be argued that these newly established rituals demonstrate the importance of the victory over Nazism for Russia's current regime, yet they simultaneously constitute a radical departure from previous ways of commemorating Victory Day. In the case of the Immortal Regiment, it will be demonstrated that the regime has appropriated the movement, which was initially aimed at enhancing private family commemoration but was transformed into the tool for legitimizing the current regime. Also, it will

[5] "Vladimir Medinsky: Falsification of History Happens to Change the Status of Russia." vest.ru, 10 March 2020. https://www.vesti.ru/article/1865520.
[6] Volkov, Igor. "The Victory Day." Levada.ru, 8 May 2020. https://www.levada.ru/2020/05/08/den-pobedy-4/.
[7] The Immortal Reginment refers to the ritual which happens every Victory Day in which the participants march in a column with their relatives which took the part in the GPW. Also see appendix, picture 1
[8] See appendix, picture 2

be argued that the tradition of using the St. George Ribbon purposefully obscures the GPW's heritage to fulfill short-term political goals of regime's legitimation.

In doing so, this paper begins by reviewing the concept of collective memory as a phenomenon which involves not only the transmission of knowledge regarding the past through private channels of communication, but also public myth-making by the state. The paper then proceeds by introducing a theoretical framework of public rituals, arguing that national holidays often lose their initial purpose by being filled with symbols with no historical connection with the events the holiday were established to commemorate. To demonstrate this phenomenon, the work employs the methodology of case study with reference to the Immortal Regiment and St. George ribbon, and discusses the implications thereof in the theoretical and empirical parts of the paper. Specifically, it will be noted that (1) the appearance of the new tradition of the Victory Day might be the result, among other factors, of the fact that the veteran's generation have now mostly passed away, which opens up opportunities for abusive (mis-)interpretations of the GPW for state-sponsored myth-making; (2) Neither bottom-up or top-down approaches to collective memory are sufficient to account for the dynamics of the Immortal Regiment's public rituals, which are associated with the GPW in contemporary Russia; and (3) St. George's ribbon has become an effective political tool for freeing the commemoration process from communist agendas, albeit a tool which leads to an inevitable degree of incomprehensibility with regard to the meaning of Victory Day celebrations.

Literature Review

Collective Memory

The concept of collective memory was coined by Maurice Halbwachs, who stressed the social nature of the phenomenon. According to the sociologist, memory cannot exist without a social group to uphold certain shared beliefs about the past: "it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognise and localise their memories."[9] In other words, the process of remembering is impossible in the absence of an extant social group. In this respect, shared interpretations of the past frame an individual's memory and enhances their identification with a group. It can be noted that collective memory is a complex phenomenon which draws upon a diversity of individual experiences, topics, and practices. Consequently, collective memory should not be analysed as a static concept, but as a process: "Collective memory is something - or rather many things - we *do,* not something - or many things - we *have.*[10]" This quote suggests that a representation of collective memory is constantly reshaped in response to changing social contexts and requires a reasonable justification to be employed. In other words, change and continuity in the representation of collective memory is always conditioned by the present.

There are two understanding of collective memory from the reading of Halbwachs. Jeffrey Olick referred to them as the "two cultures" of collective memory. On the one hand, collective memory can be understood as social phenomenon *sui genesis,* that is, an interdisciplinary, yet independent, field of social research; on the other hand, collective memory can be understood to constitute part of a process that frames the memories of individuals. The latter approach opens the door to insights from cognitive psychology, but it also neglects the importance of social norms in the process of the collective's memory formation. However, Olick continues : "certain patterns of socialization are not reducible to individual psychological processes".[11] This might be evident,

[9] Olick, Jeffrey K. "Collective Memory: The Two Cultures." *Moment Journal* 1, no. 2 (December 2014): 177. https://doi.org/10.17572/mj2014.2.175211.
[10] Olick, Jeffrey From "Collective Memory to the Sociology of Mnemonic Practices and Products." In *The Invention of the Cultural Memory*, 144. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2008.
[11] Ibid.

considering an individual who was born after an event, interpretation of which is fundamental for a collective memory of his or her community. Such individuals do not carry any individual experiences of these events, and their understanding of these events is conditioned by the social norms prevailing within their social group. Thus, it may be argued that collective memory entails not only a collective's direct witness to particular past events, but can be extended to any set of shared remembrances of future generations. This argument suggests that it is possible to analyze collective memory as a set of interpretations about a country's (or any other group's) past, regardless of individual perceptions of historical events; in other words, interpretations of historical events may continue to form the foundation of a society even if the individuals who witnessed those events are long gone.

In the same manner, Jan Assman differentiates between cultural and communicative memory.[12] Communicative memory refers to knowledge which is passed through informal channels based on reflections of individuals' experiences of recent events. In contrast, cultural memory refers to the set of social institutions which uphold and continually restate certain notions of the past; these memories are not based upon individual witness of particular events but are "disembodied". The stability and continuity of this "disembodied" cultural memory is ensured by the presence of symbols which provide a specific – but not always objective – reference to past events. Another difference between the two types of memory are the channels of its transmission: while communicative memory is often transmitted orally through informal communication, cultural memory requires a formal ceremonial setting. While communicative memory has a limited timespan which is conditioned by the length of individual life and the capability to pass the knowledge, cultural memory does not have timeframes as it refers to mythical past. Thus, it may be noted that through the course of time the source of certain historical representations may change;

[12] Assmann, Jan. "Communicative and Cultural Memory." In *Cultural Memories*, 15–27. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2011. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-8945-8_2.

for example, as a particular historical event became more distant in terms of time, its contemporary interpretation may gradually cease to be based upon communicative memory.

Collective memory involves not only the process of remembering, but also social "amnesia". The importance of collective forgetting in an evolution of identity was firstly noted by Ersnt Renan and his account of a nation as a daily plebiscite: "[t]he act of forgetting, I would even say, historical error, is an essential factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for nationality." Not only does this quote highlight a difference between history and national mythology, but it also underlines that the constitution of national identity emphasizes particular notions of collective memory at the expense of others. Natalie Zemon and Davis Starn claim that the process of collective remembering in inseparable from the process of social forgetting. In this respect, they refer to notion of counter-memory, i.e. where historic representations which are ignored or rather forgotten by the official narrative. [13] This observation highlights that collective memory operates not only as an the official narrative, but as a devise for neglecting and even overwriting other shared memories.

The importance of forgetting is further highlighted by Aleida Assman, who notes that: "In order to remember anything one has to forget; but what is forgotten need not necessarily be lost forever."[14] Selectivity is not only a characteristic of an individual memory, but also of its social counterpart. According to Assman, there are two types of cultural practices which involve forgetting as a factor of identity construction. On the one hand, there is active forgetting, which refers to intentional actions aimed at erasing representations of the past, while on the other hand, there is passive forgetting, which refers to those instances when a particular representation of the past is left outside of "the frames of attention, valuation, and use." Thus, the main difference between the two types of forgetting are their relations with the material world. While active

[13] Davis, Natalie Zemon, and Randolph Starn. "Introduction." *Representations* 26 (1989): 1–6. https://doi.org/10.2307/2928519.
[14] Aleida Assman "Canon and Archive." In *Inventing of the Cultural Memory*, 97–107. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2008.

forgetting implies a specific policy aiming to total negate historical sources of knowledge, passive forgetting is a discursive phenomenon which does not imply total exclusion, but a neglecting of a particular narrative. Therefore, collective memory is a process which involves the process of remembering and forgetting, a process in which the state is usually actively involved in as the establisher of commonsensical notions of the relevant social group's past.

Public Rituals as the Representations of Collective Memory

Although there is existing literature concerning the importance of collective memories of the GPW to Russia's identity, none of this has systematically considered the importance of public rituals centered around the cult of war. The interplay of collective memory with rituals which enhance feelings of collective identity is discussed in the works of Emile Durkheim. Although Durkheim did not conceptualize collective memory with any degree of vigor, Barbara Misztal applies his framework to the concept to argue that "rituals and their symbolism have significance as means of transmitting social memory, seen as the essential condition of the continuity of collective identity and social life."[15] Thus, rituals are used as tools to project particular historical representations located in the collective memory of a political community. Durkheim's account of public rituals in "Elementary Forms of Religious Life" implies that any social group necessarily shares representations of the past, as such representations are fundamental to a society's existence. This argument is supported by Werner Gephart, who noted that there are two concepts discussed by Durkheim that are closely related to collective memory: *conscience collective* and *rites commemoratives.* While a *conscience collective* refers to a combination of history, identity, and memory, "periodically enlivened by rituals representing and creating the identity of a group",[16] *rites commemoratives* refer to those rituals from which the collective identity is derived. Thus, it may be

[15] Misztal, Barbara A. "Durkheim on Collective Memory." *Journal of Classical Sociology* 3, no. 2 (July 2003): 134. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468795x030032002.
[16] Gephart, Werner. "Effervescence, Differentiation and Representation in the Elementary Forms." In *On Durkheim's Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 127–37. London and New York: Routledge, 1998.

argued that particular representations of collective memory are manifested through the conduct of public rituals, in particularly through the ways in which they symbolize the society's past.

In order to highlight the importance of public rituals for a society, Durkheim differentiated between the two spheres of public life, those being the sacred and profane. On the one hand, the sacred sphere of public life refers to those phenomena which are characterized by a transcendence of everyday life and collective effervescence, i.e. a shared social experience which holds a sacred significance for each member of the society who participates. On the other hand, the profane side of public life refers to every other aspect which cannot be considered to possess a sacred dimension, i.e. the mundane aspects of social life. The division between the sacred and profane aspects of social life is stressed by Durkheim in order to lay out his understanding of religion. For Durkheim, the phenomenon of religion consists of the sacred aspects of social activity. There is a body of literature which equates religion and the sacred. However, as argued by Kim Knott, it is possible to employ the notion of sacred in non-theological context, as "people participate in sacred-making activities and processes of signification according to paradigms given by the belief system to which they are committed, whether they be religious, national or ideological."[17] In this respect, the sacred ceases to be an exclusively religious phenomena because it can also be observed in secular social practices. Kenneth Thompson affirms this argument by pointing out that Durkheim's understanding of sacred and Althusser's account of ideologies are similar in terms of the social role they are said to play. Specifically, both the sacred and ideology serve as a foundation for providing a "mythical or imaginary *representation* of the underlying social structure or system of social relations."[18] Thus, the Durkheimian approach might be extended to an analysis of the sacred aspects of modern life, which Thompson calls ideology. It might be argued that ideology re-enhances identity by attaching symbolic significance to particular tokens of social life, including those which are derived from its past. As noted by Misztal, however, collective memory should not be equaled with ideology as it

[17]"Knott, Kim "The Secular Sacred: In-Between or Both/And?" In *In A. Day, C. Cotter and G. Vincett (Eds), Social Identities Between the Sacred and the Secular*, 134–43. Ashgate, 2013.
[18] Thompson, Kenneth ""Durkheim and Sacred Identity." In *On Durkheim's Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 104–16. Routledge, 2012. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203021903-13.

grasps not only historical representations imposed by a state, but also private shared remembrances which challenge dominant narratives of the past.[19] Thus, collective memory is not a concept which fully overlaps with ideology, but is an analytically distinct phenomenon which may either support or challenge a national ideology.

Commemoration practices might be viewed as sacred rituals which reproduce and change the collective memory of a particular social group. In this respect, commemoration serves "present day aims, by bringing the original narrative of a community into focus."[20]. Thus, an analysis of commemoration practices allows the evolution of collective memory to be traced in the context of a particular society. On the one hand, the very fact of commemoration reinforces a society's continuity with its past; on the other hand, methods of commemoration may change over time as they are indivisible from the present sociopolitical context. With regard to the commemoration practices of modern states, holidays can be viewed as sacred rituals. The state has selects the historical events or figures which are to be commemorated. That is why national holidays which involve commemoration might be one of those governing tools of sustaining a coherent collective identity and ensuring that its members possess a sense of continuity with their collective past. The way that symbols involved in national holidays change over time therefore exposes certain dynamics within a particular society's collective memory.

According to Barry Schwartz, there are two approaches to study national holidays in the context of the process of governing.[21] He calls these the conflict and commitment models of national holidays. The first model views national holidays as a mere instrument deployed by elites to sustain their power. This implies that understanding national holidays requires a theoretical division between the elites and the masses, and the former are understood to project their power

[19] Misztal, Barbara A. "Durkheim on Collective Memory." *Journal of Classical Sociology* 3, no. 2 (July 2003): 124-146. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468795x030032002.
[20] Zelizer, Barbie. "Reading the Past Against the Grain. The Shape of Memory Studies." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 1995, 256..
[21] Schwartz, Barry. "Collective Memory and Abortive Commemoration: Presidents' Day and the American Holiday Calendar." *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 2008, 75–110.
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upon the latter. In such view, a national holiday is an "invented tradition", i.e. "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or a symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past."[22] Such traditions are "invented" because they come as a product of state's mythmaking, but perceived as long lasting ones. The second model of understanding national holidays and state power holds that elites fulfil a demand for commemoration which comes from below. In this context, commemoration practices highlight the unity of the state's population and constitute "shared activities that are not undertaken as means to an end but are ethically good in themselves."[23] This "commitment" model of national holiday aligns with Durkheim's framework, which highlights that collective sentiment creates a demand for public rituals in order to reaffirm collective identity by facilitating individuals' identification with their community's past.

However, as argued by Schwartz, neither of the approaches are sufficient to understand the dynamics of the state governing power with regards to national holidays. He uses the term "abortive holiday" to describe a practice of commemoration which refers to a particular historical event, but fails to indicate the specific object of reference. In other words: "Abortive holidays are those that refer to the past without instructing or inspiring, and, at least…indicating what precisely they refer to."[24] He further stresses his point by arguing that many abortive holidays are characterized by historicism, i.e. by the borrowing of historically significant symbols which do not necessarily refer to the original object of commemoration. Such a situation may lead to the blurring of the initial meaning of the event being commemorated. Hence, the Durkheimian function of holiday, i.e. the practice of confirming and enhancing identity through a sacralization of the past, may be undermined due to the involvement of symbols which do not have direct connection to the initial

[22] Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781107295636., p.17
[23] Schwartz, Barry. "Collective Memory and Abortive Commemoration: Presidents' Day and the American Holiday Calendar." *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 2008, 75–110.
[24] Ibid.

object commemoration. In other words, a national holiday fails to constitute societal glue when the purpose of the holiday is obscured for the majority the social group's members.

Although Schwartz is skeptical of the utilization of the "conflict" model to analyse national holidays, he does not explicitly elaborate on reasons why the existence of abortive holidays should not be viewed as an outcome of the elite's employment of particular historical representation to maintain their own power. In contrast, John Bodnar introduces a framework where rituals of commemoration are seen as an object of elite manipulation and as a top-down production of national mythology. In the context of national holidays, Bodnar argues that the "Negotiation and cultural mediation [which commemoration practices may create] do not preclude domination and distortion."[25] Thus, national holidays and other commemoration practices can be seen as an area of contestation between official and private domains of collective memory in which political leaders use the past to project and sustain their political power. Although the private domain of collective memory may exist independently from official ideology, elites are involved in the process of selecting the representations which may prove to be useful in the present context. Therefore, national holidays might be analysed as a relationship of power between elites and broader society. On the one hand, this power reveals itself in the selection of the dates chosen for holiday celebrations. On the other hand, the state has the capacity to introduce new symbols and change their meanings during commemoration processes.

To sum up the argument, national holidays which involve commemoration practices refer to the sacred part of public life because their purpose is to enhance a national identity through highlighting the continuity between the past and the present of a political community and create effervescence among members of a social group. However, this function of a national holiday may be disrupted as commemoration may take an ambigious form due to the apperence of symbols which are unfamiliar for the public. This is because the significance of national holidays, as well as

[25] Bodnar, John E. *Remaking America: Public memory, commemoration, and patriotism in the twentieth century*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1991. p.50

the meaning of the symbols and representations involved may change overtime and are subject to governmental mechanisms which select and insist upon particular interpretations of a political community's past. In this respect, national holidays may continue to serve as tools for social cohesion while simultaneously embodying relationships of power between political elites and society more broadly. These relationships of power and their historical development can be revealed through analyses of governmental policies concerning a particular holiday and tracing their evolution over time.

Empirics

Brief History of the Victory Day

The history of the commemoration of Victory Day as a national *holiday* can be divided into three eras: (1) the first two years after the Great Patriotic War (1945-1947), (2) the revival of the holiday during in the middle 1960s and its continuation up until the collapse of the Soviet Union (1965-1991), and (3) the post-Soviet era (1992-present). Even though the holiday was officially discontinued in 1947 due to a perceived need to "demilitarise society"[26], significant bottom-up commemoration practices persisted thereafter. The persistence of the significance of the Victory Day for the Soviet Union could be further stressed by the fact that the front cover of "Pravda" (the main Soviet newspaper) was devoted to the content regarding the war.[27] Mass rallies, meetings with veterans, salutes, and sports events were held on the 9th of May, 1948.[28] Although under Khrushev the topic of the Great Patriotic War was less visible in official propaganda, its decennial anniversary was nonetheless celebrated with mass rallies in 1955.[29] It may be argued that the celebration of Victory Day during the first years after the war was the result of considerable initiative "from the bottom", as veterans actively promoted commemoration. Their experience of the war was actively transmitted to younger generations through informal meetings and storytelling.[30] For example, Mark Edele notes that there was an attempt to create a union of veterans without the approval of the state. He tells the story of V. Barykin, a veteran and activist who presented a "fairly sophisticated" draft of a proposed international association of veterans. [31] This suggests that veterans played a crucial role in the formation of commemoration practices in the years immediately following the war.

[26] *Pravda*, 7 May 1947, p. 1.
[27] *Pravda*, 9 May 1946, p. 1
[28] *Pravda*, 9 May 1948, p. 1
[29] *Pravda*, 9 May 1955, p.1
[30] Dmitrov, Igor. "The War was Won not by the Soviet Party." Lenta.RU, 8 May 2020. https://lenta.ru/articles/2020/05/08/vd/.
[31] Edele, Mark. *Soviet veterans of the Second World War: A popular movement in an authoritarian society 1941-1991*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. P.129

Social effervescence of the Victory Day gradually decreased as the end of the war was becoming more distant. The topic of war faded from official iterations of Soviet ideology due to the government's disavowal of the Stalin's cult, which was, among other factors, legitimized through the victory over Nazism under Stalin's command. Thus, it was not until the middle of 1960s that the state began to intervene in Victory Day commemoration practices. The state revived Victory Day as an official holiday in 1965, where it was made a day off and a military parade was held to mark the occasion. It could be argued that this comeback of the Victory Day is the foundation of contemporary commemoration practices for the holiday. As the power of veterans' shared memories was not so strong as it had been immediately following the war, the new generation (which had not witnessed the war) were brought up with a predisposition towards being receptive to mythical knowledge. Considering both of these factors, the state was able to create an official mythology of the war which did not necessarily reflect the personal experiences of veterans, but highlighted the might and glory of the Soviet Union during the fight against Nazism.[32]

As Boris Dubin notes, the myth of victory was foundational for Soviet ideology as represented under Brezhnev: "Paradoxically… [the myth of victory over nazism] can be called not only the main event of the Soviet era, but also the central "event" of the Brezhnev years when it was created. The meaning and justification (one might say, self-justification) of Brezhnev's fifteenth anniversary, as well as of all Soviet history as a whole, is victory in the war."[33] Thus, it could be argued that there was a shift in commemoration practices in comparison to the first years following the war. In particular, the 1960s were a time of active state intervention in the sphere of GPW commemoration. The Party erected new monuments, increased the prominence of the GPW in the school curriculum, and clothed the commemoration of Victory Day in solemn language. Thus, as Ivan Kurilla notes, the commemoration practices of the Victory Day under Brezhev may be divided

[33] Dubin, Boris. "Memory, War, Memory About War. Contruction of of the Past in Practice Over the Last Decade." strana-oz.ru, 12 March 2012. https://strana-oz.ru/2008/4/pamyat-voyna-pamyat-o-voyne-konstruirovanie-proshlogo-v-socialnoy-praktike-poslednih-desyatiletiy.

into the two domains: on the one hand, the presence of official commemoration in the form of military parade and state's ceremonies, and on the other hand, veterans gatherings where a more personal side of the war's narrative was transmitted. Thus the representation of the official ideology, which emphasised the greatness and military capabilities of the victorious state, was mixed with the popular "holiday through tears" view, which emphasised mourning and sorrow in remembrance of the personal losses sustained during the war[34]. Nonetheless, in comparison to the Stalin and Khrushchev eras, the state was now actively involved into establishing new commemorative practices for the Victory Day holiday.

Several crucial transformations of commemoration practices of Victory Day appeared as the Soviet Union collapsed. It seemed that the Victory Day would lose its importance for Russian society as it was not needed by the state which adopted a different ideology. Although the victory over Nazism was the "foundational myth"[35] of the Soviet Union, Nina Tumarkin argued that the cult of the GPW would decline in post-Soviet Russia. Indeed, during the Yeltsin years (1991-1994), the official ceremony was reformulated to concentrate more on commemoration practices and eradicate aspects which glorified Soviet ideology and the Soviet state.[36] However, the commemoration of the holiday became a site of political struggle during the conflict between Boris Yeltsin and the Supreme Soviet. For example, in 1993 the supporters of the Supreme Soviet organized their own procession in the center of Moscow, while the official celebration was limited to Yeltsin opening a new memorial at the Poklonnaya mountain. It seemed that the Victory Day had failed to ease social tensions, which is one of the functions of any national holiday. In fact, it led to a contrary outcome because the two separate celebrations in 1993 embodied the polarisation of Russia's society at that time.

[34] Kurilla, Ivan. "The "Immortal Regiment": A "Holiday Through Tears," a Parade of the Dead, or a Mass Protest? Arguments Over the Meaning and Future of a New Holiday Ritual." *Russian Politics & Law* 57.5-6 (2020): 150-165
[35] Tumarkin, Nina. *The living & the dead: The rise and fall of the cult of World War II in Russia*. Basic Books, 1994.
[36] Malinova, Olga. "Political Uses of the Great Patriotic War in Post-Soviet Russia from Yeltsin to Putin." *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2017. 43-70.

The 50th anniversary of the Victory Day in 1995 was marked by the incorporation of several Soviet symbols into the ceremony. Of particular significance was the introduction of military parades as an integral part of every Victory Day celebration. This was because during the years of the Soviet Union, the 7th of November (the date of October Revolution celebration) was the day of military parade in which the state demonstrated its military might. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, the October Revolution celebration was – understandably – no longer an official holiday. As a result, the practice of holding an annual military parade migrated into the domain of the Victory Day celebrations, where it found new life. Moreover, the Soviet red flag was rehabilitated as the symbol of the victory over Nazism.[37] Therefore, despite an initial purge of Soviet symbols in the early 1990s, they were reintegrated into these official ceremonies, thereby highlighting the legacy of the Soviet Union in contemporary Russia.

In the beginning of 2000s, the Victory Day remained to be the most popular national holiday, serving as the only uniting myth for Russians.[38] I would like to highlight two practices which have become integral with the Victory Day under Putin. On the one hand, I would like to discuss the appearance of St.George's strap as a symbol of the Victory Day. In particular, I would claim that this is the instance of the invention of tradition, as St.George's strap was never a symbol of the Victory Day and comes as a result of state's policy, which was aimed to eliminate association of the victory over Nazism with the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the practice of "immortal regiment" exemplifies how the state could seize the initiative "from the bottom" and reformulate it for its own purposes. In both instances the new symbols are used as a means of dealing with challenges to the current Russian regime.

[37] Ibid.
[38] Volkov, Igor. "The Victory Day." Levada.ru, 8 May 2020. https://www.levada.ru/2020/05/08/den-pobedy-4/.

St. George's Ribbon

On April 2005, "Ria-Novosti", a major state owned news outlet, introduced a new commemoration practice called "St. George Ribbon". The new tradition involved tying a ribbon of St. George to different objects, including clothes, cars, and bags. The ribbons were handed out by volunteers in various places: shops, administrative buildings, and even bars. Michail Zygar describes how administrative resources were used to distribute the new symbol: "A ribbon should be on every counter and every cash register! - This is how the employees of municipalities instructed their subordinates on the eve of May 9, forcibly decorating all the bureaucratic institutions for the holiday."[39] During Victory Day in 2005, around 800,000 ribbons were distributed in Moscow alone. Over the years following, the new tradition became extremely popular as the public demand for ribbons exceeded all expectations.[40] This could be explained by the fact that this initiative allows individuals to actively demonstrate their attitude to the victory over Nazism. As the press-release of Ria-Novosti notes, the initiative provides the opportunity for Russians to "mark their attitude towards the celebration of the great Victory…their feelings of pride and recognition of the colossal role that our country played in fighting the global fascism." [41]

The history of the St. George ribbon (which was a necessary part of the St. George Award) dates back to the middle of the 18th century, when it was introduced by Cathrine the Second as an honour for those who served to the Russian state outstandingly. Throughout the course of history, the award became the state's most honorable award. After the revolution, all national awards were disbanded by the communist party. However, during the GPW, the ribbon was revived as part of the Order of Glory, a Soviet medal for military achievements. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ribbon remained an essential part of state awards for exceptional military achievements, but its use was not widespread among ordinary people.[42] Hence, it may be suggested that although the

[39] Zygar, Michail. "Tied with One Strap." *Kommersant*, 15 June 2006. https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/673083
[40] "Natalya Loseva, the Georgian Strap is a Tradition, not a perfomance." *Ria-Novosti*, April 23, 2014.https://ria.ru/20140423/1005130860.html.
[41] Oushakine, Serguei Alex. "Remembering in public: On the affective management of history." *Ab imperio* 2013, no. 1 (2013): 269-302.
[42] Ibid.

ribbon had associations with the Russian state's glorious military past, the continuity of between the GPW and its use in current commemorative practices is tenuous at best.

The tradition of attaching the ribbon might be compared with the similar ritual in England, where the poppy is used to commemorate the memory of those who died in various wars. Although both symbols carry the same meaning, the logic of commemoration is different. In particular, when the British purchase poppies, the money raised is used to service veterans' needs. In contrast, the ribbon is distributed for free, and selling it is forbidden. Instead, the state finances the distribution of the ribbons.[43] This fact creates a different dynamic of commemoration in comparison to the English case. Specifically, it is not an individual, but the state who acts as the initiator of commemoration, insinuating people to perform the ritual. Thus, it may be argued that the ribbon is a state initiative which aims to legitimise the regime by highlighting its continuity with a glorious military past.

Sergei Oushakine notes that the use of the ribbon led to "historical blurring, temporal amalgamation and semantic ambiguity"[44] regarding the collective memory of the GPW. Indeed, it may be evident that the use of the ribbon has no specific relationship with the victory over Nazism. Thus, it may be argued that the power of the ribbon as the symbol of the victory does not lie in the fact that it highlights the continuation of Victory Day in Russian society, instead it constitutes a powerful performative practice based on a "newly learned vocabulary of public gestures"[45]. Because of the obscure connection between the ribbon and the GPW, this ritual often takes ridiculous forms. For example, it is often used for commercial purposes, such as attaching the ribbon to bottles of vodka available for purchase.[46] Although it was claimed by governmental officials that the use of the ribbon for commercial purposes is unacceptable, this practice has persisted since the ribbon became a symbol of the GPW. It may be argued that inappropriate use of

[43] Miller, Alexey. "Inventing The Tradition ." carnegieendowment.org. Last modified July , 2012. https://carnegieendowment.org/files/proetcontra55_94-100.pdf.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] see appendix, picture 3

the strap reflects its incomprehensibility as a symbol of the commemoration of those who died during the GPW.

Despite on its symbolic ambiguity, this tradition has possibly become the most popular symbol in post-soviet Russia.[47] In order to better understand why the ribbon was promoted by the government as a new symbol, it may be necessary to consider the broader context in which the new ritual was suggested by the state. As Zygar notes, one of the main symbols of the orange Revolution in Ukraine was an orange strap, which was understood as a means of expressing support for the protests against the pro-Russian regime. Kremlin political strategists subvert the strap symbol and turned it into the symbol of historical continuity as opposed to an expression of dissatisfaction with the current regime.[48] Moreover, as Alexey Miller suggests, the St. George's ribbon became an effective tool for purging communist symbols from Victory Day celebrations. On the one hand, it disrupted the appropriation of the victory over Nazism celebrations by the Communist Party of Russia, which was actively using the topic of the GPW in its electoral campaigns and other agitation. On the other hand, the ribbon became a convenient symbol of the GPW's commemoration abroad, especially in former Soviet republics. This is because the Soviet past and its symbols (such as the red flag) are perceived as signs of communist oppression, in contrast to how they are perceived in Russia, where continuity with the Soviet Union is often underlined.

The Immortal Regiment

This section reviews a relatively new Victory Day ritual known as the Immortal Regiment. It will demonstrate that this initiative – which originated from civil society – was appropriated by its creators and turned into the tool for the legitimisation for the current regime in official commemorations of the GPW. The essence of the ritual is the following: participants of the event walk in a column and hold photos of their ancestors who took part in the GPW. The case of the

[47] Oushakine, Serguei Alex. "Remembering in public: On the affective management of history." *Ab imperio* 2013, no. 1 (2013): 269-302.
[48] Zygar, Michail. "Tied with One Strap." *Kommersant*, 15 June 2006. https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/673083

Immortal Regiment suggests that the dynamics of collective memory in contemporary Russia are not limited to strictly top-down projection of power by the state; instead, the dynamics of the collective memory concerning the GPW might be more complicated. Specifically, it will be demonstrated that the Immortal Regiment started as an initiative of civil society to create a new form of commemoration which would emphasise the importance of personal stories, concentrating on experiences of families, purposefully circumventing state-driven narratives of the GPW.

A closer engagement with the history of Immortal Regiment may reveal the interplay of competing understandings of the ritual. Immortal Regiment started as the initiative of several journalists from Tomsk. One of the founders of the movement, Sergei Lapenkov, notes that it was conceived as an initiative which would highlight the personal experiences of families whose ancestors took part in the war and "the desire to cleanse the Victory Day from alluvial husks, condo officialdom and attests to speculate on the holy holiday".[49] The charter of the movement stresses that the ritual highlights personal stories : "The Immortal Regiment considers its main task to be the preservation in *each family of personal memory* of the generation of the Great Patriotic War." Also, the charter states that the movement is free from any political connotations: "The Immortal Regiment is a non-profit, non-political, non-state civic initiative."[50] In this respect, the movement established the web-site, moypolk.ru, which collects thousands of family stories about the veterans of the war. The emphasis on the family ties is crucial and provides a story which signifies the idea of Immortal Regiment as the movement about family experience. During the organising of the first event in Tomsk, there was conflict with local officials of the Russian communist party, who suggested that the column should be headed with portraits of Stalin. Lapenkov felt that this was an inappropriate addition, as the logic of the event implies that every participant carries a portrait of her ancestor, signifying the family's remembrance.[51] Thus, it can be noted that the Immortal

[49] Segey Lapenkov: "The immortal Regiment is absolutely personal story"." rg.ru. Last modified August 28, 2015. https://rg.ru/2015/08/26/rodina-polk.html.
[50]Lapenkov, Sergey. moypolk.ru. https://www.moypolk.ru/ustav-polka.
[51] ibid.

Regiment appeared as the bottom-up initiative which was aimed to stress Russian families' personal memories of the GPW, rather than official state narratives.

In 2012, the first Immortal Regiment event was held in Tomsk, and the number of cities holding such events grew year-by-year. The local initiative became appraised in other cities, including Moscow. According to Lapenkov, a Moscow activist who wished to conduct Immortal Regiment in Moscow asked for Lapenkov's approval for commercial activity during the ritual, which contradicted established principles of the movement.[52] This was the beginning of the conflict between the founders of the movement and pro-government structures which strived to redefine the tone of the ritual. In 2014 the pro-government structures created an organisation which mimicked the existing movement, but which practiced a different mode of commemoration. The newly formed clone of the Immortal Regiment movement used a different mode of mobilisation for participation in the ritual, one that was shaped by administrative pressure and state money. In the public letter to the president of Russia, the founder of the Immortal Regiment points out the inappropriateness of the new way of organising the event:

"In some regions they are trying to set quotas for the Immortal Regiment. That is, instead of creating the conditions for everyone who wants to stand in the Regiment s columns on May 9 with a portrait of a veteran family member, only specially chosen citizens would be allowed to walk in the parade. Sometimes they are not even family members, but simply youth activists; another manifestation of formalism is the desire to achieve a mass Immortal Regiment at any cost, with some regions competing for the largest regiments, primarily through mobilizing students and worker collectives. A portrait of a veteran handed out one day at school or at the factory is just an obvious substitution of form for the meaning of the Immortal Regiment."[53]

Thus, it can be noted that the involvement of the state into the movement distorted its initial purpose, which was the preservation of family memories. Instead, the Immortal Regiment was transformed into another official ceremony, organised from the top. This is because the ritual was built into the chain of ceremonial events which included the speeches of Moscow mayor, concert,

[52] Ibid
[53] Kurilla, Ivan. "The "Immortal Regiment": A "Holiday Through Tears," a Parade of the Dead, or a Mass Protest? Arguments Over the Meaning and Future of a New Holiday Ritual." *Russian Politics & Law* 57.5-6 (2020): 150-165

and other events which violate the charter of the initial movement, obscures the ritual's message, and predisposes it to being repurposed for commercial practices and political propaganda.[54]

The 2015 Immortal Regiment procession in Moscow comes is an obvious manifestation of the state's appropriation of the civil society initiative, and as such, Lapenkov and his peers chose not to participate in the organisation of the event. In their letter to the Russian president they claim that "This [the Immortal Regiment] is no longer a civic initiative but a different Regiment, a formal public organization based on state funding, which will cause the voluntary popular movement to degenerate into an annual reporting event, into a race for numbers to report to higher-ups, whatever the cost."[55] In this respect, it may be noted that the story of state's capture of the Immortal Regiment demonstrates that top-down iterations of memory politics may not fully reflect their full essence in the Russian context. This is because the state can imitate bottom-up initiatives and adapt them to the purposes of legitimising itself. In 2020, Ivan Kurilla argued that it is too soon to claim that the Immortal Regiment has been completely co-opted by the state, as it still represents family histories rather than officialdom and provides an alternative to other state-driven commemoration practices. However, in April 2022, Lapenkov and others pleaded to stop associating them with the activities of the Immortal Regiment, not only because the state-driven movement broke the initial principles, but also because the war with Ukraine dramatically changed the meaning of these commemoration practices.[56] Therefore, it may be evident that today the Immortal Regiment is no longer has any relationship with civil society and has become fully embedded into the official celebrations of Victory Day: organised and financed by the state's bureaucracy. As a result, the atmosphere of the ritual has changed. Instead of being a commemoration ritual which highlights family side of collective memory and exuding mourning and sorrow, Immortal Regiment has

[54] Segey Lapenkov: "The immortal Regiment is absolutely personal story"." rg.ru. Last modified August 28, 2015. https://rg.ru/2015/08/26/rodina-polk.html.
[55] Kurilla, Ivan. "The "Immortal Regiment": A "Holiday Through Tears," a Parade of the Dead, or a Mass Protest? Arguments Over the Meaning and Future of a New Holiday Ritual." *Russian Politics & Law* 57.5-6 (2020): 150-165

[56] zona.media. https://zona.media/news/2022/04/23/bp.

degenerated into another run-of-the-mill mass rally, whose scope and content is determined by state officials.

Discussion

Bringing together the theoretical and empirical parts of this work, three observations can be made. (1) Although communicative memory was the main driver of commemoration practices of the Victory Day in the days following the GPW, it was gradually replaced by cultural memory. This might be explained by the gradual disappearance of the veteran generations; fewer people there to transmit memories borne of direct witness of the GPW cleared the road for the state erect mythologies and invented traditions in their stead. (2) The ritual of using the St. George's ribbon demonstrates a case of an invented state driven tradition having an obscure and extremely tenuous connection to the GPW. This is evident from the fact that the public display of the ribbon has been banned in several former Soviet republics, demonstrating that the ribbon is primarily associated with the current Russian regime rather than with the GPW. (3) The case of the Immortal Regiment might exemplify that the simple top-down logic of commemoration practices does not consider all the nuances of interaction of state and civil society. However, the dramatic changes in the movement of the Immortal Regiment show that even bottom-up commemoration practices are vulnerable to state capture. Specifically, the Immortal Regiment has acquired elements of religious ritual, sacralizing the figure of veteran. It will be argued, however, that the fact that the Immortal Regiment is still held abroad may signify that the movement does not fully belong to the Russian regime, and events may still be arranged according to the movement's initial principles, albeit only outside of the jurisdiction of the Russian state.

From Communicative to Cultural Memory

To theorize the transformation from communicative to cultural memory in the context of Victory Day, it may be useful to conceptualize generation of GPW's veterans as the holders of shared memories of the war.[57] There is a body of literature which traces public attitudes towards figures and events in the past, conceptualizing a generation as a unit of analysis. Taking Karl Mannheim's understanding of generations as a cohort of people which is socially bounded by shared experiences and cultural background, this approach argues that members of one generation may carry similar understandings of past events, including those which they bear personal witness to. In this respect, the difference in perceptions of one historical event by various generations might be conditioned by the "intersection of personal and national history"[58]. Thus, a change of public perceptions with regard to a community's past might be explained by the conceptualization of a generation as a socially constructed phenomena when it comes to the transformation from communicative to cultural memory.

It can be argued that the veteran generation carries shared interpretations of the GPW based not only due to their similar age, but also because they experienced the war personally. To employ Assman's terminology, the veterans came to be the main holders of communicative memory concerning the GPW as they could share their autobiographical knowledge in informal settings. However, as noted above, communicative memory lost its power as the generation of those who witnessed the historical event vanished. Assman argues that the timespan of viable collective memory is 80-100 years, "a moving horizon of 3-4 interacting generations."[59] The case of the Victory Day and the GPW may confirm this claim, though this assertion ought to be qualified with an additional crucial nuance. Communicative memory does not disappear instantly, but its significance slowly gives way to cultural memory, which gradually reshapes historical representations and interprets them in accordance with current political needs. In the years

[57] Schwartz, Barry. "The social context of commemoration: A study in collective memory." *Social forces* 61, no. 2 (1982): 374-402.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Assmann, Jan. "Communicative and Cultural Memory." In *Cultural Memories*, 15–27. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2011. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-8945-8_2.

following the war, the main driver of commemoration practices during Victory Day were veterans who shared their wartime experience with younger generations without any intervention from the state. The state first expressed interest in creating a myth out of the GPW under Brezhnev, where commemoration practices of the Victory Day began to combine cultural and communicative elements of collective memory. Over time, the role of veteran's communicative memory decreased, and the state has filled the commemoration processes of Victory Day with new practices, and has thereby altered the holiday's meaning.

During the last decade, it may be claimed that the commemoration practices of Victory Day have been thoroughly subsumed in the domain of cultural memory. Even if we look past the rituals discussed in this piece, it is evident that the new institutions or "specialized carriers of memory"[60] uphold state-driven and state-serving representations of memory within Russian society; museums, films, and educational activities aim to demonstrate the continued significance of the *victory* over Nazism for Russian society today and thereby neglect the sorrowful aspect that the holiday commemorations traditionally contained. When answering the question: "which emotions does the Victory Day evoke in you?", 39 percent of people chose to respond with the option "happiness", 26 percent chose "sorrow", and 34 percent chose "both equally". In 2015, "happiness" was chosen by 56 percent, "sorrow" by 26 percent, and both equally by 21 percent.[61] The shift towards the feeling of happiness might be explained by the fact that, the state constantly highlights the glorious aspect of the victory over Nazism, and people do not think about the struggles of the veteran generation, who ultimately have not played a decisive role in shaping the overall narrative of the GPW in Russia over the last decade.

The shift away from atmosphere of commemoration and mourning could be further illustrated by contrasting the two slogans, which are popular in the GPW context. "Never Again" was a popular slogan not only in Europe, but also in the Soviet Union after the GPW[62]. Clearly, this

[60]Ibid.
[61] Titkov, A. (2019). New celebration practices of Victory Day: Macrosociological explanation. Urban Folklore & Anthropology, II(1–2), 206–229. (In Russian)
[62] Ibid.

slogan implies the ethical unacceptability of violence in the future. In contrast, the other slogan "We Can Do it Again" emphasises that the war was a means of social coexistence, and this slogan has became more widely used over the past decade. Attaching stickers with aggressive slogans to cars is another relatively new performative practice associated with the GPW[63]. It could be argued that the appearance of aggressive slogans might only be possible in a context where communicative memory – which is able to transmit the story of people's suffering – loses its position to new forms of cultural memory provided by the state.

Invented and Rejected Tradition

The case of the St. George's ribbon may come as a deliberate policy which was introduced the Russian regime because it served not only for the purposes of domestic legitimation, but also because it serves the state's status internationally. The ribbon has become a convenient symbol for the promotion of the Russian regime not only because it reminds of the victory over Nazism, but because it also avoids the use of communist symbols while commemorating the war. As such, the ribbon became a symbol of the support of the Russian regime abroad, the signification of «Russian world» (*Ruskii mir*), politicizing the process of commemoration in the former Soviet republics.

Miller notes that the possible drawback of the ribbon as a symbol lies in its obvious connection to the Russian regime: "The "weakness" of the symbol of the St. George ribbon is in its obvious link to the current Russian political regime. If a regime begins to lose popularity, the ribbon may suffer from political unattractiveness ribbons as a political symbol"[64] In the context of the current Russian aggression against Ukraine, the ribbon has become a symbol of the war, as it is perceived as a symbol of the Russian regime. The St. George's ribbon was banned from public display in Moldova, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in 2022. In some countries, such as Georgia and the republics of Central Asia, there is no special law, but the ribbon has changed its colors to those

[63] See appendix, picture 5

[64] Miller, Alexey. "Inventing The Tradition ." carnegieendowment.org. Last modified July , 2012. https://carnegieendowment.org/files/proetcontra55_94-100.pdf

of a national flag.[65] This may suggest that the former soviet republics associate the ribbon not with the GPW, but with the Russian regime which brought the symbol into Victory Day commemorations.

Hence, it could be argued that the current war has revealed a discrepancy between commemoration practices in Russia and abroad. One the one hand, the ribbon seems to be an integral part of the Victory Day in Russia; on the other hand, it was banned from public display as a symbol of war promoted by the Russian regime. This observation signifies the fact that the ribbon, which appeared under the current regime, is not perceived as an appropriate way of commemoration by the participants of Victory Day in Europe.

The Sacred Proceeding

Evidently, it may be claimed that neither a top- nor a bottom-down framework of memory politics allows one to fully grasp the essence of the Immortal Regiment movement. Although the movement was appropriated by the state, it might be argued that the initial impetus for its popularity was an outcome of the initiative from below. Conceptual opposition between the state and civil society continues to structure the understanding of Victory Day, though the reality might be more complicated still. Nevertheless, it is evident that the Immortal Regiment has become not only a commemorative practice, but a form of religious ritual since it has been co-opted by the regime. In this respect, it may be useful to consider how the Immortal Regiment had changed since the state captured the movement. It might be argued that the Immortal Regiment has become a sacred proceeding where the figure of the veteran becomes a sacred object, serving to unify contemporary Russian society.

Although nowadays government-affiliated structures are fully responsible for the organising of the Immortal Regiment, it is still presented by the governmental officials as a true people's

[65] bbc.com. "Were the St.George's ribbon is banned?"Last modified April 21, 2022. https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-61131224.

initiative which unites Russians in their shared memory of the past. The fact that Vladimir Putin took part in the ritual in 2015, marching in the column with the portrait of his father was incomprehensibly promoted by pro-government commentators as a manifestation of a democratic element of Victory Day.[66] Not only did Putin's participation in the Immortal Regiment in 2015 become a major push for the popularity of the movement, but it also gave grounds for pro-governmental commentators to claim that the movement was one of true national unity. For example, Nikolay Zemtsov, one of the founders of the state's Immortal Regiment, argues that the participation of Putin in the Immortal Regiment signifies his closeness to the people (*narod),* contrasting him with unnamed sinister "elites" which exploit Russians. Hence, he continues: "the Immortal regiment presents the pillar of Russian society's unity nowadays: The strength of the "Immortal Regiment" is that we turned to our roots, called our personal family and common, national, history to help us - and they merged into a fiery alloy called "the people""[67] The role of Putin in this respect is that he acts as a "usual Russian person";[68] as an ordinary element of the procession. Hence, it may be suggested that the Immortal Regiment may be seen as the process which shows the unity and equality of the Russian society.

In this respect, the ritual of the Immortal Regiment may have a religious connotation because its form is similar to "procession", (*krestnyi hod*), a tradition in Orthodox Christianity involving an organized group of people marching in a column with icons and other religious symbols. The pro-government organizers frequently describe the Immortal Regiment as they would describe a religious ritual: "In essence, we, the descendants, have been mobilized and united by our fallen soldiers. There is some kind of mystery in this, something incomprehensible for human consciousness."[69] The perception of the Immortal Regiment as a sacred ritual could be further exemplified by the appearance of Natalya Poklonskya, the former general attorney of Crimea and

[66] Fedor, Julie. "Memory, kinship, and the mobilization of the dead: The Russian state and the "Immortal Regiment" movement." In *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus*, pp. 307-345. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2017.
[67] Zemtsov, Nilokay "Unity of Russians is scary for those who want dissolution of the society ." vz.ru. Last modified May 12, 2015. https://vz.ru/politics/2015/5/12/744727.html.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.

one of the symbols of Crimean annexation, carrying the image of the Nikolay the Second, the last Russian Tsar, during an Immortal Regiment procession in 2015.[70] The last Russian Tsar was canonized by the Russian Orthodox church after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The appearance of the canonized person at the ritual of the Immortal Regiment may suggests that it is perceived as a sacred public ritual, merging religion and the GPW together. Therefore, the figure of the veteran, the portrait of whom replaces icons of saints, becomes then not a signification of family's history but an object of religious worship and the symbol of martyrdom. Hence, it can be argued that the appropriation of the Immortal Regiment by the state has also changed the social meaning of the ritual, giving it an undertone of a religious procession, sacralizing the veterans of the war.

It should be noted, that the Immortal Regiment has become an international event, and in many cases outside of Russia, the organizers of the movement stick to the initial rules of the ritual, whereby the participants carry only the portraits of their ancestors and abstain from the glorification of officialdom. For example, the last Immortal Regiment in Berlin took place excluded all displays of other symbols associated with Victory Day, such as St. George's ribbon. The fact that the Immortal Regiment (in its initial form) is still held in Europe regardless of the war, may suggest that the movement can be disentangled from the Russian regime and return to its founding principles by highlighting the aspect of families' commemoration. However, today the Immortal Regiment in Russia and Europe present two movements with different purposes, principles, and mode of organization. Thus, in comparison to St. George's ribbon, the Immortal Regiment cannot be called "an invented tradition", as its initial form requires no intervention from the state and persists to exist outside of Russia.

Conclusion

This work addressed the evolution of the Victory Day as the national holiday in Russia. By employing theoretical insights from the literature on collective memory and commemoration, this

[70] See appendix, picture 3

work has conceptualized public rituals as events which are able to change and reinforce particular historical representations with or without involvement of state. Briefly tracing the changes in commemoration practices of the Victory Day, this work has argued that there is a gradual shift from communicative memory to a cultural one in its symbolic representations of the GPW on Victory Day. It did this through two cases studies of novel practices that have been incorporated into Victory Day commemorations, namely the use of the St. George's ribbon and the movement of the Immortal Regiment, illustrating how the state is able to "invent" commemoration traditions, blurring the lines between the event's initial meaning and modern political objectives which allow the state to legitimize itself as the successor of a glorious past. It is argued that the use of the ribbon might be called an invented tradition, as it was introduced top-down as a tool to rally people in support of the current regime and has become a 'commonsensical' symbol of Victory Day in Russia. The ribbon's artificial nature can also be exemplified by the fact that it was banned from public display in a number of countries due to its close association with Russia's current aggression in Ukraine rather than with the Soviet victory over Nazism. In contrast, in the case of the Immortal Regiment has demonstrated that the logics of certain commemorative practices go beyond the top-down memory politics of the Russian regime. Although it was appropriated by the regime, which has transformed it into a sacred procession, the movement started as an initiative "from the bottom" and persists in its initial form outside of Russia, regardless of the current war in Ukraine.

Appendix

Picture 1 (retrieved from hram.mil.ru)

Picture 2 (retrived from pobedarf.ru)

Picture 3 (retrieved from Ria-novosti.ru)

Picture 4. (Retrieved from Meduza.io)

Picture 5 (retrieved from Gordon.ua)

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