

**From Fringe Ideology to Official Historiography: The
Historical-Revisionist Concept of Novorossiya as a Tool to
Promote Right-Wing Ideas in Russian Intellectual
Discourse**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis contributes to the literature on Russian right-wing intellectuals, Russian academic historical writing and organizations and platforms that help to establish connections between them.

It addresses two main questions: 1) How the concept of Novorossiia was developed and explored by the Russian ultranationalist authors of the *Zavtra* weekly journal? 2) What form did the concept of Novorossiia take after being incorporated by the collective work by the Russian Academy of Sciences titled “History of Novorossiia”?

The thesis finds out that right-wing intellectuals who shared anti-Ukrainian views appropriated the concept of Novorossiia and turned it into a vehicle for their other views that were not complimentary to the Russian state, including questions of social justice, ethnonationalism and anti-capitalism, and also an image of a perfect New Russia, riddled with an eclectic mix of Stalinist reminiscences with an Orthodox revivalism. While almost all of these sentiments were not explicitly expressed in the “History of Novorossiia”, they remained implicitly present in the text produced by the Russian Academy of Sciences, solidifying the historical revisionist Novorossiia concept as a part of an established historiography.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

STATEMENT OF COPYRIGHT	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
INTRODUCTION.....	1
A brief historical background.....	6
CHAPTER 1: NOVOROSSIYA ON THE PAGES OF THE ZAVTRA JOURNAL.....	9
What is the “Zavtra” journal?.....	10
How “Zavtra” operates in the Russian right-wing intellectual network.	11
Novorossiya as a tool to delegitimize the Ukrainian state.	17
Novorossiya as a social critique.	22
Futurism – envisioning the future through the past.	29
Timeline for the development of Novorossiya.....	31
Conclusions	366
CHAPTER 2: THE PRODUCTION OF HISTORY OF NOVOROSSIYA	388
The name “Novorossiya”	4040
Reemergence of Novorossiya as a historical-revisionist brand.....	433
Organizations and authors behind the production of History of Novorossiya.	455
The “imagined geography” of Novorossiya.	511
Expanding the chronology of Novorossiya.	544
Explanatory paragraphs as an instruction to the reader.....	622
Conclusions.	688
CONCLUSIONS.....	7070
BIBLIOGRAPHY	733

INTRODUCTION

On April 17, 2014, in the wake of the War in Donbass, Russian President Vladimir Putin mentioned Novorossiia for the first time in a speech. On February 22, 2022, in the wake of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, he mentioned the term in another speech for a second time. Strikingly, in both instances the concept was utilized by the President when the country was on the brink of war. This throws up the question: Why did Novorossiia emerge in these moments of crisis? As I will discuss in this thesis, this historical concept, initially confined to the fringes of Russian intellectual ultranationalist discourse, had undergone a notable transformation in these years. It had evolved from an obscure historical-revisionist notion to being officially recognized by the Russian Academy of Sciences. This evolution, from fringe ideology to mainstream historiography, forms a central focus of this study.

This thesis focuses on two stages of development of this concept: first its emergence in public discourse in nationalist and conservative intellectual circles in 2014, and then as a part of history books titled “History of Novorossiia”. It explores the mechanisms which helped this concept to be transferred between different mediators of Russian intellectual life.

My main argument is that infiltration of historical-revisionist concept of Novorossiia into official historiography carried a lot of right-wing ideas along with it, ideas that were originally developed on the fringes of Russian intellectual life. This entailed the situation whereby approving the dissemination of certain messages and concepts into wider public sphere, Russian state indivertibly shifts public discourse to the right, making right-wing agenda much more visible and pronounced even amongst most respectable organizations such as the Russian Academy of Sciences. The concept, that in its academic form may seem stripped of its additional meanings, nevertheless carries messages tailored by specific group of authors who otherwise cannot reach and convince wider intellectual audience.

In order to explore these issues, my thesis will draw from two distinct sets of primary sources. Chapter 1 focuses on the electronic archive of the *Zavtra* weekly journal, the main printed newspaper for Russian ultranationalist voices since 1993. The unique position of *Zavtra* in Russian intellectual life – a platform that is extremely nationalistic and patriotic but not necessarily adherent to the state-approved narratives, provided its authors with the freedom of expression when trying to articulate what Novorossiia was supposed to be conceptually and politically. The electronic archive for the journal is available only from 1996 onwards.

Chapter 2 focuses on two books titled “History of Novorossiia”, both of which were commissioned by the state-affiliated organizations and both of which introduced the revised historical-geographical interpretation of Novorossiia into the Russian academia for the first time ever. The second “History of Novorossiia”, published by the Russian Academy of Sciences in 2017, is at the center of research in this chapter, as it combines both academic and publicist writing in order to create a convenient historical narrative that would justify the political state of affairs in Russian-Ukrainian relations during the period of War in Donbass 2014-2022.

To provide a foundation for the thesis, a brief discussion of the pertinent literature and conceptual framework that underpins the subsequent analysis is in order. Since my thesis focuses an interconnected web of Russian right-wing intellectuals, it contributes to a body of literature on such circles and their growing influence on the Russian state. There have been several studies that discussed Russian right-wing intellectual circles since 2000s¹. The net of Russian ultranationalist think-tanks became especially relevant after the so-called

¹ Marlene Laruelle, “‘Inside and Around the Kremlin’s Black Box: The New Nationalist Think Tanks in Russia,’ Stockholm Papers, October.,” October 1, 2009.

“conservative turn” in 2012², and by 2014 they were closely engaged with the official and unofficial Russian discourses about discrediting the legitimacy of Ukrainian statehood, the annexation of Crimea and inciting armed insurgency in the Donbas region. The political project of Novorossiia and, that emerged in 2014 as a pro-Russian separatist movement in Southeastern Ukraine, and its implications, were studied by such authors as Marlene Laruelle, Gerard Toal and some others³. Gerard Toal, in his 2019 book, “Near Abroad: Putin, the West, and the Contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus” dedicated a whole chapter to the Novorossiia political project and the role it played in Kremlin’s international affairs. Marlene Laruelle had several publications that discussed the ideological context of Novorossiia and the influence it had on Russian intellectuals⁴.

In her 2019 publication “Back From Utopia: How Donbas Fighters Reinvent Themselves in a Post-Novorossiia Russia”⁵ Laruelle explored what Novorossiia as a concept meant to those who were involved with Novorossiia on the ground, fighting in the Donbas trenches. She also noticed how Novorossiia engendered an upsurge in literature dedicated to Novorossiia, including fiction, memoirs, and the so-called *Novorossievidenie*, or “science of Novorossiia”, a literature that justified the historical existence of an entity called Novorossiia.

These studies provide a useful background to my thesis; nonetheless, their focus is different inasmuch as they are primarily interested in official organisations and think tanks and

² Natasha Bluth, “Fringe Benefits: How a Russian Ultranationalist Think Tank Is Laying the ‘Intellectual’ Foundations for a Far-Right Movement,” *World Policy Journal* 34, no. 4 (2017): 87–92.

³ John O’Loughlin, Gerard Toal, and Vladimir Kolosov, “The Rise and Fall of ‘Novorossiia’: Examining Support for a Separatist Geopolitical Imaginary in Southeast Ukraine,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 33, no. 2 (March 4, 2017): 124–44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2016.1146452>.

⁴ Marlene Laruelle, “The Three Colors of Novorossiia, or the Russian Nationalist Mythmaking of the Ukrainian Crisis,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 32, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 55–74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2015.1023004>.

⁵ Marlene Laruelle, “Back From Utopia: How Donbas Fighters Reinvent Themselves in a Post-Novorossiia Russia,” *Nationalities Papers* 47, no. 5 (September 2019): 719–33, <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2019.18>.

describe the place of these circles within the Russian context. My focus, on the other hand, is specifically on *Zavtra*, a platform that existed on the fringes of society and was not in any way approved by the state, as well as the Russian Academy of Sciences, which is a state organization (rather than just state-affiliated, which is the main focus of the literature discussed above), and it produces official historiography. In other words, I am concerned with how the concept of Novorossiia travelled from one end of the spectrum to the other, which is a focus that is still missing from the scholarly discussion of Russian intellectual discourse. As a subject of separate research, conducted in Chapter 1 of this thesis, *Zavtra* journal takes a specific place in between the official utilization of Novorossiia and the grassroots level carriers of Novorossiia ideology. The authors of *Zavtra* and their articles served as mediators in intellectual expression of Novorossiia, being connected to both insurgents on the ground and state agents and think tanks.

Russian right-wing thought had repeatedly disregarded the notion of Ukrainian sovereignty ever since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991⁶, and these views were regularly disseminated into the public sphere and official rhetoric⁷. What I am trying to show in this thesis is that Novorossiia as a concept provided an opportunity to create an alternative to Ukraine. Novorossiia was yet another manifestation of anti-Ukrainian views in Russian public discourse, that tried to further delegitimize Ukraine via historical imagery.

In fact, this connects my thesis to a larger theme in Russian political thought – the use of historical imagery in order to legitimize contemporary political agenda of the Russian state. It

⁶ Serhii Plokyh, *Ukraine and Russia: Representations of the Past* (Toronto ; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 166.; Paul Robinson, *Russian Conservatism*, NIU Series in Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (Ithaca London: Northern Illinois University Press, 2019), 202.; Gabriella Gricius, "The Consequences of Russian Populism," *Sicherheit & Frieden* 37, no. 1 (2019): 29–34, <https://doi.org/10.5771/0175-274X-2019-1-29>.

⁷ Kataryna Wolczuk, "Russia's Longstanding Problem with Ukraine's Borders | Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank," Chatham House, August 24, 2022, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/08/russias-longstanding-problem-ukraines-borders>.

was noted by many authors, that Putin's presidency ramped up the weaponization of historical metaphors and narratives in official rhetoric⁸. Glorification of Russian imperial past in public sphere became much more pronounced over the last two decades. For example, old imperial names reappeared in organizations like Russian Historical Society and Russian Geographical Society, that claimed continuity with organizations from the 19th century. These imperial commemorations coincided with the sacralization of the Second World War in a form of The Great Patriotic War 1941-1945 with the Victory Day celebrations on May 9 reaching the status as the main state holiday of the year⁹. In this thesis I am trying to show that Novorossiia is yet another historical image that harks back to Russian imperial and Soviet past as a natural state of affairs, the disposition that was meant to be and should be restored¹⁰.

On an even larger scope, it is a standard in sociology¹¹ and public discourse¹² to refer to the society in Russia as politically disengaged, passive, apathetic. Observers of Russian society have commented on low levels of civic participation and the lack of grassroots activism in Russian society. Reasons cited for this perceived passivity include the lack of historical examples, state control over media, and the lack of viable political alternatives. A typical example of such views is a piece published by Maxim Alyukov in the NYU Jordan Center, which contends that "living in an authoritarian environment, citizens feel politically

⁸ Miguel Vázquez Liñán, "History as a Propaganda Tool in Putin's Russia," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 43, no. 2 (2010): 167–78.

⁹ Mark Edele, "Fighting Russia's History Wars: Vladimir Putin and the Codification of World War II," *History and Memory* 29, no. 2 (2017): 90–124, <https://doi.org/10.2979/histmemo.29.2.05>; Matthew Luxmoore, "'Orange Plague': World War II and the Symbolic Politics of Pro-State Mobilization in Putin's Russia," *Nationalities Papers* 47, no. 5 (September 2019): 822–39, <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2018.48>

¹⁰ Thomas Sherlock, *Historical Narratives in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2007), <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230604216>;

¹¹ Maryana Prokop and Arleta Hrehorowicz, "Between Political Apathy and Political Passivity. The Case of Modern Russian Society," *Torun International Studies* 1, no. 12 (December 20, 2019): 109, <https://doi.org/10.12775/TIS.2019.007>.

¹² Mark Bennets, "Putin Rides to Victory on Apathy and Indifference," *Politico* (blog), March 19, 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/vladimir-putin-rides-to-victory-on-russia-election-apaty-and-indifference/>.

powerless and certain that engaging with political information cannot help them affect the course of political life. Because propaganda clichés are readily accessible, citizens can borrow them to interpret political life without fully integrating them with prior knowledge, including multiple ideas directly questioning various aspects of authoritarian policies.”¹³ In other words, the conventional portrayal of Russian society is one that is entirely inert and devoid of agency.

In order to correct this rather one-sided view of Russian society, what I am going to show in this thesis, is that a relatively small group of Russian right-wing authors not only had still remained socially and politically engaged and much more visible in public sphere due to the political demobilization of the rest of society, but this group of thinkers had also learned how to use state-approved narratives and their own public platforms to promote their ideas and values, and in case of Novorossiia even influence public discourse to the point where these ideas are able to infiltrate official state historiography, which complicates the standard picture of a completely inert society devoid of agency.

A brief historical background

At the end of 1980s centrifugal forces in the Soviet Union were growing strong, and by 1990 and 1991 talks about different republics of the Soviet Union gaining independence were heard louder than ever. But the exact boundaries of these would-be independent states were not completely clear, and the legitimacy of their governments and their actions were at best questionable. On July 16, 1990, the parliament of the Ukrainian SSR declared The Declaration of the state sovereignty of Ukraine. In response, in August 1990, a professor at the Odesa State University, Oleksii Surylov, argued that the polyethnic community of Southern Ukraine comprised of a separate ethnos called Novorossy and therefore should have

¹³ Maxim Alyukov, “Propaganda, Political Apathy, and Authoritarianism in Russia,” NYU Jordan Center, October 26, 2022, <https://jordanrussiacenter.org/news/propaganda-political-apathy-and-authoritarianism-in-russia/>.

some kind of autonomy inside Ukraine called “Novorossiia.”¹⁴ At the time he was also involved with the Transnistria project - a much more successful pro-Russian separatist movement in Moldavian SSR, bordering the Odesa region in Ukraine, that was also showing some interest in the idea of Novorossiia. Activists of this “Novorossiia” movement called the Democratic Union of Novorossiia had some gatherings in the summer and autumn of 1991 in the preparation for the all-Ukrainian referendum on its independence. Their ideas did not get any significant traction amongst Ukrainian population, as Odesa voted overwhelmingly in favor of Ukrainian independence (86%)¹⁵. The “Novorossiia” movement quickly withered away after that and its newspaper “Novorossiiskii telegraph” was closed.

At the same time, many Russian statesmen expressed ideas that Russia should retain control over the territories with significant Russian population and close cultural and economic integration with the Russian state, in Ukrainian case these were territories like Odesa, Crimea, and Donbass. The mayor of St. Petersburg and a presidential candidate Anatoly Sobchak in 1991 specifically used the term “Novorossiia” to refer to the territories in question¹⁶. It is worth mentioning that during that time future Russian president Putin was working for Sobchak as his advisor on international affairs.

Eventually, Russian-Ukrainian territorial tensions were resolved by signing the Russian-Ukrainian Friendship Treaty¹⁷ that mutually recognized the inviolability of their respective borders and solidified the commitment of both parties to not use each other’s territories to harm the security of each other.

¹⁴ Roman Solchanyk, “The Politics of State Building: Centre-Periphery Relations in Post-Soviet Ukraine,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 46, no. 1 (1994): 60.

¹⁵ Dieter Nohlen and Philip Stöver, eds., *Elections in Europe: A Data Handbook*, 1. ed (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verl.-Ges, 2010), 1985.

¹⁶ Solchanyk, “The Politics of State Building,” 48.

¹⁷ UNTC, “Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation,” [Treaties.un.org](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/showDetails.aspx?objid=08000002803e6fae), May 31, 1997, <https://treaties.un.org/Pages/showDetails.aspx?objid=08000002803e6fae>.

The term briefly resurfaced in the public media during the 2004 “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine. The mayor of Odesa Ruslan Bodelan, who participated in the Democratic Union of Novorossiia in 1991, in 2004 proposed to create an autonomous Novorossiiskiy Krai (region) inside Ukraine in case the Ukrainian state would not recognize the legitimacy of Viktor Yanukovich’s election as the president of Ukraine¹⁸. That proposition, like some other similar threats of federalization made by mayor of Kharkiv in the East, went nowhere and were not acted upon.

It was only in the wake of the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine in 2014 when the term “Novorossiia” would come back in a big way, including pages of the *Zavtra* journal.

¹⁸ “V Odesse reshili vydelitsja v novorossiiskii kraj,” *segodnya.ua*, November 28, 2004, <https://www.segodnya.ua/oldarchive/c2256713004f33f5c2256f5c005a205e.html>.

CHAPTER 1: NOVOROSSIYA ON THE PAGES OF THE ZAVTRA JOURNAL

This chapter focuses on a short time period (the most active phase spanned just four months of April-September 2014) and a rather small group of thinkers – authors of the ultranationalist *Zavtra* weekly journal. Yet their conception of Novorossiya is significant because it got disseminated to the wider public after it got the “green light” through Putin’s 2014 speech, and because the concept then travelled from this group of relatively marginal thinkers to an official version of ‘history-making’, to be explored in Chapter 2. It needs to be added that while Putin’s speech was an important moment in the genealogy of the concept, these thinkers had been engaging with it prior to it as well.

I argue that the concept served contradictory purposes in several ways. On the one hand, it was clearly a tool to justify Russian expansionism, a vehicle for ideas such as the return to an imperial ‘Golden Age’, as well as a tool to delegitimize the Ukrainian nation-state. On the other hand, it was also a concept through which a powerful social critique could be launched, since the same thinkers were also dissatisfied with their state and needed a channel to articulate their critique of oligarchic role, corruption and capitalism. Thus, the same concept that (as its very name, “New Russia”, signifies) envisioned the perfect Russia of the future, also served as a critique of the contemporary state of Russia. I aim to explore and illustrate this contradiction through a discussion of entries in the *Zavtra* journal, because for years it was the main outlet for Russian ultranationalists of a wide political spectrum.

Furthermore, another contradiction that characterizes the concept in this context is its futuristic – perhaps even utopian – thrust on the one hand, and what shapes these futuristic ideas took on the other. One core element of the way these thinkers envisioned the future was technological advancement; this, however, was explored in industrialist, Stalinist terms. I

thus argue that their version of the future of the nation (and more specifically, the future of technology) very much depended on drawing on and resurrecting notions from the nation's past.

In my chapter I intend to tease out these contradictions, but also show how the authors themselves very consciously also try to overcome these contradictions. Ultimately, these texts served the purpose of garnering public support for these ideas, to create a sense of community, but also to provide a sense of critique of the current state of affairs.

But first I am going to provide the political-historical background for the *Zavtra* journal, in order to understand how this intellectual platform became an important piece of media and a safe haven for Russian ultranationalist intellectuals.

What is the *Zavtra* journal?

Founded by the Soviet writer Alexander Prokhanov in 1990 under the name *Den* (“Day” in Russian), this newspaper was opposing the Perestroika policies and the political-economic and ideological course of the late Soviet Union and early Russian Federation from nationalistic and Soviet-patriotic stance¹⁹. During the events of the 1993 Russian constitutional crisis “Den” supported the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation and published a call “to depower the anti-people regime of Boris Yeltsin”. The newspaper was banned by the government and continued its work in November 1993 under the name *Zavtra* (“Tomorrow” in Russian). For the following two decades it was a safe haven for the Russian national-patriotic public, for many right-wing, nationalistic, fascist, Soviet-revisionist, and anti-liberal authors²⁰. During the events of 2011-2013 Russian protests, *Zavtra* was

¹⁹ Charles Rougle and Elisabeth Rich, “Aleksandr Prokhanov,” *South Central Review* 12, no. 3/4 (1995): 18–19, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3190227>.

²⁰ Gerard Toal, *Near Abroad: Putin, the West, and the Contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 76.

increasingly seen as an anti-liberal intellectual force that can effectively resist the liberal agenda in the public space. In fact, *Zavtra* made this fight one of its main missions, launching the interactive media project “DenTV” in December 2011²¹ under the leadership of Alexandr Borodai, the man who would later become the prime minister of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People’s Republic²². In fact, heavily interested in the Russian near abroad, *Zavtra* authors were actively commenting on Ukrainian affairs during years prior to 2013-2014. By that time the circulation figures of the paper-printed version of *Zavtra* reached 100 000 copies a week. Unfortunately, there is no way to find out what the site traffic for the journal at the time was. Because of the way the weekly *Zavtra* works, it has a “personal blog” section on the site where any associated author can write entries on any topic or theme. Once a week a compilation of entries that are seen to be particularly notable by *Zavtra* editors is published on the site and printed in paper. There are some publications included in this chapter for the analysis, that were not later published in a paper version of the journal but were written in a very similar way to the ones that were picked for the printed version, and therefore they both constitute one body of ideological texts and images of Novorossiia in authors’ view.

How *Zavtra* operates in the Russian right-wing intellectual network

Zavtra is especially interesting as a source material for publications because it does not stand alone as a public platform. It is connected to the larger Russian conservative intellectual network, mainly through the official “Izborsky Club” think tank, and these connections help to establish a reciprocal movement of ideas and discussions between different audiences and levels of governmental and public recognition of messages.

²¹ DenTV, “O Kanale Den’TV,” [dentv.ru](https://dentv.ru/about/), accessed August 24, 2023, <https://dentv.ru/about/>.

²² MK.ru, “Prem’er-ministrom DNR stal rossijanin Aleksandr Borodaj,” *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, May 16, 2014, <https://www.mk.ru/politics/2014/05/16/premerministrom-dnr-stal-rossiyanin-aleksandr-boroday.html>.

The intellectual life in patriotic circles in Russia is organized as a net of interconnected intellectual think tanks that are supervised or mediated by the state agents like the United Russia ruling party, Russian Duma, different ministries and municipalities, state corporations; and by some private agents affiliated with the state interests like banks, agricultural sector, etc²³. The net grew since mid-2000s and became especially prominent in the Russian public space after Putin's so-called "conservative turn" in 2012²⁴. That was also a year in which *Zavtra*'s founder Alexander Prokhanov founded the next big think tank called "Izborsky Club", named after the city in which it was founded in. This event had shown how Prokhanov's ultra nationalistic and Soviet-imperial views became much more influential amongst Russian intellectuals. Back in 1993, the predecessor to *Zavtra* – the "Den" journal was banned by Russian authorities for supporting nationalistic and pro-Soviet forces during the 1993 Russian Parliamentary Crisis. For almost two decades after that the new *Zavtra* journal and its authors existed in the far backyards of Russian politics, recovering from the 1993 defeat. It is worth noting, that the majority of authors who supported the Novorossiia concept, including those from the *Zavtra* pool, in 1993 supported communists and nationalists during the 1993 crisis, and they perceived the events of 2014 in Ukraine as a chance to get even with some liberal and democratic forces inside and outside of Russia²⁵.

During the rest of the 1990s and early 2000s authors of *Zavtra* were largely expelled from the public intellectual life of the country²⁶. They had never abandoned their ideas for the rebirth of both Russian and Soviet empires. Many authors turned to literature and futuristic fiction to

²³ Laruelle, ""Inside and Around the Kremlin's Black Box."

²⁴ Andrey Shcherbak, "Russia's 'Conservative Turn' after 2012: Evidence from the European Social Survey," *East European Politics* 39, no. 2 (April 3, 2023): 194–219, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2022.2084077>.

²⁵ Laruelle, "The Three Colors of Novorossiia, or the Russian Nationalist Mythmaking of the Ukrainian Crisis," 70.

²⁶ Juliette Faure, "A Russian Version of Reactionary Modernism: Aleksandr Prokhanov's 'Spiritualization of Technology,'" *Journal of Political Ideologies* 26, no. 3 (September 2, 2021): 365, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2021.1885591>.

express their ideas. Prokhanov's fiction "The Fifth Empire"²⁷ suggested that historically Russia went through four effective imperial stages – Kievan Rus', Muscovy, Romanov's Empire and Stalin's Empire, and through the events such as the October Constitutional Crisis of 1993 and the presidency of V. V. Putin Russia started to display a will to form yet another empire in the future. He started to use this notion in his political speeches too, while also on multiple occasions declaring that the idea of a powerful Russian state became his religion²⁸. Through his *Zavtra* weekly, Prokhanov stated goals of unifying far-left and far-right intellectuals amongst Russian opposition long before he regained the prominence in Russian intellectual life.

Anti-Ukrainian stance and ideological attacks on the Ukrainian state, which in 2014 would become a common theme in Russian propaganda, were harbored by the *Zavtra* authors, like Alexander Dugin, Maksim Kalashnikov and Sergei Sokurov long before it became a mainstream. They did not just jump on the bandwagon of the Russian official propaganda in 2014; their views predated the Ukrainian crisis by decades, and these views were one of many reasons for these authors for helping the concept of Novorossiia to reemerge in 2014.

A. Dugin during 1990s went on to develop his neo-Eurasianist ideology, developing the ideas of Russia as a unique and distinctive civilization inherently opposed to Atlantic civilizations of the West. In 1997 he published one of his most influential books "Foundations of Geopolitics"²⁹ which became a textbook for the strategic planning in the Academy of the

²⁷ Aleksandr Prokhanov, *Piataia Imperiia*, Serii "Amfora" (Sankt-Peterburg: Amfora, 2007).

²⁸ Lenta.ru, "Chernaja dyra russkoj istorii Aleksandr Prokhanov rasskazal, chto proizojdet v Rossii posle 4 marta," Lenta.ru, February 8, 2012, <https://lenta.ru/articles/2012/02/08/prokhanov/>.

²⁹ Aleksandr Gel'evič Dugin, *Osnovy geopolitiki: geopolitičeskoe buduščee Rossii*, Serija: Bol'shoe prostranstvo (Moskva: Arktogeja, 1997).

General Staff of the Russian Military³⁰. His political and philosophical imagery significantly influenced many *Zavtra* authors.

And all of these authors unanimously shared a deep resentment of an idea of an independent Ukrainian state long before Novorossiia became a thing. Even in his “Foundations of Geopolitics”, which was published the same year as the Russian-Ukrainian Friendship Treaty was signed, Dugin stated that *“Ukraine as a state has no geopolitical meaning. It has no particular cultural import or universal significance, no geographic uniqueness, no ethnic exclusiveness”*³¹.

Another author, Maksim Kalashnikov, repeatedly criticized Russian foreign policies towards Ukraine as being too soft, and in 2009 he published a book titled “Independent Ukraine. The failure of the Project”³². This blatant disregard for the Ukrainian statehood would become a golden standard for all of the authors of *Zavtra* when they would engage with the Novorossiia project, because that concept would add a vision for the political alternative, something that the supposed “failed Ukrainian project” could be replaced with.

The author who in December 2013 would be the first to address Novorossiia concept on the pages of *Zavtra* would be Sergey Sokurov, Russian writer and public figure. It is no wonder that he was at the frontier of promoting and developing intellectual concepts about Ukrainian internal problems - he was engaged with the politics of memory and cultural wars with Ukraine since the late Soviet times. He grew up in Lviv, an overwhelmingly Ukrainian-speaking town in the very west of Ukrainian SSR, he experienced the rise of Ukrainian national sentiments and Ukrainian nationalism in Ukrainian SSR first-hand and in real-time,

³⁰ John B. Dunlop, “Aleksandr Dugin’s Foundations of Geopolitics.,” *Demokratizatsiya* 12, no. 1 (January 1, 2004): 41–57.

³¹ Dunlop.

³² Maksim Kalashnikov and Sergej Buntovskij, *Nezavisimaja Ukraina: krach proekta*, Kniga-rassledovanie (Moskva: Folio, 2009).

and he directly opposed them during late 1980s by championing Russian cultural presence in the Western Ukraine. He founded the Russian Society named after A. S. Pushkin and the Russian cultural center in Lviv in 1990, but after the fall of the Soviet Union had moved to Russia and became a member of the Russian Union of Writers and an avid Russian-patriotic and anti-Ukrainian publicist³³. During 2007-2010 he continued his struggle against Ukrainian nationalism, now in the heart of Russia - he was employed at the Library of Ukrainian Literature in Moscow as an expert on Russian-Ukrainian relations. It was a period of “purges” among the cadres of the library full of controversies. For example, a historian and ethnosociologist Yurii Kononenko was fired from his position and banned from entering Russia where he lived for more than fifty years. It was because Kononenko was a person behind the publication of the audiobook named *History of Rus'*, which was the audio version of the 1818 manuscript that had caused sparks of Russian-Ukrainian “memory wars” about the Cossack myth from the day it was published³⁴. Despite being a chief librarian at the institution, Sokurov considered the Ukrainian Library to be a russophobic and anti-humanistic organization as it included texts written by the Ukrainian nationalists of the past and sought to reorganize it in a more Russian-centric way³⁵.

This unambiguous anti-Ukrainian stance of the majority of *Zavtra*'s authors probably prompted them to play with different scenarios of Ukrainian disintegration long before the project of Novorossiia was brought to an open discussion.

³³ Sergey Sokurov, “Ohota na brontozavra,” *Russkaja linija*, August 16, 2011, <https://rusk.ru/st.php?idar=105030>.

³⁴ Serhii Plokhyy, *The Cossack Myth: History and Nationhood in the Age of Empires*, New Studies in European History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

³⁵ Sergey Sokurov, “Delo Kononenko Zhivjot i Pobezhdaet... Natal'ju Sharinu,” *Dvizhenie za vozrozhdenie otechestvennoj nauki*, February 6, 2011, http://www.za-nauku.ru//index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3793&Itemid=39.

While one of Prokhanov's projects - the *Zavtra* journal - lingered in the shadows of the official rhetoric of the Russian state, in 2012 Prokhanov launched his another project, the Izborsky Club, named after the ancient Russian city Izborsk, that promoted the same ideas, had Putin's adviser Sergey Glazyev as one of its founding members, with the Russian Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinsky officially attending the foundation event. Many members of the Izborsky club had been writing for *Zavtra* for decades prior, and in fact, some of the articles analyzed in this chapter were either republished in the "Izborsky Club" journal later, or vice versa some articles here were a transcript or a verbatim report from the "Izborsky Club" meetings.

Zavtra and "Izborsky Club" occupied different positions in the Russian public space. As *Zavtra* was a non-state affiliated media outlet, the rhetoric of its authors did not draw that much public attention and sometimes could be disregarded as "just another thought from the radical ultranationalists". But "Izborsky Club" is an organization with much more solid public credentials and visible governmental connections, its programs and statements were usually taken much more seriously. This allowed the transfer of ideas like Novorossiia and many others from the intellectual fringes (like *Zavtra*) where they could be experimented with, to the more carefully curated intellectual centers (like Izborsky Club) and vice versa. The same transitional mechanics on a larger scale were also at play when the concept of Novorossiia went on to become a part of the Russian official historiography, which will be discussed in Chapter 2.

The intellectual life, organized in that way, allows Russian state to have a variety of options to choose from, when it needs to boost a particular agenda or promote a certain narrative. As Mark Galeotti, a senior researcher at the Institute of International Relations in Prague had put it: "When the Kremlin finds it convenient – they turn on the tap. When it becomes

inconvenient – they turn it off.”³⁶ I’m arguing that the picture is not that simple: while yes, the metaphorical ”tap” could be and indeed was opened on demand, it is not that easy to track its course of development and it is impossible to turn it off completely, as these ideas had direct consequences to the development of the real situation on the ground and in the public sphere. The system of reciprocal connections between different intellectual organizations and individual thinkers is too complex to be curated in that precise manner.

Authors of *Zavtra* experimented with the concept of Novorossiia and in result it became interconnected with their own values and their worldview, and the concept became a vehicle for perpetuating their own ideas about history, justice, both Ukrainian and Russian statehoods, their existential hopes and fears, their own piece of ideology.

Novorossiia as a tool to delegitimize the Ukrainian state

This approach conceptualized Novorossiia as a partial or complete alternative to the Ukrainian nation-state, which demanded to exercise its own right for self-determination.

Novorossiia was also imagined as a tool to influence internal Ukrainian politics, that could push the public opinion and the power balance in Ukraine to pursue the federalization process that would eventually create a new bilingual and decentralized Ukrainian state with Novorossiia being a significant pro-Russian part of it, a Russian political lever in the Ukrainian internal affairs.

Later on, Novorossiia was also presented as an end goal of the Donbass armed insurgency, providing a larger sense of purpose for the existing of self-proclaimed separatist republics, that were increasingly conceptualized as a “smaller Novorossiia”, or just as the first stage of a grand Novorossiia project.

³⁶ Bluth, “Fringe Benefits.”

Starting from the very first mention of the Novorossiia on the *Zavtra* pages, in Sergey Sokurov's article "The salvation of Ukraine is... in the disintegration of Ukraine"³⁷, it became a strong argument and a vehicle for promoting anti-Ukrainian sentiments, which were quite close to the hearts of many *Zavtra* authors to begin with. First of all, all the authors claim that Ukraine as a political project has definitely failed. They often attribute this to the fact that independent Ukraine is a fake and artificial entity to begin with, and, as mentioned before, it was at the core of their beliefs long before Novorossiia concept came into play. Sokurov's argument is that it is really only the Galicia region of Ukraine that is supporting any form Ukrainian independence. This part requires a little more explanation, because this view had some presence even in the Russian academia, not just some random publicist's opinion.

Sokurov and some other authors share the popular Russian conservative theory, which views Western Ukrainians as an artificial nation, created by the Austrian state in the second half of the 19th century as a countermeasure to spreading rusophilic ideas amongst Austrian Ruthenians. These views date back to the post WWI era, when some Russian "White émigrés" (a collective term for Russian intellectuals who were forced to leave the country after the October Revolution of 1917) shared the view that "There is no doubt as to the Austro-German origin of the legend of the existence of a separate Ukrainian nation"³⁸. In fact, one of such emigres, Ivan Ilyn, a Russian fascist intellectual of whom Valdimir Putin is very fond of³⁹, shared these views about the Ukrainian nation too. Cristoph Mick put it very

³⁷ Sergey Sokurov, "Spasenie Ukrainy v... raspade Ukrainy," *Zavtra*, December 15, 2013, <https://zavtra.ru/blogs/spasenie-ukrainyi-v-raspade-ukrainyi>.

³⁸ Alexandre Wolkonsky, *The Ukraine Question : The Historic Truth versus the Separatist Propaganda*, 1920, <http://archive.org/details/TheUkraineQuestionTheHistoricTruthVersusTheSeparatistPropaganda>.

³⁹ Taras Kuzio, "Soviet and Russian Anti-(Ukrainian) Nationalism and Re-Stalinization," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 49, no. 1 (2016): 88.

simply: “For Putin, Ukrainians are an 19th century invention of Russia’s enemies at the time: Austria-Hungary and the German Empire”⁴⁰.

So, in his article from December 17, 2013, that introduced Novorossiia to the *Zavtra* audience, Sokurov briefly retells the gist of the theory: “*Vienna, seriously alarmed, launched an effective propaganda of “Western values” amongst young Ruthenians*”. Even the very name of the nation was invented in the same way: “*The Vienna General Staff (avstriyskii genshtab) thought about the name of the projected nation. They settled on the word “Ukrainians”. After all, Ukraine does not have to be Russian. It can again become, as it has been for centuries, both Polish and Austrian. Whatever you want, you can sew a territory with such an “outlying name”*”. The article implies that the very word “Ukraine” is illegitimate, as it takes away the word “Rus” from these territories, both from Malorossiia (Little Russia) and Novorossiia (New Russia), erasing the Russian identity from these lands.

The idea of illegitimacy of everything Ukrainian was repeated multiple times in different articles from December 2013 in order to elevate Novorossiia as a legitimate and competitive alternative to what Ukraine is or what it had become⁴¹. In May 2014, Alexander Prokhanov described the Ukrainian nationality as to be “*born from the drug fantasy of the Kyiv mythmakers*” and praised Novorossiia as opposing “*this ugly, history-violating myth*”⁴².

⁴⁰ Christoph Mick, “The Fight for the Past: Contested Heritage and the Russian Invasion of Ukraine,” *The Historic Environment: Policy & Practice* 14, no. 2 (April 3, 2023): 135–53, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17567505.2023.2205703>.

⁴¹ Vladimir Bondarenko, “Ostavim ukram tol’ko ukru!,” *Zavtra*, March 20, 2014, <https://zavtra.ru/blogs/ostavim-ukram-tolko-ukru>.

⁴² Aleksandr Prokhanov, “Rossija, sestra tvoja — Novorossiia!,” *Zavtra*, May 15, 2014, <https://zavtra.ru/blogs/rossiya-sestra-tvoja---novorossiia>.

Vitaly Averyanov wrote that Ukraine is nothing more but a buffer state, with a *provincial and artificial identity* created by Anglo-Saxons to undermine Russia, and Novorossiya project aims to dismantle this buffer state⁴³.

Many authors seem to also suggest that a lot of Ukrainian lands were presents, gifted to Ukrainian state by the Russian rulers, and Novorossiya was gifted to the Ukrainian SSR by Lenin in 1920s. After that, Novorossiya was treated by Ukrainians as a colony and people of Novorossiya who were naturally Russian, were forced into Ukrainianness during the Ukrainization policy, so, in fact, the return of these lands to Russia and getting rid of Ukrainian identity is nothing more than a restoration of historical justice⁴⁴.

At the same time some authors recognized that such a blatant disregard of Ukrainian statehood could become a problem for Russian international relations, so in practical terms they suggested to exploit the ambiguous political situation in Ukraine to promote Novorossiya not as a part of Russia, but as a separate state, that has its own right for self-determination, and is not directly connected to Russia. Authors viewed such kind of political maneuver justified and quite standard, as they argued that Kosovo was created by the West in the same way, and Russia have already had unrecognized states of South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Transnistria as vanguards of its political influence in different countries before⁴⁵. After all, they argued, “the weakest goes to the wall, and the weakest right now is Ukraine”⁴⁶. Sometimes they suggested an even more restrained approach: to push Ukraine for the administrative change in order for it to become a federation of different regions, usually

⁴³ Vitalii Averyanov, “Novorossiya — nash avangard,” *Zavtra*, June 5, 2014, <https://zavtra.ru/blogs/novorossiya-nash-avangard>.

⁴⁴ Sergey Sokurov, “Hoteli Ukrainu, a poluchili... kak vseгда,” *Zavtra*, April 21, 2014, <https://zavtra.ru/blogs/hoteli-ukrainu-a-poluchili-kak-vsegda>.

⁴⁵ *Zavtra* editorial, “Slovo dnja: NOVOROSSIJA,” *Zavtra*, May 7, 2014, https://zavtra.ru/word_of_day/novorossiya.

⁴⁶ Aleksei Anpilogov, “Gorizont sobytij,” *Zavtra*, August 13, 2015, <https://zavtra.ru/blogs/gorizont-sobytij>.

divided into Western Ukraine, Central Ukraine and Novorossiya as the Southeastern Ukraine. They hoped that federalization could be achieved if the civil disobedience or armed insurgency in Southeastern Ukraine would provoke the government in Kyiv to accept the special status of these regions and to agree on federalization reforms. Novorossiya at the core of the bilingual Ukrainian Federalization was meant to influence the whole of Ukraine to become a much more Russian-oriented state in international affairs⁴⁷.

A majority of authors focused primarily on a partially successful armed insurgency in Eastern Ukraine, in the Donbass area, and included it into the Novorossiya imagery⁴⁸. Self-proclaimed DPR and LPR republics on the pages of *Zavtra* served as a proto-state and a larva stage for a larger Novorossiya in the future⁴⁹. But for the time being they had to come to terms with the fact that the Minsk agreements did not recognize Novorossiya or even small separatist republics on their own (in these documents they were referred to as the separate regions of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts in Ukraine). As the fall and disintegration of the Ukrainian state to them seemed inevitable, by 2015 these thinkers considered the project to be only postponed, and not entirely closed. They continued to call the Ukrainian government a “junta” and the Ukrainian state a “404”(referring to the error code “not found” in IT), denying Ukrainian claims for control over these territories and a lot of authors claimed that the rest of Novorossiya was just occupied by the “Kyiv regime”. The use of the term Novorossiya diminished but did not fade away completely from the pages of *Zavtra*, and some authors continued to use it as an umbrella term for both DPR and LPR republics, as well as the whole of Ukrainian Southeast.

⁴⁷ Nikolay Starikov, “Ideologija Novorossii,” *Zavtra*, June 5, 2014, <https://zavtra.ru/blogs/ideologiya-novorossii>.

⁴⁸ Sergey Sokurov, “Harakter Pervoj Ukrainsko-Novorossijskoj vojny,” *Zavtra*, accessed August 23, 2023, <https://zavtra.ru/blogs/iii-harakter-pervoj-ukrainsko-novorossijskoj-vojnyi>.

⁴⁹ Gevorg Mirzayan, “Luchshe men’she, da luchshe,” *Zavtra*, October 1, 2014, <https://zavtra.ru/blogs/luchshe-menshe-da-luchshe>.

Novorossiya as a social critique

In the process of creating and expanding the imagery of Novorossiya many authors appealed to the fight for social justice for the common people who were disenfranchised since the fall of the Soviet Union.

On the roundtable event “Ideology for Novorossiya”, organized by the Izborsky Club and published on the pages of the *Zavtra* journal, the one thing that all participants had agreed upon was that the social justice as the main cause of the Novorossiya insurgency was the most effective message for the audience⁵⁰.

Indeed, Donbass, which was the center of the Soviet mining and heavy industries, had a lot of depressed mining towns, and population was very prone to Soviet nostalgia. Since the fall of the Soviet Union former miners and factory workers experienced a significant drop in the quality of life, and plants and factories that survived were privatized by the oligarchs, who became the sole powerholders in Ukraine⁵¹. This anti-elite, almost class-driven thrust was a very powerful tool in promoting Novorossiya. Prokhanov and other authors praised the Novorossiya as a vanguard for justice, which is threefold: social justice, national justice, and divine justice. Social justice meant the fight against economic disparity, against oligarchs that privatized state property. It also had very strong regional overtones, as according to this narrative, the Western Ukraine and the capital Kyiv were leeching off the hardworking

⁵⁰ Zavtra editorial, “Ideologija dlja Novorossii,” *Zavtra*, September 18, 2014, <https://zavtra.ru/blogs/ideologiya-dlya-novorossii>.

⁵¹ Pekka Sutela, “The Underachiever: Ukraine’s Economy Since 1991,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, accessed September 17, 2023, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2012/03/09/underachiever-ukraine-s-economy-since-1991-pub-47451>.

people in Donbass, redistributing the budget unevenly, intentionally driving people in the Eastern Ukraine into the poverty.

This was a very powerful message directed primarily at the people in Donbass, to the active separatist republics, exploiting the popular but outdated myths amongst the local population about the Eastern regions being economic donors for the rest of Ukraine⁵². But at the same time this particular message left behind more agricultural and trade-oriented regions of the Ukrainian South, that did not conceptualize themselves as the ones being leeches off. This narrative also exploited fears and economical insecurities of the local population connected to the change in the oligarch clans in power in Ukraine. Former president Yanukovich was from the Donetsk clan, he was born and raised in Yenakiyev in Donbass region, and he was perceived as “one of us” by many people in the region⁵³. Donetsk benefited a lot during Yanukovich’s presidency, and Donbass locals were afraid that the rest of Ukraine might turn this thing around. For the same reasons these fears were also less prevalent in the South. Another important theme was the total corruption of the Ukrainian state.

What is intriguing though, it is that the same problems such as an oligarchic rule or corruption were applicable to Russia as well, and in case of economic disparities towards the capital city sometimes even more than in Ukraine, and these authors were quite aware of this situation. In fact, they used this knowledge in favor of promoting Novorossiia as a state, separated from both Ukraine and Russia. Among all the text in *Zavtra* it was probably the strongest argument used for the justification of Novorossiia: it cannot be a part of Ukraine, but it also cannot be included in Russia too, because it would be stricken with the same corruption, injustice and capitalism. Authors championed the popular (“narodnoe”) nature of

⁵² Adam Swain, ed., *Re-Constructing the Post-Soviet Industrial Region: The Donbas in Transition*, BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies 33 (London ; New York: Routledge, 2007), chap. 5.

⁵³ Swain, chap. 3.

the rule in Novorossiia: “*It has people's militia, people's journalists, people's leaders. These are not oligarchs who are delegated to power by the world government. These are not immoral rich men who have robbed their own people. These are the children of the people's war who are fighting for justice. Social justice, where there is no hierarchy, rich and poor*”⁵⁴.

At the same time these authors recognized that without Russian support there would be no Novorossiia at all. So, their rhetoric became quite sophisticated and quite utopian: Russia should recognize that in Novorossiia lies its salvation, and help it, and support it, but Russia should not allow its corrupted nature to corrupt Novorossiia too, and let people build their institutions in a relative freedom⁵⁵.

There was also a message for national justice in Novorossiia. It was rooted in the powerful feeling of *Ressentiment* – resentment and hostility of Russian people towards former Soviet “national outskirts” – national republics, including Ukraine, that left the Soviet Union and pursued to leave the Russian sphere of influence⁵⁶. This feeling takes an interesting form on the pages of *Zavtra* journal. On one hand, authors champion the state in which all nationalities are equal, and all nationalities are represented, as opposed to the national Ukrainian state, for example. But on the other hand, they continuously evoke the notions of the “Russian World” and “Russian Spring” as specifically ethnically Russian movement, they dream of the state free of “globalist Jewry”, and they usually do not even recognize some nations at all (for example, a popular Russian opinion that dated back to tsarist Russia perceives Ukrainians and Belarusians as subethnic groups among Russian people, akin to Cossacks or Pomors). These contradictions had even provoked a discussion among the

⁵⁴ Aleksandr Prokhanov, “Rossija, sestra tvoja — Novorossiia!,” *Zavtra*, May 15, 2014, <https://zavtra.ru/blogs/rossiya-sestra-tvoya---novorossiia>.

⁵⁵ Maksim Kalashnikov, “Novorossiia — zavtrashnjaja real’nost’,” *Zavtra*, May 29, 2014, <https://zavtra.ru/blogs/novorossiia-zavtrashnyaya-realnost>.

⁵⁶ Charles H Fairbanks, “The Politics of Resentment,” *Journal of Democracy* 5, no. 2 (1994): 37, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1994.0018>.

authors who argued that the excessive Russo-centric message of Novorossiia alienated some other ethnic groups from Russia – for example, Chechens and Ingushes, who were willing to fight for the common cause⁵⁷. In fact, *Zavtra* authors had to dial down some of their national sentiments in order to offer a critique to the Ukrainian nation-state, because a lot of them appear to be anti-migrant supporters and xenophobes when they discuss the internal Russian affairs (for example, chief editor Prokhanov is usually regarded as an open antisemite⁵⁸, and just by searching “migrants” in Russian on the *Zavtra* site the reader will be met with a plethora of articles berating non-Russian “*neobarbarians*” and “*living weapons*”.

Of course, related to the “national justice” question is the question about the language. Authors of *Zavtra* also participated in larger debates important for the Ukrainian politics – the role that Russian language played in the Southeastern region of Ukraine. And here Novorossiia as a term for the “Russian speaking Ukraine” was more applicable, than in case of the social justice rhetoric that was crafted specifically towards Donbass audience. In fact, Novorossiia here provided a smaller frame of reference as to the regions that predominantly spoke Russian: Crimea, although a part of historic Novorossiia, was out of the question because it was annexed by Russia in March 2014, and Sumy and Chernihiv were part of different historical regions that could not be tied to Novorossiia in any significant way. But the message was quite clear: Russian language is under attack in Ukraine, soon it would be illegal to even speak Russian publicly, and people should defend their Russian identity through the independence of Novorossiia which can become their home where no one could order them to speak Ukrainian. This notion harks back to the idea expressed by the *Zavtra* authors about Ukrainianness as an unnatural identity that was forced on people of

⁵⁷ “Газета Завтра: Идеология для Новороссии,” accessed August 23, 2023, <https://zavtra.ru/blogs/ideologiya-dlya-novorossii>.

⁵⁸ Henrietta Mondry, “Ethnic Stereotypes and New Eurasianism: Alexander Prokhanov’s Novel ‘the Cruise Liner Joseph Brodsky,’” *New Zealand Slavonic Journal* 45, no. 1 (2011): 147–73.

Novorossiya by Bolsheviks in 1920s and it is being forced on people now by the Ukrainian state. The language question was a hot topic in Ukraine even before 2014⁵⁹, and an appeal for the Russian-speaking population and exploitation of fears about people's identity being taken away definitely had some audience in the Southeast.

Alexander Prokhanov also mentioned another kind of justice that was being fought for in Novorossiya – divine justice, the fight between fascists and soviets, between evil and good, dark and light. He imagined this as an existential battle for the survival of the Russian nation, or even Russian civilization – if the resistance to evil in Novorossiya would fail, then soon Russia itself will succumb to the satanic forces of the West, that operate in Ukraine. Divine motif was also present in some publications that described the Greek-Catholic religion popular in the Western Ukraine and how it is yet another attempt to convert ethnic Russians into these artificial Ukrainians, or “Uniats”(religious term for specific Western-Ukrainian Christian congregation, that mixes Orthodoxy and Catholicism together). Interestingly enough, conceptualization of Novorossiya in terms of Orthodox revival was much less present in these articles and was used mainly for creative imagery and secular values, - for example, Prokhanov applied Orthodoxy to Novorossiya in that way in particular. Orthodox thinkers never really imagined Novorossiya as something different from Russia and didn't see any reason for Novorossiya to be independent. Authors like Frol Vladimirov, Vladimir Semenko or Leonid Semonovich-Nikshich, only argued in favor of Russian annexation of Novorossiya regions, or for the matter, annexation of all of the Ukraine. The thing is, that the schism between the Ukrainian and Russian Orthodox Churches – the problem that concerned Orthodox thinkers the most, was not a regional feature of Novorossiya, it was an all-

⁵⁹ Natalya Shevchenko, “The History of Bilingualism in Ukraine and Its Role in the Present Day Political Crisis,” *Cahiers Sens public* 1718, no. 1 (October 7, 2015): 203–25.

Ukrainian thing, therefore the scope of Novorossiia fell short in elucidating these problems for the religious audience.

This emphasis on justice as an ultimate goal of Novorossiia created an interesting effect by September 2014, when the first Minsk agreement was signed. Russia did not annex any new territories besides Crimea, it did not recognize Novorossiia in any shape or form, in fact, it did not even recognize the separatist republics in Donbass. In the eyes of many people who believed in Novorossiia it was a betrayal. And many *Zavtra* authors had found themselves in a peculiar position, as the metaphorical Galiotti's "tap" was now turned off on the Novorossiia. But evidently, these processes are not that easy to manipulate.

Yes, some authors tried to justify this state of affairs by saying that it was a masterfully executed chess play on behalf of President Putin, and that now Russia would economically elevate separatist republics in Donbass so high that the rest of Novorossiia would gladly secede from Ukraine⁶⁰. Some others just stopped bringing up Novorossiia in their articles at all. But the "Novorossiia network", organization of Novorossiia supporters, continued to post on the *Zavtra* site. And many authors started to express grievances about the situation. They could not just abandon their audiences who became invested in the project, they had established connections with the people in Donbass, in the very beginning they had created a roadmap for the Novorossiia project⁶¹, they participated in drafting the Constitution of Novorossiia, they had helped to launch the newspaper in separatist-controlled Donetsk and Luhansk.

⁶⁰ *Zavtra* editorial, "Luchshe men'she, da luchshe," *Zavtra*, accessed August 7, 2023, <https://zavtra.ru/blogs/luchshe-menshe-da-luchshe>.

⁶¹ *Zavtra* editorial, "Novorossija: dorozhnaja karta," *Zavtra*, May 25, 2014, <https://zavtra.ru/blogs/novorossija-dorozhnaya-karta>.

Some authors of *Zavtra*, like Igor Strelkov (Girkin) were removed from their positions but continued to write about Novorossiya, about the necessity of military action and military victory even after the cease fire agreement⁶².

Others changed their angle of social justice attack towards Russian elites, arguing that it is “international comprador elites” in Russian government who betrayed people of Novorossiya because of their class solidarity with the Ukrainian oligarchs and Western globalists⁶³.

Sometimes they claimed that the Novorossiya project was sabotaged by the liberal “sixth column” around President Putin⁶⁴.

The first signs of disenchantment with the Russian official policy towards Novorossiya were visible already in May 2014. But by the end of 2014 some authors were able to criticize Putin directly, comparing him to Nicolas II and M. Gorbachev (a very serious accusation in the eyes of imperialists), suggesting that Mr. President was lured into Ukrainian affairs by the United States, just like Saddam Husein was lured into Kuwait back in 1991, and now Russia was stuck in Novorossiya and with internationally unrecognized Crimea due to the incompetence of its leader⁶⁵.

Thus, Novorossiya provided options to critique the Russian state not only using the concept itself, but also using political consequences of Novorossiya as a critique to Russian defeatist attitudes and indecisiveness of its rulers. Novorossiya, that supposed to highlight the weakness points of the Ukrainian state, that failed as a nation-state and geopolitical buffer zone, this same Novorossiya helped to perpetuate and highlight weaknesses of the Russian

⁶² Igor Strelkov, “Pobedim v Novorossii – sohranim Rossiju,” *Zavtra*, September 12, 2014, <https://zavtra.ru/blogs/slovo-strelkova>.

⁶³ Igor Boikov, “Novorossiya i strah imushhego klassa,” *Zavtra*, July 4, 2014, <https://zavtra.ru/blogs/elita>.

⁶⁴ Valerii Stroev, “Gonenija,” *Zavtra*, July 8, 2014, <https://zavtra.ru/blogs/goneniya>.

⁶⁵ Frol Vladimirov, “Novorossiya umerla. Da zdravstvuet Novorossiya!,” *Zavtra*, December 4, 2014, <https://zavtra.ru/blogs/novorossiya-umerla-da-zdravstvuet-novorossiya>.

state too, that failed to be the anti-globalist empire of justice it should have been in the eyes of national-patriotic authors of *Zavtra*.

Futurism – envisioning the future through the past

The third aspect of Novorossiya could be considered a futuristic-utopian one. After all, the journal is called *Zavtra*, which literally translates as “Tomorrow”, and visions of the future were always its distinctive features in articles. Plus, the term Novorossiya, “New Russia” also bears that impulse towards the future, towards something new. But *Zavtra*’s imagery for the Novorossiyan “new” looks very much like the resurrection of the Soviet Stalinist “old”, with the planned economy, focus on heavy industry, increased international isolation and carefully curated and restricted trade. Of course, this Soviet “old” is greatly idealized and simplified, but the colorful pictures of the Novorossiyan, and for that matter, Russian future, paint an appealing picture for the masses and puts their ideas neatly into the so-called “Golden Age discourse”, a notion that ethnic nationalism tend to utilize nostalgia in order to create a system of glorious past, decaying present and utopian future⁶⁶. In the case of *Zavtra* authors, the Stalinist USSR serves as a glorious past, the War in Donbass – the decaying present, and Novorossiya – the utopian future.

As was previously discussed, Novorossiya was sometimes envisioned as the “pure” and uncorrupted version of Russia, that not only have to be separated from Russia for political reasons, but it needs to be separated from Russia for the ideological reasons, as it might have become a staging ground for what the future Russia can become. Surprisingly many authors engaged with this utopian vision of what Novorossiya could achieve, basically expressing their ideas of an ideal Russian state.

⁶⁶ Gabriella Elgenius and Jens Rydgren, “Nationalism and the Politics of Nostalgia,” *Sociological Forum* 37, no. S1 (December 2022): 1230–43, <https://doi.org/10.1111/socf.12836>.

One of the most prominent themes, evoked by Alexander Prokhanov and Maksim Kalashnikov was the so-called *Technosphere*⁶⁷⁶⁸. They dreamed of the reborn of the Soviet heavy industries: huge shipyards of Odesa and Mykolayiv, producing mega-ships in dry docks with tens of thousands of workers, immense factories in Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk, producing modern microprocessors and chemical materials, vast agricultural fields in the south in Kherson, growing healthy food, elite and luxurious seashell farms on the coast of the Black Sea, roaring turbines of spaceship shuttles and launching pads in Zaporizhzhia, immense silhouettes of nuclear power plant colling towers piercing the sky and of course the once again prosperous resource industry in Donbass that utilizes “*environmentally friendly coal mining*”, and endless gas and oil pipelines crossing the landscape. These are very appealing technocratic images of the future, but they evoke pictures of Soviet industrialization of the middle of XX century. It is the future how it was imagined back then, probably when these people were still children or young men. Of course, it is sprinkled with some obvious remarks about oyster farms (probably pried about on some seaside resort in Italy or Georgia) and “*environmentally friendly coal mining*” (a curtsey to the miners’ communities in Donbass), but at its core this imagery has an advanced technology of 1950s, of Stalin’s “Golden Age”. Modern developed nations do not see the production of microelectronics as the pinnacle of hi-tech development in the country and well-being of its population, modern technocrats rarely praise fossil fuel as the way of the future, and in a way this futuristic view in reality is a nostalgic gaze into the idealized past. Because, of course Novorossiia should run as a planned economy with some small-scale manual crafting allowed – the notion of “*people’s economy*” or “*dictatorship of development*” is quite

⁶⁷ Aleksandr Prokhanov, “Rossija, sestra tvoja — Novorossiia!,” *Zavtra*, May 15, 2014, <https://zavtra.ru/blogs/rossiya-sestra-tvoja---novorossiia>.

⁶⁸ Maksim Kalashnikov, “Novorossiia — zavtrashnjaja real’nost’,” *Zavtra*, May 29, 2014, <https://zavtra.ru/blogs/novorossiia-zavtrashnyaya-realnost>.

popular amongst *Zavtra* authors⁶⁹. They usually promote the autarkic economy without the international trade, “*free of dollar and World Trade Organization*”, that had already ruined Russia.

It is especially interesting to see this mix of technological optimism with the Orthodox spiritualism, that sometimes can be observed in the writings of the same authors. They simultaneously praise the industrial society and progress and lament the lack of piety amongst the people and the elites. But it is very much in line with Prokhanov’s goal to unite “white” and “red” patriots in Russia, because in the end they all want their country to be a strong empire once again. And this eclectic imagery of Orthodox power plants and spiritual spaceships draws quite a demonstrative picture.

Timeline for the development of Novorossiia

Zavtra weekly with its variety of authors provided a plethora of images of Novorossiia during 2014, and the development of these images happened in different stages.

There are no cases of the term Novorossiia being used in modern political imagination on the pages of the *Zavtra* weekly or even on its site, since 1996 (the earliest available date that can be tracked through the site and electronic archives). My own understanding of the reasons it was never brought up earlier is that up until late 2013 there was a genuine belief in Russian right-wing circles that Ukraine is just too weak to really break off from the Kremlin’s grasp, and the Ukrainian economy, ineffective and heavily dependent on close ties with Russia, would never allow the Ukrainian state to pursue the change in political vector in a meaningful way. But by 2013 the prospects of further Ukrainian integration into the European Union instead of Russia were proving to be grounded in reality, and not just imagination of some

⁶⁹ Vitalii Averyanov, “Novorossiia — nash avangard,” *Zavtra*, June 5, 2014, <https://zavtra.ru/blogs/novorossiia-nash-avangard>.

pro-European Ukrainian elites. The first mention of Novorossiia regarding the territories of modern Ukraine dates back to December 2013, when tensions in Ukraine were running high and Euromaidan protests were in full swing. Russian state media were involved in information war with Ukrainian media for a several months by that time, trying to discredit pro-European Union and anti-presidential protests in Ukraine, as then-president Viktor Yanukovich along with his party was largely a pro-Russian figure in Ukrainian politics. So, the anti-western and anti-Ukrainian sentiments, quite popular by that time amongst the majority of *Zavtra* authors, coincided with the similar stance of the Russian state media and even some Russian state officials⁷⁰ which definitely gave more courage to *Zavtra* authors to express themselves.

Political crisis in Ukraine followed by the annexation of Crimea engendered an upsurge in patriotic sentiments in general Russian public and gave hope for the right-wing conservative intellectuals that their time had come to be heard. Since late February 2014, Ukraine plunged into a power crisis and civil protests, and to many Russian national-patriotic intellectuals it was looking like an opportunity for Russia to shape the configuration of a disintegrating neighbor country. Having recognized that Crimean case was different in a lot of ways from mainland Ukraine, these authors started to play with the idea of redefining and recategorizing the most affected by the turbulences and anti-Euromaidan sentiments territories of Ukraine as something different than just the Ukrainian state. That's when the notion of Novorossiia, a historical-revisionist concept of Ukrainian Southeast, had resurfaced in a big way. Authors of *Zavtra* did not invent it, but they played an important role in this term getting initial traction in intellectual circles. Later in 2015 Alexander Prokhanov would boast that even Putin's officials admitted that "*Novorossiia is Zavtra's and Izborsky Club's doing (delo)*"⁷¹. What

⁷⁰ Kuzio, "Soviet and Russian Anti-(Ukrainian) Nationalism and Re-Stalinization," 96.

⁷¹ Aleksandr Prohanov, "Rossija Na Perelome Sud'by. Zasedanie Izborskogo Kluba v Nizhnem Novgorode.," Izborskij klub. Russkie strategii., April 2015, 93.

really propelled Novorossiia to public media headlines was Putin's annual conversation with the Russian public called the Direct Line, that happened on April 17, 2014, where he stated that territories "from Odesa to Kharkiv" were never called Ukraine, they were called Novorossiia instead. From that day Novorossiia became a default term for Ukrainian Southeast amongst national-patriotic intellectuals in Russia.

What followed next was the most fruitful period for intellectual conceptualization and actualization of Novorossiia. Vague geographic borders and political uncertainty inside Ukraine allowed the concept to be very flexible and serve as a vehicle for many larger ideas. Many *Zavtra* authors actively participated in Novorossiia's intellectual and political beginnings. *Zavtra* authors like Igor Strelkov (Girkin) and Borodai became a Minister of Defense and the Prime Minister of self-proclaimed DPR respectively, and another prominent separatist figure – a Ukrainian citizen Pavel Gubarev, went the other way around and became the member of Izborsky Club and *Zavtra*'s author. DPR and LPR went on to sign a unification treaty that created a confederate Union called "Novorossiia", that included associate members from virtual Kharkiv People's Republic and Odesa People's Republic, that existed only on paper. The very name Novorossiia suggested a much larger territorial claims of Donbass insurgency. Izborsky Club along with some *Zavtra* authors helped to draft Novorossiia's constitution and provided it with ideological support. Izborsky Club's office opened in Donetsk in early June 2014.

By the summer of 2014, Ukraine's successful anti-terrorist operation put pro-Russian forces in Eastern Ukraine on the brink of annihilation. In August 2014 several thousand Russian troops crossed the Russian-Ukrainian border, and in a series of battles managed to inflict

heavy casualties to the Ukrainian army⁷². As a result, the first Minsk ceasefire treaty in September 2014 was signed, and later solidified by the second Minsk treaty in February 2015⁷³. In these agreements there was no mention of Novorossiia, only a “Separate districts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine”. Separatist-controlled territories were under increasing Russian direct control. Local agents were removed from positions of power, including the abovementioned Gubarev, Strelkov and Borodai. Even DPR and LPR were recognized neither by Ukraine nor Russia. Political project Novorossiia was pronounced dead on May 19, 2014⁷⁴, by Oleg Tsarev, former deputy of the Ukrainian parliament from the “Party of regions” and an official speaker of Novorossiian parliament. These events launched a swift disappearance of Novorossiia from Russian intellectual life. Since summer 2014 an increasing number of articles and entries were published in *Zavtra*, where authors expressed their disenchantment and lamented the future of such a promising project. The number of publications even mentioning Novorossiia on the *Zavtra* site had significantly dropped⁷⁵.

Now, the obvious question would be: why did they not abandon the notion of Novorossiia entirely? After all, it quickly became clear that the project fell out of favor in the Russian higher ups, and 2015 marked the beginning of series of assassinations of people who were involved with the initial phase of Novorossiia in April-August 2014, starting with field commanders like Aleksey Mozgovoy, Alexander Bednov, Pavel Dryomov, Mikhail “Givi”

⁷² Piotr Żochowski, Rafał Sadowski, and Marek Menkiszak, “The Russian Military Intervention in Eastern Ukraine,” OSW Centre for Eastern Studies, September 3, 2014, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2014-09-03/russian-military-intervention-eastern-ukraine>.

⁷³ Kristian Åtland, “Destined for Deadlock? Russia, Ukraine, and the Unfulfilled Minsk Agreements,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 36, no. 2 (March 3, 2020): 122–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2020.1720443>.

⁷⁴ Redakcija Pravda.Ru, “Novorossii ne byt’ iz-za Minskih soglashenij,” Pravda.ru, May 19, 2015, https://www.pravda.ru/news/expert/1260461-Oleg_Tcarev/.

⁷⁵ How many entries use the word Novorossiia on the “Zavtra” site, broken down by years: December 2013 – 2; January 1, 2014, to April 16, 2014 – 8; April 17, 2014, to February 12, 2015 – 524; February 13, 2015, to December 31, 2015 – 256; January 1, 2016, to December 31, 2016 – 97; January 1, 2017, to December 31, 2017 – 36; January 1, 2018, to December 31, 2018 – 16; January 1, 2019, to December 31, 2019 – 13; January 1, 2020, to December 31, 2020 – 4; January 1, 2021, to December 31, 2021 - 4

Tolstykh, Arsen “Motorola” Pavlov and ending with leaders of LPR and DPR such as Valery Bolotov, Gennadiy Tsytkalov and Alexander Zakharchenko. Indeed, the project, or the concept of Novorossiia did not manage to get much attention from the Ukrainian or even Russian general public. But for those whose attention it got, Novorossiia became everything. Regular soldiers left their comfortable lives in Moscow, or Saint Petersburg, or Odesa, and according to famous Russian writer and National Bolshevik Zakhar Prilepin, lived “anti-life”⁷⁶ in the trenches of Donbass ever since. And some authors of *Zavtra* were so involved with promoting and creating Novorossiia that they became entangled with these people on the ground who fought and died for the cause, and for some of them that cause was Novorossiia, that for many people symbolized exactly those things that were described in the articles above: Russian imperial legacy, hardworking Soviet people, beliefs about Russian rejuvenation in the future. Organizations like “Coordination center for the assistance of Novorossiia”⁷⁷ and “Novorossiia public movement”⁷⁸ were active for years after 2014 and are still active by 2023. Some separatist military formations like “Viking” battalion and “Volunteer Communist Squad” wore patches with Novorossiia cross banner in the past and some, like “Prizrak” brigade⁷⁹, bear the name of Novorossiia on their flags and patches as of 2023, even after separatist military units were merged with the Russian ones after an official annexation of DPR and LPR by the Russian Federation in Autumn 2022. For them Novorossiia had always meant territories “from Odesa to Kharkiv” ever since 2014. Being outside of the Russian public sphere these people on the ground had never reserved their words about their disenchantment with Putin. In fact, some of them had never supported

⁷⁶ Laruelle, “Back From Utopia,” 727.

⁷⁷ “Koordynatsionnyj Centr Pomoshhi Novorossii,” KCPN, accessed August 26, 2023, <https://kcpn.info/>.

⁷⁸ “Dvizhenie Novorossiia,” Dvizhenie Novorossiia Igorya Strelkova, accessed August 26, 2023, <http://novorossia.pro/>.

⁷⁹ Aleksandr Rybin, “Idejnye principy brigady «Prizrak» im. A.B. Mozgovogo,” *Rabkor.ru* (blog), July 21, 2015, <https://rabkor.ru/columns/left/2015/07/21/ghost/>.

Putin to begin with. *Zavtra* authors were usually sympathetic to Putin, and they had to be more cautious choosing their words, but they could not ignore Novorossiia completely because they were too invested in it. People who were close to the Russian state organizations and had a huge media presence, like members of the Izborsky Club, especially Dugin and Prokhanov, had to abandon Novorossiia completely as a political or ideological project, although the word “Novorossiia” never completely vanished from public discussions, reappearing retrospectively or just as a geographical term.

Conclusions

Zavtra, as a relatively free agent in the Russian intellectual life, allowed for its authors to go above and beyond in exploring and expanding the concept of Novorossiia primarily as a tool against the Ukrainian state at first, because in early 2014 it was this anti-Ukrainian position that had aligned views of the *Zavtra* ultranationalists with the rhetoric of the Russian state.

But Novorossiia became much more than just a tool – it became a vehicle for authors’ own ideas, complaints and grievances directed to the Russian Federation too.

Returning to Mark Galeotti’s metaphor about the tap, that could be turned on by the Kremlin on demand in order to prompt the brainstorm of ideas and that then could be turned off immediately. In reality, many *Zavtra* authors did not have an official position within the state, and they were not obligated to follow established directions. For them the tap was never completely off ever since. Day by day, article by article Novorossiia absorbed authors’ worldview, their social and political aspirations, it became a concept of its own that sometimes went far beyond what was suitable for Russian officials, their rhetoric and their policies. Novorossiia expressed existential fears of Russian nationalists about social justice and national resentment, elucidating their longing for the New Russia, not only

geographically, but metaphorically, that one day would become the world's technological and spiritual powerhouse.

CHAPTER 2: THE PRODUCTION OF HISTORY OF NOVOROSSIYA

The need to create a written “History of Novorossiya” was raised on the pages of the *Zavtra* journal as early as May 2014⁸⁰.

This chapter traces how the concept travelled from the relatively marginal group of *Zavtra* writers to the officially sanctioned discourse in two history textbooks. I argue that this enterprise conceptualized the region as a separate entity with a seamless historical narrative, and in the process constructed an ‘imagined geography’ (rather than an ‘imagined community’) for the Southeastern Ukraine in the form of Novorossiya. Ultimately, the textbook production project could be conceived of as constructing a history of a nation state without there actually being a nation state in reality.

As the concept travelled from the *Zavtra* journal to the history books, several transformations took place. In the process, a relatively unknown, obscure concept came to be used as a justification of official discourse. Some of the previous aspects got lost – it no longer served the purpose of social critique, and the futuristic aspect was also no longer present in the discourse.

What remained, and what characterizes the project as a whole, is the desire to produce a seamless, unified narrative through the deployment of a concept that is fraught with contradictions. Its role was to serve as a reference point, and to produce a stable historical concept that would justify the state of affairs. In other words, the project was driven by a desire to provide consistency to a concept that was in fact always shifting. In addition, the

⁸⁰ Maksim Kalashnikov, “Novorossiya — zavtrashnjaja real’nost’,” *Zavtra*, May 29, 2014, <https://zavtra.ru/blogs/novorossiya-zavtrashnyaya-realnost>.

construction of Novorossiia in this case was not simply justified as something that could influence the public, but merely the fact that thanks to these texts Novorossiia came to existence was an end in itself. As a result of constructing this historiography, Novorossiia is now a historical concept.

I want to start the chapter with a brief discussion of the production of these textbooks, and how they came into being in the first place. It is important to underscore that the two organizations that had commissioned the textbooks played an intermediary role between the right-wing intellectuals and Russian academia. So, while the end product is a product of academia, its point of departure is decidedly not an academic interest.

I then want to turn to the contradictions and inconsistencies of the texts (especially the second one). Firstly, how it engages in the project of mythmaking by constructing a series of historical “anchor points” and tries to present a seamless, deterministic narrative, that retroactively merges Novorossiia with the modern Southeastern Ukraine into the one geographical and historical continuum. At the same time, there are certain ‘breaking points’ that complicate and contradict this seamless narrative. I aim to discuss some representative examples of such ‘breaking points’ in order to deconstruct this history writing.

Secondly, the book contains chapters and passages that would classify as properly ‘scientific’, backed up with proper research and evidence; but at the same time there are passages (and even whole chapters) whose tone and message undermines this serious academic quality. I aim to show that whereas the former sections present historical facts and evidence, the latter serve the purpose of interpreting this evidence for the reader. Novorossiia could thus only be constructed by instructing and ‘educating’ the readers as to how it should be read.

The name “Novorossiya”

Novorossiya as a term in historical science is not an invention of 2014. But the original historical-geographical term for the region of the Northern Black Sea was significantly expanded upon in these texts, in order to create a sense of connection and continuity between the Novorossiya region from the 18th and 19th centuries and modern regions of the Southeastern Ukraine. So, we need to explore the historical implementation of the term Novorossiya before 2014.

Novorossiya, which literally means “New Russia”, was a name given to the newly established Russian imperial governorate (guberniya) back in 1764, and at the time it included southern frontier territories of the Russian Empire: Slavyanoserbsk, Kremenchug, “Ukrainian defense line” and served as an outpost for future Russian territorial advances on the territories controlled by the Crimean Khanate and the Ottoman Empire⁸¹. Territories of the governorate were constantly moving and readjusting because of the swift Russian expansion into the Steppe territories during the next 25 years, some parts of the governorate had to be excluded from the military administration, some were added to it. The so-called first Novorossiya was disbanded in 1783, and later the second administrative unit under the same name appeared for a brief period of six years in 1796. The name “Novorossiya” stopped being used on imperial maps⁸² after the territorial reform of 1802, when it was divided into smaller governorates and its fringe territories redistributed between other regions like the Don Cossack Region, Azov governorate, etc. The influential Geographical and Statistical Dictionary of the Russian Empire (1863– 1885), edited by famous traveler and scholar Petr

⁸¹ Mikhail Suslov, “The Production of ‘Novorossiya’: A Territorial Brand in Public Debates,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 69 (February 7, 2017): 202–21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2017.1285009>.

⁸² Proekt «Istoricheskie Materialy», “Atlas Rossijskoj Imperii (1800),” accessed August 29, 2023, <https://istmat.org/node/45252>.

Semenov Tyan-Shanskii, had no entry on ‘Novorossiya’ at all⁸³. The term stuck around for a while in the newly established Odesa port city and the southern regions around it. The reason for that was that the military units of these fringe south-western borders of the empire were organized in a “General Governorship of Novorossiya and Bessarabia” up until 1874, and some Russian military officials were very fond of the imperial connotations of the New Russia – the same way they were excited to promote the concept of the “Zheltorossiya”, or “Yellow Russia” on the other side of the empire – on the Chinese territories⁸⁴. In fact, the University, founded in Odesa in 1864, was named the University of Novorossiya, and the newspaper named “Novorossiiskii telegraf” was published in Odesa from 1869 to 1900. By the end of Russian imperial times, the term became a rather vague geographical term referring to territories in the Northern Black Sea region.

⁸³ Suslov, “The Production of ‘Novorossiya,’” 206.

⁸⁴ Mikhail Khodjakov, “‘Yellow Russia’ of the Late XIX — Early XX Centuries in the Geopolitical Plans of the Russian Military Elite,” *Modern History of Russia* 8 (January 1, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.21638/11701/spbu24.2018.406>.

For example, one of the last times Novorossiya was mentioned on the maps was in the 1910 publishing “Novorossiya and Crimea” by the Russian Imperial Geographical Society⁸⁵.



Figure 1. Ethnic map of Novorossiya in the 1910 atlas and the borders of political project of Novorossiya in 2014 which is the endpoint in the “Histories of Novorossiya”.

The original 1910 map, although not completely accurate⁸⁶, derives its data from the military – from the Russian imperial officer Rittich, and includes territories not only from the modern Ukraine, but also territories that belong to modern Moldova and Russia (Stavropol and Rostov regions, and even parts of Volgograd and Krasnodar regions too). It shows the maximum extent to which the term Novorossiya was referred to during imperial times.

⁸⁵ P. P. Semenov, *Novorossiya i Krym*, Rossiya. Polnoe Geograficheskoe Opisanie Nashego Otechestva 14 (Saint Petersburg: A.F. Devrien, 1910).

⁸⁶ Rittich confused data for Little Russians and Great Russians in the Northern Crimea and Kherson, as the 1897 imperial census clearly shows the Little Russian majority in the region. It is referred to as a "Rittich's mistake" in historiography.

Compared to this, both “Histories of Novorossiia” use a much smaller scale to define the region, to include exactly eight regions of modern Ukraine and nothing more, excluding Crimea, Moldova or Russian regions of Stavropol, Rostov and Volgograd. In fact, they try to redefine the Ukrainian Southeast as Novorossiia, because it fits the official Russian narrative discussed further in the chapter.

Reemergence of Novorossiia as a historical-revisionist brand

The re-imagining of Novorossiia in this way is very much in line with the ideas of “imagined geographies” expressed by Edward Said⁸⁷ and “imagined communities” expressed by Benedict Anderson⁸⁸. It is of constructivist nature by design, and what makes its peculiar is that firstly, it was not *imagined* this way by the people of these territories but rather by a group of intellectuals based mainly in the Russian Federation, and secondly, that this constructivist nature was quite well understood by its creators and proponents.

Novorossiia narrative got a strong media presence since the President Putin’s Direct Line on April 17, 2014, when he has said: *The essential issue is how to ensure the legitimate rights and interests of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers in the southeast of Ukraine. I would like to remind you that what was called Novorossiia (New Russia) back in the tsarist days – Kharkov, Lugansk, Donetsk, Kherson, Nikolayev and Odessa – were not part of Ukraine back then. These territories were given to Ukraine in the 1920s by the Soviet government. Why? Who knows. They were won by Potyomkin and Catherine the Great in a series of well-known wars. The center of that territory was Novorossiysk, so the region is called Novorossiia. Russia lost these territories for various reasons, but the people remained”*.

⁸⁷ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Penguin Books India, 1995).

⁸⁸ Benedict Richard O’Gorman Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 1991).

The name “Novorossiya” as a geographical term by that time was not familiar to the general public, barely anyone could correctly identify the Novorossiysk mentioned in the president’s speech with the modern city of Dnipro (Dnipropetrovsk in 2014) in Ukraine and not with the modern city of Novorossiysk in the Russian Federation (the ambiguity that might be welcome in such situation), and only historians could argue about territories of the Kharkiv region being conquered and settled a good one hundred years before Catherine the Great. The public, that knew about the peculiarities of the Southeastern Ukraine in terms of contemporary politics and election cycles, discussed in the introduction part of this Thesis, now were given a concept that would appropriate a familiar geography of the Ukrainian Southeast and expand it on the timescale of a vaguely determined Novorossiya at least back to 18th century, thus creating a historical-revisionist narrative that would trace the 2014 political crisis in Ukraine back to 1920s, 1760s or even further back in time.

The problem was that such a narrative posited a problem for the existing school textbooks or academic writings that previously did not conceptualize historical events in a similar fashion. In fact, direct comparison between the historical borders of the Novorossiya governorate at its maximum expanse in 1800 and the territories controlled by the separatist insurgents in 2014 might lead an interested person confused, as the borders did barely coincide.

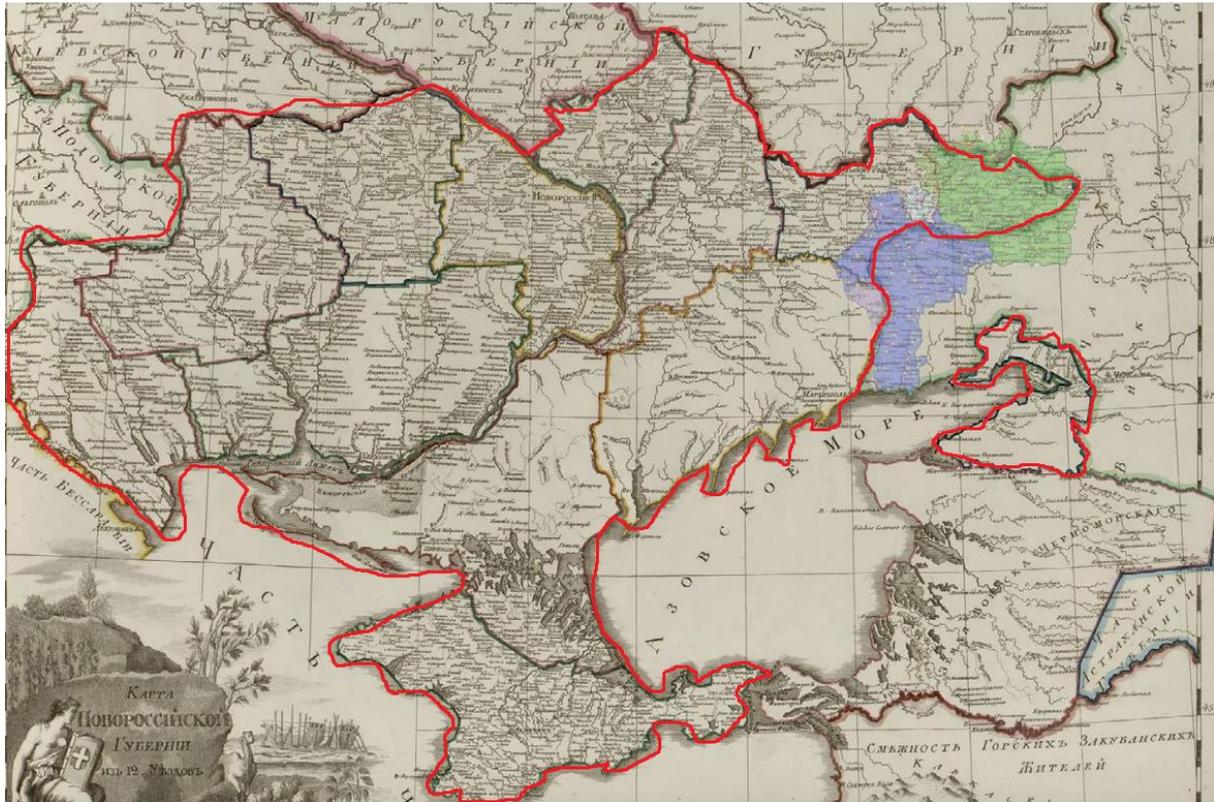


Figure 2. Map of Novorossiysk governorate, 1800, outlined in red, and the Territory controlled by the Pro-Russian insurgents in Donbas, 2014⁸⁹.

That is why this particular narrative that combined the notion of historical Novorossiysk region with the contemporary eight regions of the Southeastern Ukraine required a proper academic polish, and a couple of state-affiliated organizations rose to the occasion in order to facilitate the production of a coherent and competent History of Novorossiysk.

Organizations and authors behind the production of History of Novorossiysk

Before discussing the construction of Novorossiysk in the textbooks themselves, some remarks about the production of the books are in order, since the mechanism behind the production and unique position of the organizations further underscore the peculiar nature of history-making.

⁸⁹ Suslov, "The Production of 'Novorossiysk,'" 207.

Both organizations that would commission the production of “History of Novorossiya” books were created in 2012 and quickly became a crucial tool of the Russian state to influence the public opinion on hot historical topics utilized for conducting memory politics inside Russia.

They approach the promotion of patriotic and often state-curated historical narratives in a different manner. The Russian Military Historical Society is a state organization that openly declares its goals of assisting, developing and promoting governmental educational programs and influencing the perception of history by the Russian citizens, especially children and youth⁹⁰. The Russian Historical Association tries to place itself in the middle between the state, the Russian public, and the Russian scientific society. Unlike RMHS, it tries to be perceived as a less politically driven organization with the popularization of pure science as its main concern.

This dual approach allows these organizations to better calibrate and deliver official narratives to the public: while RMHS prestige lies in the public understanding that its actions and messages are state-approved, RHA draws its prestige from the credibility of scientific organizations like the Russian Academy of Sciences and the top Russian Universities, therefore exercising a less blatant “soft power” state intervention into the public historical and cultural narratives.

In the next part of the subchapter, I’m going to analyze the exact mechanics that help these organizations to mediate messages convenient for the state to a wider audience, and how these mechanics led to legitimizing the historical-revisionist concept of Novorossiya within the Russian academia.

⁹⁰ RMHS, “Zadachi,” accessed September 17, 2023, <https://rvio.histrf.ru/activities/tasks>.

The Russian Military Historical Society (RMHS) was founded by the decree of the Russian President Vladimir Putin on December 29, 2012⁹¹. The decree stated that RMHS was created “in order to consolidate the forces of the state and society in the study of the military-historical past of Russia, to promote the study of Russian military history and counteract attempts to distort it, to ensure the popularization of the achievements of the military history, to raise the prestige of military service and the education of patriotism”. Two major statesmen that participated in the creation of the Society were the Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation on Environmental Protection, Ecology and Transport Sergei Ivanov, and the Minister of Culture, the Assistant to the President of the Russian Federation, Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor Vladimir Medinsky⁹². By 2014 Medinsky was repeatedly criticized by the members of Russian academia for academic dishonesty and political agenda^{93,94}, and accusations would grow even stronger in the following years⁹⁵. In 2014 RMHS as an organization was quickly becoming a powerful competitor in the so-called “memory wars” both within Russia and abroad⁹⁶. One of the most important activities that RMHS participated in at the time was a creation of a unified school textbook on History, that would be “free of internal contradictions and multiple interpretations”⁹⁷. The situation in Russia with the production of the history textbooks is

⁹¹ Oficial’noe opublikovanie pravovyh aktov, “Ukaz Prezidenta Rossijskoj Federacii Ot 29.12.2012 # 1710,” January 4, 2013, <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001201301040034>.

⁹² “Ukaz # 1710,” accessed August 29, 2023, <https://rvio.histrf.ru/official/decreed-no-1710>.

⁹³ Aleksej Valer’evič Isaev, ed., *Anti-Medinskij: psevd-istorija Vtoroj Mirovoj ; novye mify Kremlja*, Anti-Medinskij (Moskva: Jauza-Press, 2012).

⁹⁴ Andrei Zubov, “Naznachenie na post ministra kul’tury cheloveka s reputaciej Medinskogo – jeto skandal. Mnenie izvestnyh istorikov,” July 24, 2012, <https://kprf.ru/opponents/108555.html>.

⁹⁵ “Leading Russian Academics Criticize Government Handling Of Minister’s Plagiarism Case,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 07:55:48Z, sec. Russia, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-culture-minister-medinsky-protest-plagiarism/28080045.html>.

⁹⁶ Dietmar Neutatz, “Putins Geschichtspolitikmaschine,” *Zeitschrift Osteuropa* 72, no. 12 (2022): 143–64, <https://doi.org/10.35998/oe-2022-218>.

⁹⁷ Andrei Suslov, “The ‘Single Concept of History’ in Russia,” Wilson Center, July 18, 2018, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/the-single-concept-history-russia>.

worth a little bit of explanation, because it helps us situate these two books within the longer history of official discourse and producing historiography in Russia.

First history textbooks appeared in the Soviet Russia during 1930s and during Stalin's years they were closely curated by the state, with some Party figures like Zhdanov making corrections in the text themselves⁹⁸. During late Soviet times textbooks focused on both histories of USSR as a whole and the history of a national SSR in which children were going to school, as well as world history. Of course, these textbooks were still ideologically charged and had only one interpretation of the historical events. During the 1990s there was a surge of different textbooks of all ideologies and different levels of professionalism.

Demythologization of Soviet narratives was an important part in many textbooks, and by 2000s there were multiple public debates about how patriotic the textbooks should be, what level of critique or freedom of opinions they should provide to the teachers and students. So, the 2013 commission of a united history textbook could be interpreted as a victory of a more patriotic and conservative forces in Russian politics and education, that sought to return to the Soviet deterministic model of teaching at least partially. By 2023, Vladimir Medinsky, the head of RMHS, became the chief editor of the united history textbook issued for the high school students for the first time. This textbook, that concluded the efforts of national-patriotic reformists, was criticized for its ideologization of education, and “unscientific approach” by the Russian political opposition and some members of Russian academia. But, as the Russian historian and statesman Vladislav Kononov said as a response to the critique

⁹⁸ Elena Dushchenko, “K Voprosu o Sovetskikh Uchebnikah Po Istorii: Dejatel'nost' A. V. Shestakova,” March 29, 2010, <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/k-voprosu-o-sovetskikh-uchebnikah-po-istorii-deyatelnost-a-v-shestakova/viewer>.

of new Russian textbooks: “Our understanding of our own history should give us the right to interpret our own history ourselves, without any prompting from outside”⁹⁹.

This situation with a state-commissioned history book in 2023 can provide a hindsight to the processes that were already in motion during the production of “Histories of Novorossiia” back in 2014-2017.

So, pursuing the goal to popularize the supporting historical narrative to the notion of Novorossiia, in 2014 Russian Military Historical Society commissioned a production of a book “History of Novorossiia”¹⁰⁰. By the end of 2014 the book that consisted of 480 pages was finished in a short time by a single author, a historian Alexander Vladlenovich Shubin¹⁰¹ and published in five thousand copies at the beginning of 2015. Shubin is a long-standing researcher of anarchist movements around the world, and besides his scientific credentials he had previous experience with writing overview papers and textbooks. Interestingly enough, he also sided with the Supreme Soviet of Russia during the 1993 Russian Constitutional crisis in opposition to rapid changes that the country was going through, which seems to be a common place in biographies of intellectuals involved in the Novorossiia project, as was discussed in the chapter about *Zavtra* authors.

Another organization, the Russian Historical Association (RHA) was founded on June 20, 2012. It was a recreation of the Imperial Russian Historical Society that existed from 1866 to 1920. RHA is a conglomerate of different well-respected educational, scientific and cultural institutions, such as the Russian Academy of Sciences, as well as research funds and state

⁹⁹ Mary Ilyushina, “Russia’s New History Textbooks Teach Putin’s Alternate Reality,” *Washington Post*, August 14, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/08/13/russia-history-textbook-revision-ukraine/>.

¹⁰⁰ A. Shubin, *Istoriia Novorossii*, Rossiiskaya Voenno-Istoricheskaia Biblioteka (Moskva: OLMA Media Grupp, 2015).

¹⁰¹ Institut vseobshnej istorii RAN, “Shubin Aleksandr Vladlenovich,” accessed August 14, 2023, <https://igh.ru/employees/231?locale=ru>.

media such as VGTRK (Russia1 and Russia24 television channels)¹⁰². This organization was headed by Sergei Naryshkin, the chairman of the State Duma, who by 2014 had already got the nickname “country’s chief historian” during his participation on a state commission’s work on battling the falsification of history¹⁰³. Using the façade of public association and the political empowerment from the higher-ups of the state one of the most important activities of RHA was its project of “spanning historic bridges” or influencing the international public opinion on politics of memory in Eastern Europe and Russia¹⁰⁴.

The Russian Historical Association commissioned the production of their own “History of Novorossiia”, that was now a much more ambitious and thorough work that took 3 years and dozens of authors each responsible for their dedicated chapter to complete. This collective “History of Novorossiia”¹⁰⁵ was published in 2017 by the Russian Academy of Sciences and consisted of 864 pages. It also took a lot of footnotes from Shubin’s work in the last chapter, describing Novorossiia after the fall of USSR. The chief editor of this book was V. N. Zakharov so I would sometimes refer to this monograph as a “Zakharov’s book” later in the text.

It is worth mentioning that there was no “History of Novorossiia” written in academic circles prior to 2014. The region was never conceptualized as a consistent geographical-historical entity with coherent cultural tradition outside of an imperial Russian period context in any academic writing before. Even by 2014, the initiative for creating these texts was not the one of Academia, but the state-affiliated agents like RMHS and RHA, that had directly

¹⁰² RHA, “Rossijskoe Istoricheskoe Obshchestvo: Ob Obshchestve, Celi i Zadachi, Ustav,” *Rossijskoe istoricheskoe obshchestvo*, accessed August 29, 2023, <https://historyrussia.org/ob-obshchestve/o-nas.html>.

¹⁰³ Jolanta Darczewska, “The History and Politics of the Russian Federation: A War for Memory, or a War against Memory?,” *Institute of National Remembrance Review* 1 (2019): 358, <https://doi.org/10.48261/INRR190111>.

¹⁰⁴ Darczewska, 365.

¹⁰⁵ V. N. Zakharov, ed., *Istoriia Novorossii* (Moskva: Tsentr gumanitarnykh initsiativ, 2017).

commissioned these publications. In fact, these publications promoted the Novorossiia concept by the very fact of them existing, because now the historical narrative of a continuous Novorossiia had a stamp of approval in the form of its publisher – the Russian Academy of Sciences, a community of Russian scientists with degrees in humanities, and not a publicist term on the pages of patriotic media outlets or political speeches.

Although by the time these books were published, the political aspect of Novorossiia project was largely abandoned by its proponents. At the same time, the production wasn't stopped, it continued for several years, a huge amount of effort was put into these texts, and if the first one, published in 2014, was really a brief overview of the history of the region, the second book published in 2017 had its ideological points much better defined and delivered, and it would become the main focus for the further analysis in the chapter.

The "imagined geography" of Novorossiia

Having discussed the production of the textbooks, now I turn to the construction of Novorossiia on the pages of the books themselves. I argue that the "History of Novorossiia" produced by the Russian Academy of Sciences, utilizes common tropes for creating history of a nation state, without there actually being a nation state, using a series of "anchor points" and topic omissions in the text in order to convey a seamless narrative of continuous existing geographical and cultural identity that spans hundreds of years.

It lays the foundation for the region's identity in ancient times, tracing its distinctiveness from Greek colonization of Northern Black Sea region in VI century B.C. up to modern times as a distinct historical-cultural region inside Ukraine.

Many inconsistencies that the text runs into are common, as a textbook of a history of the state or a region is always an extrapolation of modern concepts like nations and current state borders onto the past¹⁰⁶¹⁰⁷.

The first problem it has to deal with is the geographical boundaries of the region. The problem is that the imperial region of Novorossiia was constantly changing, mirroring Russian military and colonization advance, and restructuring into smaller subdivisions as the time went by.

Disregarding this shifting nature of the boundaries, authors tie Novorossiia exclusively to eight regions in modern Ukraine plus Kharkiv, even if they don't really correspond to the boundaries of a historical region, because in their own words, this geographical scope allows to explain the political crisis in Ukraine in 2010s¹⁰⁸. I am going to look at some of their other considerations in order to prove that this is the only legitimate reason for such geography to exist, and providing a convincing narrative for the events of 2014 is the main goal of "History of Novorossiia".

For example, the book states that the largest possible geographical extent of Novorossiia does not really makes sense, as Don Cossacks historically had little to do with Nogai people in Bessarabia, so the geographical scope needs to be reduced in order to maintain coherence. This "reduction of scope" in the text conveniently leaves behind only territories of Moldova and Russian Federation. The only part of Ukraine, that is also excluded, is the Crimea, that was already annexed by the Russian Federation in 2014, and of course was also considered to be not a part of Ukraine by the authors. The text provides a more diplomatic explanation

¹⁰⁶ Bruce VanSledright, "Narratives of Nation-State, Historical Knowledge, and School History Education," *Review of Research in Education* 32 (2008): 109–46.

¹⁰⁷ *The Nation, Europe, and the World: Textbooks and Curricula in Transition*, 1st ed. (Berghahn Books, 2005), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1btbwcq>.

¹⁰⁸ Zakharov, *Istoriia Novorossii*, 5.

about Crimea: according to them, its history is “too unique” and it deserves separate research, especially taking in account its recent reunification with the Russian Federation¹⁰⁹. As for the territories of Ukraine, authors are willing not to reduce the scope, but to add some more Ukrainian regions, that were never a part of historical Novorossiia, for example the Kharkiv region (part of historical Sloboda Ukraine region). The reason that they provide is that Kharkiv became intertwined culturally and economically with Novorossiia and sometimes it should be brought up in the text too. At the same time, here I have identified one more contradiction in the narrative. One of the reasons as to why the Don Host Oblast (now part of Russia) was largely excluded was the explanation that the region was already settled before 18th century, and it had already developed its separate identity. But somehow Kharkiv region (now part of Ukraine) that was also settled before 18th century still managed to make it into the text,

Basically, the geographical boundaries of this reimagined Novorossiia in both works coincided strictly with eight Southeastern Ukrainian regions (Odesa, Kherson, Mykolaiv, Zaporizhzhya, Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Luhansk and Kirovohrad) with an addition of Kharkiv. These regions except maybe for Kirovohrad in 2014 seemed promising for the Ukrainian federalization project that was beneficial to Russia and was discussed in the introduction part of this Thesis. It can also explain why the Crimea was for the large part excluded from these books, as this part of Ukraine was straight up annexed by the Russian Federation in 2014 and it required the whole another historical-ideological basis for that, not creating conflicting narratives about what possible boundaries Novorossiia could have in case it would manifest into an administrative reality of Ukraine. In fact, I claim that all territories of Novorossiia that were part of modern Russia were excluded from the geographical imagery, because the text that provides justifications for a possible

¹⁰⁹ Zakharov, 6.

Novorossiyan identity and separatism might send mixed messages to the reader about encouraging the same self-determination and separatism in the Russian regions of Stavropol, Rostov-on-Don or some others.

Expanding the chronology of Novorossiya

The Soviet and the independent Ukrainian periods present a profound work on creating a narrative of a continuous Novorossiyan identity during 20th century up to 2014, as it includes crucial “anchor points” for the narrative as well as “break points” that disrupt it.

First of all, the Russian Revolution of 1917, the disintegration of the Russian Empire and the Civil War that followed provided many inspirations for future political projects to draw their legitimacy from. It was the time when both the short-lived Ukrainian People’s Republic (UPR) and the Soviet Ukraine first appeared, but it was also the time when a Donetsk – Krivoy Rog Soviet Republic had briefly existed, claiming roughly the territories of Donbas, a project that was separate both from Ukrainian national and Russian national projects. The main organization of Russian “white” movement - Armed Forces of South Russia under general Denikin, even had “Novorossiyskaya oblast” that roughly corresponded to modern territories of Ukrainian Odesa, Mykolayiv, Kherson and Dnipropetrovsk regions, as one of the parts of their political project for the future Russia.

The main narrative of this period in both books can be summarized by the quote from Shubin’s “History of Novorossiya”: “*The Ukrainian state that arose in 1917-1918, both the UPR and the Ukrainian SSR, was based on the union of Little Russia and Novorossiya*”¹¹⁰.

It stands in stark contrast to the main narrative followed by Ukrainian history textbooks: that the Ukrainian state was based on the union of the Eastern Ukraine (UPR) and the Western

¹¹⁰ Shubin, *Istoriia Novorossii*, 188.

Ukraine (WUPR), with the Unification Act of January 22, 1919, as the high point of these years. This is one of the cases when the concept of Novorossiia is used not only to challenge the Ukrainian national-historical paradigm, but to provide an alternative to it. Here, Novorossiia obtains historical agency as an integral part of Ukrainian statehood at the time of its conception, which suggests implications about the agency of Novorossiia in deciding the fate of a modern Ukraine as well.

In “Histories of Novorossiia” Western-Ukrainian People’s Republic is barely mentioned and irrelevant for the narrative, while forming territorial boundaries of a young Ukrainian state is presented as continuous battle of claims and counterclaims focused specifically on the territory of Novorossiia by UPR, Russian Provisional Government, Ukrainian SSR, DKSR and Armed Forces of South Russia. Thus, Novorossiia in this narrative becomes a central element of the power struggle around the emergence of Ukrainian statehood.

Another very important element of elevating the historical agency of Novorossiia in “History of Novorossiia” is the Donetsk – Krivoy Rog Soviet Republic (DKSR), a self-proclaimed Soviet republic that challenged the authority of the Ukrainian state over Donbas region territories, but was recognized neither by Ukrainian nor by Russian state in 1918. The focus on this particular republic is especially interesting considering the fact that in 2015 a self-proclaimed DPR in Eastern Ukraine had declared itself to be a legal successor to DKSR of 1917¹¹¹. “History of Novorossiia” emphasizes that proponents of DKSR argued for the Donbas region to be a part of the Soviet Russia instead of Soviet Ukraine, because its economic system was more tied to the major Russian industries. Thus, DKSR proposed a viable alternative to the national principle of organization of the Ukrainian SSR. One could

¹¹¹ EurAsia daily, “DNR provozglashena preemnicej Donecko-Krivorozhskoj respubliki,” EADaily, February 5, 2015, <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2015/02/05/dnr-provozglashena-preemnicej-donecko-krivorozhskoy-respubliki>.

say, that once again, Novorossiia in the form of DKSR served as an alternative concept to the Ukrainian state on these territories.

“History of Novorossiia” utilizes one peculiar source while describing DKSR. It is “Donetsk-Krivoy Rog Republic. Executed dream”¹¹² written by V.V. Kornilov, a Russian-Ukrainian political activist of Donbas separatism, who became a citizen of self-proclaimed DPR in 2014. The book is praised on the pages of “History of Novorossiia” for its “*polemical fervor and publicist passion*”¹¹³, and it in fact was not as much of a historical writing but a political debate, that argued that it is Ukraine that is a separatist republic, seceded from Russia, and not Donbas, that just wants to return to Russia again. The book was republished twice after 2014 in Russia and became a part of historical-political series of Nikolai Starikov, an author of *Zavtra* journal who was mentioned in the first chapter of this Thesis. This is exactly how these messages were transferred from the intellectual underground to the text published by the Russian Academy of Sciences.

There is one more reason for the “History of Novorossiia” to focus on DKSR. It had claimed the city of Kharkiv to be its capital, and this is a major incentive to add Kharkiv to the Novorossiian imagined geography, although the city or the region had nothing to do with historical Novorossiia. Official liquidation of DKSR in 1919 by Lenin “History of Novorossiia” interpreted as a forceful merge of Novorossiia against its will with Ukrainian SSR by Bolsheviks¹¹⁴.

¹¹² Vladimir Kornilov, *Donetsko-Krivorozhskaia Respublika: Rasstrel'iannaia Mechta = Donets'ko-Kryvoroz'ka Respublika: Rozstriliana Mriia*, Proekt “Ukraina” (Khar'kov: Folio, 2011).

¹¹³ Zakharov, *Istoriia Novorossii*, 5.

¹¹⁴ Comparing with the events of 2014-2022, Minsk agreements that stalled the Novorossiia project were seen by many of its supporters as a forceful merge of LPR and DPR with Ukraine supported by Russian statesmen too.

“History of Novorossiia”-2017 utilizes a lot Shubin’s “History of Novorossiia”-2015 throughout the whole book, but especially so in the part where it describes an anarchist movement led by Nestor Makhno in the region, because this topic is Shubin’s specialty, and he dedicated a lot of space to it in his monography. Thus, both works portray this movement as an idealistic but fierce peasant and working-class uprising that did not care for nationalities but only for absolute freedom from the oppressive state, whichever it may be¹¹⁵. Authors follow up this notion with a conclusion that for the people of Novorossiia Ukrainian nationalism was a foreign concept, and they attribute some of Makhno’s slogans such as “down with the Russian invaders” to the imperialistic nature of White Army and his later conflict with Bolsheviks. Makhno’s rejection of Ukrainian nationalism and Ukrainian state, his struggle against exploitative classes of the former Russian Empire is a useful allusion to the state of affairs of 2014 with DPR and LPR republics and adds to the concept of Novorossiia.

Describing Soviet economy, Zaharov’s book retroactively applies the term “Novorossiia economic region”, to 8 regions of Ukrainian SSR, although they did not constitute a separate economic unit and in fact these territories were divided between two major economical regions: Donetsk-Pridneprovsky economic region and Southern economic region.

Conveniently enough, such a huge text does not explain this division at all, in order not to disrupt the seamlessness of Novorossiia’s coherency.

Another important element of cultural-historical continuity of Novorossiia is Ukrainization policy in the Ukrainian SSR in 1920s and the “New Ukrainization” policies of independent Ukraine from 1990s onwards. “New Ukrainization” is the term coined by Shubin and

¹¹⁵ In 2014-2022, “Makhnovites” was a derogatory term used by LPR and DRP officials to describe various idealistic field commanders who pushed for continuing the fight for Novorossiia instead of following the Minsk agreements. Eventually, all of these so-called makhnovites were assassinated (Motorola, Mozgovoi, Givi, Bednov, etc.) or forced to leave the republics (Strelkov, Bezler).

appropriated by the second “History of Novorossiia” specifically to establish a certain narrative. Of course, there is an important theme of how Ukrainization was met with a good portion of resistance from the Russian-speaking and polyethnic population of the region, after all, the language question was still relevant for 2014. Of course, authors did not actually compare two Ukrainizations and their mechanics. Instead, they tried and delivered a powerful message: “*In the southern and southeastern regions of Ukraine, Ukrainization ultimately led to the fact that already in the 1930s the region ceased to be Novorossiia, or Russian South, instead it became a part of the Soviet Ukraine*”¹¹⁶. I consider this to be one of “breaking points” in the narrative the notion about which I brought up earlier. First of all, this message contradicts the body of the chapter, where Ukrainization is described as for the most part unsuccessful and resented by the population – why then it resulted in rewriting the whole identity of the region? But the second, and more important thing here is that “New Ukrainization” by its very name suggests that in 2014 the unique identity of Novorossiia is under the new Ukrainian attack and the region once again is at risk of erasure, thus empowering the emancipatory nature of Novorossiia and hinting on the questions of self-determination, which were so important for the Novorossiian discourse, discussed in Chapter 1.

For the large part chapter about Ukrainization portrays it as in imposition of a foreign culture on the people of Novorossiia by Ukrainian national communists, citing a great number of grievances expressed by the members of Soviet administration in the region and working-class city dwellers. This draws a one-sided picture, as there are no mentions of Ukrainian-rooted culture in the region at all. For example, the text fails to mention that the Head of Ukrainian SSR who led the Ukrainization effort was Mykola Skrypnyk who was originally from Donbas, and his predecessor on this post was Yevgeniia Bosch from Kherson region. In

¹¹⁶ Zakharov, *Istoriia Novorossii*, 560.

fact, there are no mentions in the text about giants of the Soviet Ukrainian culture who were born and raised in the region and who had significantly elevated the Ukrainian culture not only in Novorossiia, but in the whole of Soviet Ukraine. I am talking about Mykola Kulish, Volodymyr Sosiura, Valerian Pidmohylny, and many others of the so-called “Executed Renaissance”. Prominent Ukrainian authors during 1920s, they were all accused of Ukrainian bourgeoisie nationalism in 1930s and shot dead. On a related note, Ukrainian activism and popular support is almost entirely omitted in the whole work, highlighting only pro-Russian or anti-Ukrainian sentiments in the region.

There is an attempt to challenge if we should really include some groups of people into Ukrainian identity. For example, there is a passage about ethnic Ukrainians in the Donbas region who identified themselves neither as “Ukrainians” nor as “Russians”, but only as “Khokhols”, and their language as “khokhol” language (*khokhlyatskaya*). They did not even recognize that as Ukrainian, so the political workers would pursue them to change their mind¹¹⁷. This term is peculiar, because its meaning has significantly changed. Today it is either an ethnic slur in Russian language to refer to Ukrainians, or a Ukrainian derogatory term that describes russified Ukrainians, especially those who are in favor of the Russian state¹¹⁸. But the text implies that these people may not be counted as Ukrainians at all.

As for the period of independent Ukraine, it is written in a way that would explain the events of 2014 and the beginning of hostilities in Novorossiia. The main narrative is that the region underwent New Ukrainization and attack on Russian language, and new pro-European orientation did not satisfy the population of Novorossiia, as they were too dependent on economic ties with Russia. Besides, Ukrainian independence had only brought

¹¹⁷ Zakharov, 555.

¹¹⁸ Encyclopedia of Ukraine, “Khokhol,” accessed August 20, 2023, <https://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5C%5CH%5CKhokholIT.htm>.

impoverishment and crime to the people, so naturally, they started voting for pro-Russian presidential candidates and reject calls for distancing from Russia. The huge contradiction that this chapter runs into is that the part about statistics and demography of the region, written by different authors, suggests that ethnic Ukrainians who spoke Russian as their first language were not against their children going to Ukrainian schools, and an increasing number of Ukrainian schools (in 1991 there were zero of them in both Luhansk and Donetsk) worried mostly ethnic Russians, and not Ukrainians¹¹⁹. At the same time, the same text quotes M.V. Remisov, Russian conservative philosopher (and a huge fan¹²⁰ of nazi philosopher Karl Schmitt) who defines ethnicity primarily by native language thus suggesting that Russian-speaking Ukrainians are, in fact, Russians, contradicting entire categories of the part about statistics, thus creating one more “breaking point” in the narrative of the text.

2014 is approached as a political activation of the people in Novorossiia, and the narrative largely suggests that the revolution in Kyiv was a coup, guided by Western Ukrainians and demonstratively supported by Europe and USA, and it was carried out by “militant thugs” (*voinstvuyushiye molodchiki*)¹²¹ who did not represent Ukrainian people.

The text also addressed the most glaring problem with the political project of Novorossiia in 2014: for the most part, it was not successful. “*Southeastern regions*” – the chapter concludes, - “*did not express that powerful and united impulse towards Russia, that allowed Crimea and Sevastopol in March to conduct referendum and to make a historical reunion*”¹²². Comparing to articles in *Zavtra* journal, discussed in Chapter 1, this narrative does not deny Ukrainian authority over the region and does not try to portray other regions of Novorossiia,

¹¹⁹ Zakharov, *Istoriia Novorossii*, 791.

¹²⁰ Mikhail Remizov, “Schmitt forever,” *Russkiy jurnal*, May 14, 2009, <http://www.russ.ru/Mirovaya-povestka/SHmitt-forever>.

¹²¹ Zakharov, *Istoriia Novorossii*, 812.

¹²² Zakharov, 817.

like Odesa or Kharkiv, as being occupied by Ukrainian government. In rhetoric of DPR and LPR official Ukraine was regarded as “fascist junta”, and for some time Russian state media were determined to calling it that way too¹²³. Apparently, by the time of this publication in 2017 there was no need to perpetuate this notion and it was put on hold.

Some other important historical anchors for Novorossiya, that could not be discussed at full length in this thesis are: The Great Patriotic War and German occupation, which period is viewed as a struggle between Ukrainian nationalists and Soviet patriots and economical exploitation of the region¹²⁴; and the electoral circle in independent Ukraine, which had actually displayed common political leaning between region of East Ukraine and South Ukraine, which basically had led to the emergence of a political-geographical term “Southeastern Ukraine”.

Chapters in both books dedicated to ancient and medieval times, as well as chapters about historical Novorossiya region in imperial Russia would be for the most part left outside of this analysis, because the first two do not contribute anything to the Novorossiya’s substance, except maybe adding to the founding myth of its perceived multicultural and polyethnic origins which included Greeks, Iranians, Turks, Germans, Slavs, Jews, Armenians and others who at certain point of history were settled there. And chapters about imperial Novorossiya are presenting a well-known and well-researched narrative about Russian expansion into the region and its colonization by various ethnic and religious groups during XVIII – XIX centuries. Of course, the peculiarity of the region in the context of the Russian empire is emphasized by the very nature of this work.

¹²³ Ane Teksum Isbrekken, “Many Russians See Ukraine as an Illegitimate State,” NUPI, June 11, 2015, <https://www.nupi.no/en/news/many-russians-see-ukraine-as-an-illegitimate-state>.

¹²⁴ Exploitation of Donbas resources and industries by the West, which was associated with the Nazi Germany, along with the help of Western Ukrainian nationalists, was a popular propaganda point during the events of the so-called Russian Spring movement in Novorossiya during the same time.

Using this series of historical anchor points, “History of Novorossiia” logically aligns them in order to give a sense of continuity and coherence to the concept of Novorossiia. In order to make this narrative even more convincing and to smooth contradictions, “History of Novorossiia” provides an instruction on how to read the book in the form of explanatory paragraphs and sometimes even whole chapters in the text, which will be the focus of the next section.

Explanatory paragraphs as an instruction to the reader

Explanatory remarks or passages are not presented in every chapter, and they do not follow up every topic in the book. Mainly they concern themselves with those “anchor points” that hold the narrative tight. It is mainly topics such the Revolution of 1917, Ukrainization policy, WWII and dissolution of the Soviet Union, which are crucial in evoking common themes and belligerents in the History of Novorossiia.

It is a collective work of the Russian Academy of Sciences. While it utilizes works of many professionals, whose texts can be considered driven by the facts and unbiased analysis, some other authors in the book are notorious outside of Academia for their involvement in Russian politics of memory and “memory wars” and their texts can be considered to be politically driven or at least politically engaged. I will provide some background for some of these authors as it better explains their motivation to write these texts in the first place.

One of such authors is V.V. Kondrashin, a historian of Russian peasantry during 1920s, who at the time of writing his texts was also a member of a ruling party “United Russia” and a member of the Federation Council (part of the parliament) in Russia. For decades, Kondrashin was involved in the so-called “Holodomor genocide question” debates concerning the Ukrainian Holodomor of 1932-1933, a man-made famine in Soviet Ukraine, and the question if it should be defined and recognized as a genocide of Ukrainians.

Kondrashin aligned himself with authors like John A. Getty, Stephen G. Wheatcroft and many others on a position that although the famine was man-made, it was unintentional and was a direct consequence of collectivization and industrialization policies of Bolsheviks. In fact, Kondrashin participated in roundtables organized by Wheatcroft¹²⁵ and was defending this stance since mid-2000s. What is interesting, is that he brought these debated on the pages of “History of Novorossiia”, directly addressing that Ukrainian historians try to frame the famine as genocide, and that it definitely wrong. He states that state policies were not targeted towards Ukrainians and many Russians, Jews, Germans, Greeks were starving just as much. The text denies any exclusivity for Ukrainian SSR during famine in policies, attitudes or outcomes.

In reality though the question of genocide is very controversial, and it is not only Ukrainian scientists who define the famine as genocide, or the unique place for Ukrainians in it. For example, authors like Andrea Graziosi, Nancy Qian support the genocide notion, pointing out a significantly higher deathrates in Ukrainian communities than in any other bordering communities¹²⁶. Even authors who do not take any active stance on the question, like Terry Martin, still point out that grain expropriations coincided with an attack on Ukrainian culture and a sharp turn on Ukrainization policies in USSR in 1932-1933¹²⁷, so the question is still up to a debate. But what is interesting is that this debate was brought up at all, as the book does not engage with political debates and interpretations throughout the text. My suggestion is that underlying perceived message here can be that Novorossiia experienced famine not

¹²⁵ Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences et al., “IF YOU ARE ENGAGED IN SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH, YOU MUST HAVE COURAGE!,” *Russian Peasant Studies* 6, no. 3 (2021): 135–71, <https://doi.org/10.22394/2500-1809-2021-6-3-135-171>.

¹²⁶ Nancy Qian, “The Causes of Ukrainian Famine Mortality, 1932-33” (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, July 2021), <https://doi.org/10.3386/w29089>.

¹²⁷ Terry Martin, “7. The National Interpretation of the 1933 Famine,” in *7. The National Interpretation of the 1933 Famine* (Cornell University Press, 2011), 273–308, <https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501713323-011>.

because it was Ukrainian, but because it was Soviet, and Holodomor memory does not make it a part of Ukrainian cultural-historic space.

There are also a lot of paragraphs, finishing remarks to big chunks of text, that draw conclusions that are not that easy to extract from the text otherwise, and these can be seen as “instructions” to the reader of how they should interpret the text.

For example, the chapter about the Soviet Ukrainization end with a remark that this policy disrupted the common Russian cultural space and caused a public mental trauma to the Russian speaking society that saw how the foundations of the “triune Russian nation” (*triyediny Rusky narod*) were shaken as Little Russian identity was transformed into a Ukrainian one within a decade or so. First of all, this apocalyptic interpretation was definitely prevalent amongst Russian “White emigres” and nationalists. But a large part of Russian-speaking people had also embraced “down with the empire” attitude and the pursuit of national self-identification and had expressed optimism for the future rather than depression. Second, and more important, is that this remark utilizes a matter-of-fact reading of the imperial “triune Russian nation” concept and does not make an attempt to distance the views of authors from it. While indeed, “triune Russian nation” that consisted of Great Russians (now Russians), Little Russians (now Ukrainians) and White Russians (Byelorussians) was a central concept for the Russian imperial national policy, today this concept became a vehicle for irredentist attitudes and territorial claims towards neighbors in Russian society¹²⁸, and it is sticking out of the text.

There are some other minor remarks of these sorts, for example describing the annexation of Romanian Bessarabia, that was never a part of USSR, the text explicitly specify that this

¹²⁸ Yitzhak M. Brudny, Jonathan Frankel, and Stefani Hoffman, eds., *Restructuring Post-Communist Russia* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 162.

cannot be considered annexation, as Romania was illegally occupying these Russian imperial territories from 1918. So, USSR has just returned¹²⁹ this region and added it to the Soviet Ukraine. The region is now a part of Odesa region in Ukraine and that is how it became perceived as a Novorossiia territory on the pages of “History of Novorossiia”.

But the best example of explanatory texts in the book can be considered a chapter called “Novorossiia: issues of national identity since joining Russia until the end of the 20th century”¹³⁰. It serves as a conclusion to two huge previous parts of the book – about Novorossiia in the Russian Empire and about Novorossiia in the Soviet Union. It can only be summarized as following: Russian language and culture on this territory was natural, inherent, supported by the local population and benefited it, while everything Ukrainian on this territory was unnatural, forced on the local population by the external forces and only hurt the community, and it was like that in 1920s during Ukrainization, in 1940s during WWII, and from 1990s onwards during “New Ukrainization”. The chapter is written by A. V. Marchukov, Russian historian and publicist who throughout his career was often criticized for his chauvinistic views, political engagement and unprofessionalism¹³¹, especially by his Ukrainian opponents in the course of countless “memory wars”¹³²¹³³. It is also the only chapter written by this author for the “History of Novorossiia”.

¹²⁹ The book explicitly specify that this cannot be considered annexation, as Romania was illegally occupying these Russian imperial territories from 1918.

¹³⁰ Zakharov, *Istoriia Novorossii*, 742.

¹³¹ Inna Bulkina, “Marchukov A.V. UKRAINA V RUSSKOM SOZNANII. NIKOLAJ GOGOL’ I EGO VREMJa.,” accessed August 31, 2023, <https://magazines.gorky.media/nlo/2012/6/novye-knigi-85.html>.

¹³² Hennadii Yefimenko/ Геннадій Єфіменко, “Єфіменко Геннадій. Дедуктивний Метод у Дослідженні Історії України. (Марчуков А. В. Украинское Национальное Движение: УССР. 1920–1930 Годы: Цели, Методы, Результаты. – Москва: Наука, 2006. – 598 с.) // Український Історичний Журнал. – 2007. – № 3. – С. 197–206.,” accessed August 31, 2023,

¹³³ Mykhaylo Gaukhan, “Marchukov A. V. Ukrainское Nacional’noe Dvizhenie. USSR. 1920–1930-e Gody. Celi, Metody, Rezul’taty.,” November 28, 2015, <http://www.historians.in.ua/index.php/en/novi-knizhki/1703-marchukov-a-v-ukrainskoe-natsional-noe-dvizhenie-ussr-1920-1930-%d0%b5-gody-tseli-metody-rezul-taty-izd-2-e-moskva-zao-izd-vo-tsentrpoligraf-2015-591-s>.

His text, although written as a summary of previous chapters, significantly differs in tone, style and attitude. “Anchor points”, laid down by other chapters, are being expanded on and become logically aligned by this text, like it is a key to decipher the meaning behind all the dates and events that were listed above.

In many cases Marchukov gives the narrative a much needed “spin”, that is hard to extract otherwise. For example, describing the Ukrainian nationalists and collaborators, and the population of Novorossiya that was resisting German occupation, Marchukov concludes that it is really only a Russian identity that could save these people and give them necessary mobilization to continue the fight, and Ukrainian identity had to be silenced in order to achieve victory. Ukrainization in his eyes was a subversive operation carried out by “Galicians and nationalists” inside the Bolshevik party. He also views Galicians, or Western Ukrainians, as harbingers of Ukrainization throughout the history: they came to Novorossiya in 1918 with Austro-Hungarian and German forces, they came in 1920s to promote Ukrainization, as members of OUN and German collaborators they came in 1941. He characterizes Ukrainian movement as terroristic, and Ukrainian identity as incapable of taking hold amongst people of Novorossiya without being backed up by the repression machine.

He goes as far as to claim that russification of the Ukrainian SSR during later years happened despite the attempts of the ruling class to convert everyone into Ukrainiannes. He sees russification as a natural process of people returning to their core identity.

Overall, the chapter looks much more emotionally driven than the majority of other chapters in the book. It is highly judgmental, full of subjective emotions, feelings of national resentment, and looks very out of place. Or, considering the explanatory nature of this text, it is placed exactly where it was intended to be.

Chapter about independent Ukraine also utilizes publicist style a lot and is quite emotional and one-sided. For example, describing the tragic events in Odesa on May 2, 2014, Yakhshiyani paints the picture of Ukrainian nationalists who suddenly and unprovoked trapped anti-Maidan protesters in the Trade Union House and burned them inside with unprecedented cruelty. There are no accounts of the clashes and gunfire that happened before that, no mentions of casualties on the opposite side before the protesters even got to the building, no mentions of Euromaidan members trying to save people from the burning building. Here the tragedy looks more like a ritual sacrifice of burning alive Antimaidan activists, with an effort to kill those who were able to survive, than a series of clashes with outbursts of violence from both sides that eventually got out of control as the building that was a base of pro-federalization activists was caught on fire, with a rescue effort that also included all sides¹³⁴.

Some explanatory passages in the text are numerous quotes from one of the separatists' leaders in DPR, an author of *Zavtra* journal and a member of the Izborsky Club - Pavel Gubarev and his book "Torch of Novorossiia"¹³⁵, where Gubarev basically arrests his case and promotes the project of Novorossiia. So, all these complimentary comments about the armed insurgency in Donbas or derogatory attitude towards Ukraine is not written by the author of the chapter directly but is outsourced to quotes from one of the belligerents in the conflict. And of course, in the context of this Thesis, it neatly connects this chapter's production of the History of Novorossiia with intellectual efforts of ultranationalists from the first chapter.

¹³⁴ "7 Years with No Answers. What Is Lacking in the Investigations of the Events in Odesa on 2 May 2014? | United Nations in Ukraine," accessed September 21, 2023, <https://ukraine.un.org/en/126054-7-years-no-answers-what-lacking-investigations-events-odesa-2-may-2014>.

¹³⁵ Pavel Gubarev, *Fake! Novorossii* (Sankt-Peterburg: Piter, 2016).

Sometimes instructions to the reader look not like explanations, but obvious hints: “*Some observers connected the beginning of the active phase of the military operation with the secret visit of CIA Director D. Brennan to Kyiv*”¹³⁶. The role of CIA calling shots in Ukrainian politics is left to be concluded by the readers themselves.

The chapter also suggests a definition and a frame as how to look at Novorossiia after 2014: by the end of May 2014, protest movement in Donbas had evolved into another so-called “unrecognized state” akin to Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Only DPR and LPR were successful, because in Donbas “*the features of the historical development of Novorossiia manifested themselves most profoundly*”¹³⁷. The hint here is that the final point of the historical development of Novorossiia is the pursuit of independence from Ukraine, and if some parts of Novorossiia are yet to be separated, then they just did not go all the way through their historical path yet. But the direction is already established.

Even more, the post-scriptum for the first “History of Novorossiia” is written by its commissioners – the Russian Military Historical Society, and this post-scriptum questions the legitimacy of Ukrainian elections that could not be conducted on the territories controlled by LPR and DPR and praises the legitimacy of elections on the territories of self-proclaimed republics. As was said earlier: the direction of “historical development of Novorossiia” is already established.

Conclusions

Novorossiia as a historical-revisionist concept was introduced into the Russian historiography by two books titled “History of Novorossiia” commissioned by the state-

¹³⁶ Zakharov, *Istoriia Novorossii*, 819.

¹³⁷ Zakharov, 827.

affiliated organizations, so the initiative to create such a historiography did not come from the Academia itself.

History of Novorossiya is presented as a series of historical “anchor points” that are highlighted in order to provide a feeling of continuity to the concept that was always shifting, and to expand it outside its traditional chronological and geographical borders.

The concept of Novorossiya in its academical form lost a lot of meanings and connotations that could be seen in Chapter 1: it does not provide a social critique to the current Russian state, and it does not challenge the Ukrainian statehood explicitly. Implicitly though, explanatory paragraphs in the text provide a reader with a key to decipher additional meanings which are very much in line with the ones discussed in Chapter 1.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this thesis was to show, that starting from 2014, a relatively obscure historical-revisionist concept of Novorossiia went to become a well-known term in Russian public media and even academic writing.

The concept of Novorossiia reemerged in Russian public discussions during the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity as a tool to delegitimize the Ukrainian statehood. Authors of the *Zavtra* weekly journal, like many other nationalist and conservative thinkers in Russia, got “green light” for experimenting with the concept after President Putin’s speech in April 2014. I demonstrated that the position of the *Zavtra* journal in right-wing intellectual life allowed it to express much more freedom when conceptualizing the notion. With an upsurge in national-patriotic feelings, authors of *Zavtra* filled the concept of Novorossiia with their own ideas, hopes and fears for the future of Russia. Novorossiia became a vehicle for their social critique of the state of affairs – not only in Ukraine, but in Russia as well. Their idealistic imagery challenged oligarchic rule, capitalist and post-industrial economy, corruption and social hierarchy of their own country. Novorossiia, not only as a “New Russia” but a “future Russia” was filled with historical resentment towards Ukraine and mixed Soviet-imperial aspirations for the returning of the Stalinist “Golden Age”. The concept got so much intellectual thrust put in it that it broke the boundaries of national-patriotic circles and was disseminated into the general public sphere. Even when the Kremlin, as Mark Galeotti put it, “turned the tap off” on the development of the concept, it has taken roots too deep to being erased from public discussions immediately.

As I have shown, through its chief editor Alexander Prokhanov, who was also a head of the right-wing think-tank called “Izborsky Club”, *Zavtra* was connected to a larger intellectual network, that had many organizations and think-tanks with different level of state affiliation and public credentials. Two of such organizations, the Russian Military Historical Society

and the Russian History Association helped to transfer the concept of Novorossiia into the Russian academia. By 2017, a fundamental “History of Novorossiia” was published, which solidified Novorossiia as a part of academic historiography, and provided it with a sense of scientific credibility. In its academic iteration, Novorossiia lost a lot of its social and futuristic thrust but left some clues in the text that instruct a reader on how to reconstruct the narrative that is quite similar to those promoted by ultranationalists on the pages of *Zavtra* and elsewhere.

On February 22, 2022, President Putin addressed the nation, celebrating that Russia had just officially recognized the independence of LPR and DPR. Once again, just like in 2014, he brought the notion of Novorossiia to the table. Two days later, the Russian full-scale invasion in Ukraine had begun.

I concluded that authors of *Zavtra*, who in 2014 envisioned LPR and DPR as a larva-stage for greater Novorossiia, now saw their vision manifest into reality. Once again, the concept of Novorossiia was deployed at the forefront of Russian aggression towards Ukraine. And now, this concept was strengthened by years of publicist and academic development and improvement. Novorossiia now was a historical term, not only for the long-forgotten imperial past, but also for the unfolding events of the present.

Research limitations: *Zavtra* journal is only one of many public platforms that was engaged with the development of Novorossiia concept, and its intellectual content is confined to the views of its limited roster of authors. The electronic archive for the journal is available only from 1996 onwards. During the writing of this thesis there was another book written on the matter, once again commissioned by the RHMS, titled “The return of Novorossiia: from Catherine the Great to Putin, 1782-2022”¹³⁸, which tied the concept of Novorossiia to the

¹³⁸ Alexander Myasnikov, *Novorossija. VoZvrashhenie. Kratkaja Istorija Ot Ekateriny Velikoj Do Putina. 1782-2022* (Veche, 2023), <https://www.labirint.ru/books/871078/>.

Russian invasion into Ukraine in 2022, but this publication was left outside of the thesis due to time limitations of master's program.

Future avenues of research: as mentioned above, RMHS continue to sponsor the further development of Novorossiia, and the evolution of the concept is worth to be closely observed in the future, as it seems to be connected to Russian state actions and their ideological justification in public sphere, as well as to be an object of interest to state-affiliated organizations.

The weaponization of history in modern Russia is rich for further analysis, as the concept of Novorossiia is just one of many historical-revisionists concepts, and transformations that it went through over the years can serve as a model for many more in the future, highlighting both the methods of instilling right-wing agenda into state discourse, as well as the mechanics of fringe ideas infiltrating official historiography of a state.

“History of Novorossiia” can also be useful for comparative analysis with Ukrainian and world historiography about the problems of historical mythmaking and “imagined geographies”, especially in terms of conflicting historical narratives of belligerent states about different geographical regions.

Overall, historical-revisionist concept of Novorossiia could add to the “presentism versus historicism” debate about different approaches in humanities education systems.

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