The Eurasian Union

through Russian Collective Memory and the Dilemma of Identity

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Abstract

The Eurasian Union project recently put forward by the Russian government has become the object of broad speculation among political analysts regarding Russian intentions and goals regarding the former Soviet republics, what has become known as "the near abroad." These accounts mainly consider the project within the "Realist" approach and discuss its political or economic aspects. Rarely, however, do they touch on its cultural or psychological dimensions. The current paper argues that the idea of Eurasian Union, well beyond any political or economic rationales, is underpinned by traditions of Russian collective memory and identity. This essay analyses Russian historical narratives as a specific type of mnemonic device in this context, suggesting how they work as cultural tools to promote collective remembering.

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On October 4, 2011, the Moscow-based daily Izvestiia published an article by Vladimir Putin, then the Russian Prime Minister, in which he called for the creation of the Eurasian Union.[1] Putin called for CIS countries (former Soviet Republics) to join this Union in order to establish a common economic, currency and customs space. He denied that the project was an attempt to re-create the Soviet Union: "The prospective union will not be a new U.S.S.R. or a replacement for the CIS, but an effective link between Europe and the Asia Pacific region, an association with close coordination of the economic and currency policies."[2] However, Russia's attempts to bring the Eurasian Union to life have essentially sought to integrate several CIS countries as some sort of supra-state formation have evoked extensive speculation among political analysts regarding Russia's intentions and ultimate objectives. These speculations, in accordance with the "Realism" school of thought, mainly look into the political or economic aspects of the project. It is worth noting that Putin himself has also described the proposed Union strictly in political and economic terms. However, I believe that the Eurasian project in some essential ways is based on certain cultural and psychological phenomena, including Russian collective memory and identity. In this article I will try to trace and identify the underlying cultural and psychological sources of the Eurasian Union project. Before dwelling on this issue let me start with one particular episode from several years ago, which stimulated my thoughts on this issue.

Do Russians remember Tsargrad?

On May 12, 2010 a visa-free travel agreement was signed between Russia and Turkey. The very next day, I participated in a roundtable devoted to the role of Russia in the Middle East, organized by Baku Center for Strategic Studies in collaboration with the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISS).[3] During the discussion I asked the assembled guests if they found the new visa agreement remarkable given the historical tensions between Russia and Turkey. After all, *twelve* Russo-Turkish wars were fought between the Russian and the Ottoman Empires during the last 200 years alone. I then asked our Russian speaker (Leonid Reshetnikov, director of the RISS): Could Russian memories of the numerous wars with the Ottoman Empire, wars that were often encouraged by slogan "Let's liberate Tsargrad!" (referring to Constantinople, later Istanbul) undermine the growing cooperation between Russia and Turkey? I expected a formal, diplomatic answer from the speaker, who by the way had been a

1 Putin V, "Novyi Integratsionnyi proiekt dlia Evrazii - budushcheie, kotoroe rozhdaetsia segodnia". Izvestia, 4 October, 2011, at http://izvestia.ru/news/502761

2 Ibidem

3 See: http://sam.gov.az/en/events/roundtables/20110719041218039.html

high ranking Russian intelligence officer. To my surprise, the speaker's response was long. He was at pains to point out that the Russian-Turkish past did not create an obstacle in his view. Finally, he said, "Who remembers those wars today? The majority of Russians do not even know what Tsargrad stands for."

His answer sounded convincing, at least at first. It might well be true that new generations of Russians did not know that Tsargrad was the name given in medieval Russian chronicles to Constantinople, the capital of Byzantium, later renamed Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Turkey. Indeed, who (aside professional historians) would remember events dating back to the Middle Ages? However, the more I thought about this, I realized that it was not as simple as it first appeared. From memory studies, we know that there are different types or levels of memory: *individual* memory, as well as *collective, social* and *cultural* memories[4]. Some scholars also talk about *deep* memory[5]. There are different interpretations of these types of memory, but the general understanding is they bear qualitatively different natures that cannot be treated as the sum of individual memories. Therefore, even if we imagine that we have conducted a sociological survey and obtained data demonstrating that the majority of young Russians did not know Tsargrad, how can one be sure that this knowledge is not somehow remembered in a different way or in a different context? So, taken from the perspective of collective memory studies, the Russian speaker's answer is not so obvious. In order to gain some insights on this issue, I have explored Russian collective memory in this context in greater detail.

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Collective Memory and Cultural Trauma

In my research I follow a particular version of collective memory developed within the framework of a socio-cultural approach.[6] According to this approach, historical narratives are considered to be cultural tools, promoting collective remembering. Certain properties of narratives affect the collective remember-

4 Halbwachs, M, On Collective Memory, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Assmann, J. (2011). Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Wertsch, J.V. (2012). Deep Memory and Narrative Templates: Conservative Forces in Collective Memory. In: A. Assmann and L. Shortt (Eds.), Memory and Political Change. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.173-185.

5 Irwin-Zarecka, Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory. NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994.

6 Cole, M, Cultural Psychology: A Once and Future Discipline. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996; Wertsch, J.V, Voices of collective remembering. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

ing process in a very specific way. James Wertsch identified an abstract and generalized form of narratives as one such property, which underlies numerous narratives and which he describes as the "schematic narrative template" or SNT.[7] These templates differ from one cultural setting to another, require special reflection to be identified, and are used to mold stories about key historic events, even in cases where historical events do not fit certain models. Based on these theoretical premises I have explored the Russian cultural memory via analysis of Russian historical narratives as a specific type of "mnemonic" device, as cultural tools promoting collective remembering.

Collective remembering is interconnected in some essential ways with cultural trauma. The notion of cultural trauma should be distinguished from psychological trauma in certain key ways. If psychological trauma refers to the immediate experience by an individual of a distressing or life-threatening event,[8] cultural trauma is experienced by a group, irrespective of being an immediate witness or victim to the act of violence.[9] More precisely, psychological trauma is experienced if there is a direct threat to the physical existence of the individual while cultural or collective trauma may occur if community members experience a threat to their collective identity. According to Neil Smelser:

> "A cultural trauma refers to an invasive and overwhelming event that is believed to undermine or overwhelm one or several essential ingredients of a culture or the culture as whole…[For example] The Protestant Reformation qualifies as a cultural trauma because of fundamental threat it posed to the integrity and dominance of the Catholic cultural worldview".[10]

Unlike psychological trauma, which is diagnosed by psychiatrists or psychologists, cultural trauma is often determined or established by cultural, religious, social or political figures. As Smelser puts it:

> "A claim of traumatic cultural damage (i.e., destruction of or the threat to cultural values, outlooks, norms, or, for that matter, the culture as a whole), must be established by deliberate efforts on the part of cultural carriers – cultural specialists such as priests, politicians, intellectuals, journalists, moral

7 Wertsch, Ibid, p.62

8 Foa, E.B., Keane, T.M., Friedman, M.J., & Cohen, J.A, Effective treatments for posttraumatic stress disorder: Practice guidelines from the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies. Second Edition. New York: Guilford Publications,2002.

9 Alexander, J.C, Toward a Theory of Cultural trauma. In: J.C.Alexander, R. Eyerman, B. Giesen, N.J. Smelser, and P. Sztompka. (Eds.), Cultural trauma and Collective Identity. A: University of California Press, 2004, pp.1-10.

10 Smelser, N, Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma. In J. C. Alexander, R. Eyerman, B. Giesen, N.J. Smelser, P. Sztompa (Eds.), Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity. Berkely: University of California Press, 2004, pp. 31-59 at p.38.

> entrepreneurs, and leaders of social movements"[11].

Cultural trauma also differs from psychological trauma in terms of its mechanisms and possible effects and outcomes:

> "The mechanisms associated with psychological trauma are the intrapsychic dynamics of defense, adaptation, coping, and working through; the mechanisms at the cultural level are mainly those of social agents and contending groups[12]."

To put this differently, if psychological trauma "operates" on an individual level and deals mostly with psychological processes "inside" the mental life of an individual, cultural trauma affects groups, their cultural memory, group identity and worldview or ideology. One possible way of dealing with cultural trauma could be to perform acts of collective remembering for rebuilding an appropriate identity.[13] Another possibility is the rediscovering or emergence of new ideology in a "traumatized" community. As one scholar has written:

> "Perceived and traumatic shared experiences under certain conditions might lend themselves to divergent interpretations and conceptualizations. In such situations, it is possible that major ideologies that were dormant in the specific society would be rediscovered and even born anew."[14]

In brief, cultural trauma that is perceived as a devastating threat to collective identities can play a particular role in generating new ideologies, collective memory, and identity constructions. Keeping in mind these suggestions, let us turn to a historical episode that took place in 1453 in Minor Asia, and which was greatly traumatic for the Russian psyche.

The Fall of Tsargrad as Russian Cultural Trauma

Tsargrad (Constantinople, the capital of Byzantium) was a sacred place for many Russians, from which they received their Orthodox Christianity (Curtis, 1996). When the Turks captured Constantinople in 1453 it was perceived by Russians as a terrible disaster. As Russian cultural historians put it:

> "For the Russian religious consciousness, accustomed to checking its ideas and acts against the authority of the true faith, the indestructible stronghold of which was the

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid, pp.38-39

13 Aarelaid-Tart, A, Cultural Trauma as the Mnemonic Device of Collective Memory. In: E. Koresaar, E. Lauk & K. Kuutma (Eds.), The Burden of Remembering. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2009, pp.197-221.

14 Hechter, T. (2003). Historical Traumas, Ideological Conflicts, and the Process of Mythologizing. International Journal of Middle East Studies. Vol., 35, pp.439-60, at p.442

esteemed second Rome-Constantinople, the fall of this stronghold….with the capture of the city by the Turks in 1453-was equivalent to a universal catastrophe".[15]

Within the cultural trauma paradigm, the fall of Constantinople can be identified as a Russian cultural trauma. To support this thesis I put forth the following arguments:

1. Among various identifications that Russians might have had at that time, one of the strongest or the most salient was their Orthodox identity. The fall of Tsargrad would definitely be perceived as a threat to this identity;

2. Soon after the fall of Tsargrad, Russian clergy responded by creating the ideologem of "Moscow – the third Rome"[16]. According to this notion, "Constantinople was the second Rome, and "Moscow - the third allowing for a new identity as the "God-chosen Russian people". These activities on the part of Russian clergy fit well into what cultural trauma literature describes as a strategy of coping.

3. The fall of Tsargrad was actively remembered through the creation and production of different narratives —"almost simultaneously with its creation by Filofei, a whole series of legends, tales, and stories developing the idea were born".[17]

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Thus, shortly after this event, four historical accounts of it emerged: 1) a story with a brief factual description of the siege and fall of Tsargrad, translated from the Greek; 2) an extensive historical tale "About Tsargard, its creation and capture by Turks in 1453", based on eyewitness accounts; 3)"On the capture of Tsargrad by the godless Turks", translated from the Latin (16th century); and 4) a lyric lament full of bitter complaints about the fate of the destroyed world capital. This latter account was entitled "On the capture of Tsargard by the godless Makhmet, son of Amuratov, Turski", and was included in the *Russian Chronograph of 1512*.[18]

Of these narratives, the most widespread was 2), the historical tale "About Tsargard, its creation and capture by Turks in 1453". It is usually attributed to Nestor-Iskander or Iskinder. This tale was reproduced in

15 Novikova, L.I., and I.N. Sizemskaia, Russkaia filosofiia istorii. Moscow: Magistr, 1997, p.36

16 There are different opinions about the authorship of this concept, but usually it is attributed to Filofei (ca. 1465–1542), a monk and the father superior of the Pskov Spaso-Eleazar Monastery (Gol'dberg, A.L., and R.P. Dmitrieva, FIlofey. In Slovar' knizhnikov I knizhnosti Drevnei Rusi, vol 2. St.Petersburg: Nauka, 1988).

17 Novikova, L.I., and I.N. Sizemskaia Op.cit., p.37.

18 Tvorogov, O.V, Povesti o vzyatii Konstantinopolya turkami v 1453 godu. Elektronnyie publikatsii Instituta russkoi literatury RAN, 2003, at http://www.pushkinskijdom.ru/Default.aspx?tabid=4515

several historical narratives through the 16th to 18th centuries, which in turn were republished numerous times. This tale was also reproduced in the 17th century in narratives such as: *Tale of the History of Kaza;, Tale of the book of old days*, attributed to I .M. Katyrev-Rostovskii; *Tale of the beginning of Moscow*, by Avraamii Palitsin; *Scythian history*, by A. Lyzlov (1692); and in the 18th century, *History of the Last Destruction of the Holy City of Jerusalem, by Tit, the Roman Caesar, son of Vespasian, a Second [History] about the capture of the glorious capital city of Greek Constantinople* (i.e. Tsargrad), by Turski Sultan Maxomet II. This latter work was first published in Moscow in 1713, and then republished in 1716, 1723, 1745, 1765, 1769 and beyond until the beginning of the 19th century.[19] Due to its popularity, it is possible to assume that the novel had a strong influence on the Russian worldview and collective memory. It therefore seems reasonable to dwell on this novel a little more. *"About Tsargard, its creation and capture by the Turks in 1453" by Nestor-Iskander*

However, there are two points that impose important corrections upon this seemingly perfect imperial concept: first, the idea of Moscow as a successor and heir for the legacy of Constantinople; and second, from the very beginning, this concept was framed by a specific type of "victim" or "sacrificial" narrative – "lament about the fallen world city of Tsargrad".

This tale is said to have been created in the 15th century, but the only preserved copies are not older than the 16th century. The tale begins with a story about the creation of Constantinople, then goes onto a detailed description of the siege and capture of the city by the Turks, and ends with a prophecy about the fate of Constantinople. The prophecy has two parts: the first part addresses the inevitability of the destruction of Tsargrad; the second announces that Tsargrad will be liberated from Muslims by "fair-haired kin". This prediction about the liberators of Tsargrad has been interpreted to mean that the "fair-haired kin" are the Russians, who will defeat the Turks.[20] Though the factual accuracy of the details given in the tale suggests that it was written based on eyewitness accounts and participants of the siege of Constantinople, the story is already a new literary elaboration whose author, undoubtedly, is s Russian from the epoch when the

19 Shambinago, S.K, Istoricheskiie povesti v literature Moskovskogo knyazhestva kontsa XIV i XV vv. Istoriya russkoi literatury v 10 tomax. Vol.2 (1). Moscow-Leningrad: Nauka, 1945, pp.201-225; Tvorogov, O.V. (1981). Literatura Drevnei Rusi. M.:Prosvesheniie

20 Shambinago, Op.cit.

concept of Moscow as the successor of Tsargrad and its future liberator from Turkish power was being created.[21] This is the concept of "Moscow-the third Rome" which was certainly an imperial concept. However, there are two points that impose important correctives upon this seemingly perfect imperial concept: first, the idea of Moscow as a successor and heir for the legacy of Constantinople; and second, from the very beginning, this concept was framed by a specific type of "victim" or "sacrificial" narrative – "lament about the fallen world city of Tsargrad". The conjunction between the concepts of succession and "victimhood" would have resulted in *meaning transformation*. On the one hand, the idea of Moscow as a successor and heir to the legacy of Constantinople promoted a very specific understanding of the conquest. Within this concept, the conquest(s) could be interpreted and perceived as a retaking of the possessions "inherited" from Byzantium, based on the right of a "successor" to Constantinople. On the other hand, "victim" narratives, as we know from conflict psychology literature, can block empathy for and recognition of the opposite side's sufferings, status and rights.[22] The combination of these two elements would have resulted in a particular type of interpretation and/or perception of annexation and conquest by Russia.

In what follows, I give some examples of interpretations presented in Russian historical and artistic narratives devoted to Russian military campaigns from the 16th to 20th centuries which reframe annexation and conquest as "liberation", as **"**triumph over alien forces, and as "Russian sacrifice".

Conquest as liberation

The *Tale of the History of Kazan* [Kazanskaia istoriia], written in the second half of the 16th century, is a good illustration of the "Conquest as liberation" framework. The tale is a literary account of the three-century history of Russian–Tatar relations, from the formation of the Golden Horde up until 1552, the year Ivan the Terrible conquered the Kazan khanate, a branch of the Horde that dated back to the mid-15th century.[23] In fact, this was one of the first, if not the first, historical narrative dedicated to the aggressive campaigns of the new Muscovite state. In this regard, analysis of this narrative allows us to capture vividly the aspects of perception and interpretation of the events that inform many of the assumptions underlying this text. The *Tale of the History of Kazan* plays out against the backdrop of Nestor-Iskander's story of the capture of Tsargrad, as well as a lament on the destruction of

21 Ibid

22 Nadler, A, Post resolution processes: an instrumental and socio-emotional routes to reconciliation. In G. Salamon & B. Nevo (Eds.), Peace education worldwide: The concept, underlying principles, and research, New Jersey: Erlbaum, 2003,pp.127-143.

23 Kazanskaia istoriia, trans. T.F.Volkova, In Za zemliu Ruskuiu! Drevneruskie voinskie povesti, comp. M.E.Ustinov. Cheliabinsk, 1991, pp. 149-532.

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Tsargrad in the *Russian Chronograph of 1512*. The tale can be interpreted both as a parallel to the history of the fall of Tsargrad (and thus, grief for Kazan's inhabitants) and, at the same time, as connected with the idea of its liberation (and thus, the glorification of the Russians, as the liberators). The destruction of Kazan is presented as the destruction of Byzantium by its enemies; the liberation of Kazan as the liberation of Byzantium from the Muslims. In this way, the text presents a type of consciousness that perceives a conquest not as "conquest" but rather as "liberation." At this point, one might question the degree to which this perception of events was reflected in the collective mind. We have at our disposal a kind of sociological indicator, that is, the degree to which a given story was in demand among its readers. According to Pliukhanova: "Apparently, the readers of the 16th – 17th centuries did not notice any inconstancies and discrepancies in the *Tale of the History of Kazan*. The numbers of copies and the owners' inscriptions testify to the exceptional love readers had for this work".[24] This suggests that a lack of close attention to historical discrepancies in the text was not a rare phenomenon.

Another example of the aforementioned reframing is the dictum, "Liberate Tsargrad!", which for a long time was very popular in Russian society. It should be noted that since the 16th century, the idea of "liberating the world city of Tsargrad" was encountered in various different forms, presented in many Russian historical narratives. The first historical narrative of the 16th century, the 1512 *Russian Chronograph*, articulated this idea. On the one hand, it contained a lament on the destruction of Byzantium, as a kind of "sacrificial" narrative. But on the other hand, it clearly expressed hope for the liberation of the "great Tsargrad" with the glorification of Russia as the last bulwark of Christianity.

This idea was widely used in Russian politics and literature in the 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th and 21st centuries. For example, in a poem written by court poet Simeon Polotskii in 1672 in honor of the birth of Peter the First, Peter was named as a "future liberator of Tsargrad".[25] The idea of the "liberating world city" was also directly connected with Russian politics. One should mention here the so-called "Greek Project", which aimed to demolish Ottoman Turkey and to en-

24 Pliukhanova, M.B, "Vitiistvo I ruskaia istoricheskaia mysl' 16-17 vekov." In Aktual'nyie problem semiotiki kul'tury. Trudy po znakovym sistemam, vol.20. Tartu, 1987 pp.73-84 at p.80.

25 Vodovozov, N.V, Istoriia drevnei ruskoi literatury. M.:Prosvesheniie, 1972.

It is worth noting that Russian military mobilization for the 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish War was also conducted under the "Liberate Tsargrad!" slogan.

throne one of Russian Empress Catherine II's grandsons, a strategy which was pursued by Catherine's minister Grigorii Potemkin. It is worth noting that Russian military mobilization for the 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish War was also conducted under the "Liberate Tsargrad!" slogan. At the beginning of the 20th century, the same idea accompanied Russia's involvement in the imperialist First World War.[26].

Even more striking, contrary to the remarks made by our visiting Russian speaker at the beginning of this essay, is that "Liberate Tsargard" has continued in Russian narratives of the 21th century: for example, the series of articles entitled "Tsargrad and Russia. Should Constantinople be Ours?" published in the Russian Orthodox press.[27]

To give just one example:

> "There are many reasons to say that the fate of Byzantium remains unresolved. The will of those who died on the walls and streets of the King of the cities in the last battle should be fulfilled. Constantinople should be ours! But ours means, orthodox, and not necessarily Russian... Whether or not we want it to be so, history repeats itself like a bad dream…. In one of these circles once again, we will probably find ourselves involved in the battle for Tsargrad. It is hard to believe it when you can see so many Russian tourists and traders rolling through Istanbul nowadays."[28]

Conquest as triumph over alien forces

This type of reframing conquest can be found in abundance in Soviet history textbooks, as James Wertsch has observed. According to his analysis of Soviet and post-Soviet school history textbooks, there is a specifically Russian schematic narrative template, which he terms "triumph over alien forces". This narrative template consists of the following components:

1. An "initial situation in which Russia is peaceful and not interfering with others;
2. Trouble, in which a foreign enemy viciously attacks Russia without provocation;
3. Russia nearly loses everything in total defeat, as it

26 Senyavskaya, E.S,Psixologiia Voiny v XX veke: Istoricheskii opyt Rossii, M.:ROSSPEN, 1999.

27 It is rather curious that the author of this article, who is also a chief editor and publisher of the Russian Orthodox newspaper, is someone by name Grigorian - ethnically Armenian. See: Grigorian, V, "Tsargrad & Russia. Should Constantinople be ours?" Vera" (Faith), North Russian Christian Newspaper, 2004, # 472, 473, 474, at http://rusvera.mrezha.ru/472/7.htm

28 Ibid.

suffers under the enemy's attempts to destroy it as a civilization;

4. Through heroism and exceptionalism, against all odds, and acting alone, Russia triumphs and succeeds in expelling the foreign enemy.[29]

The author points to its wide dissemination as the model for plot construction of the most important events in Russian history, as well as its high degree of plasticity, that is, its ability to take on extremely diverse forms. Finally, he indicates that this schematic template is used even in cases that do not seem to fit the confines of this scheme. After all, the history of Russia, as he rightly notes, does not only include events where Russia was the victim of aggression. In many cases, Russia itself was the attacking force; otherwise it would be difficult to explain the creation of the vast Russian empire. Nevertheless, even in these cases, the schematic template described above underpins the narrative, as Wertsch shows using textual examples from Soviet and post-Soviet history textbooks.[30]

Conquest as sacrifice

This kind of trope is particular to Russian literature devoted to the conquest of the Caucasus in the 19th century. Among the first was Pushkin's poem "The Captive of the Caucasus". Written in 1821, the poem tells a story of a Russian aristocrat who sets off to the seat of war in the Caucasus, seeking adventure. Soon he finds himself taken captive by the Circassians, only released when a young maiden sets him free. Later, other prominent Russian poets and writers such as Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, Lermontov, Tolstoy and others also made use the Caucasian captive plot in their work. In a sense, the captive plot is a perfect manifestation of the abovementioned amalgamation of the imperial idea with the Russian tradition of sacrificial or victim narratives. The ubiquity of this theme has given rise to various explanations. According to Bruce Grant (2009), the Caucasian captive plot could help reconcile Russians to the issue of their invasion.[31] The author discussed this reiterated pattern in terms of a "gift of empire" and "sacrifice", and points out that: "Russians gave of their own […] to legitimate imperial, colonial, and later communist interventions".[32] In Susan Layton's view, these narratives serve the function of [re]constructing of Russian identity as semi-European, semi-Asian people.[33]

29 Wertsch, J.V, Voices of collective remembering.Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp.95-96.

30 Ibid.

31 Grant, B, The Captive and the Gift: Cultural Histories of Sovereignty in Russia and the Caucasus. London: Cornell University Press, 2009.

32 Ibid., p.xv

33 Layton, S, Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

The Fall of the Russian Empire: Eurasianism as Response to Cultural Trauma

The collapse of the Russian empire and the civil war of 1917-1920 can also be considered within the cultural trauma paradigm. This period was marked by brutality, violence and massacres on a huge scale, taking place during the fierce civil war between "Reds" and "Whites". From this point of view, Russians clearly experienced a threat to their collective identities. In such troubling circumstances,[34] a group of Russian émigré intellectuals proposed a new ideology, Eurasianism, which sought to redefine Russian identity.[35] The concept announced that: "Asia is a significant part of Russia and Russians are mainly Asians not Europeans."[36] Under this approach to Russian identity construction, Asia was not the "exotic Other" but the "exotic Self". Nevertheless, even if Eurasianism looked like a redefinition of Russian identity, it drew upon - with slight modifications - the old imperial idea of "Moscow – the third Rome". Thus, Eurasianists stated that

The collapse of the Russian empire and the civil war of 1917-1920 can also be considered within the cultural trauma paradigm.

Mongols preserved the Byzantine Empire for Russians. The Mongol Empire gave Russia an identity that manifests itself in geography. Now along with the religious connection between Constantinople and Moscow, they suggested a territorial legacy passed on from Byzantium via the Mongols to Moscow.[37] However, Eurasianism failed to become a dominant ideology in Russian society at that time, as Moscow's leadership turned instead to communism.

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The Collapse of the Soviet Union and the Re-emergence of Eurasianism

Falling into oblivion during the Soviet period, Eurasianism, surprisingly, reemerged soon after 1991. The re-emergent Eurasianism, or as some may call it, neo-Eurasianism, slightly adjusted its basic postulates to the changed historical, political and other contexts. It posits that: a)

34 The cultural and psychological climate of Russian society that conditioned the emergence of Eurasianism is described by one research: "We cannot understand Eurasianism unless we bear in mind the disappointments and disillusionment suffered by the Russian intelligentsia during the events of 1905 and February 1917…Eurasianism was thus born in the context of a crisis, in an atmosphere of eschatological expectations: Its proponents had the feeling of standing at a turning point in human history…" (Laruelle, M. (2008). Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire. Woodrow Wilson Center Press, pp.19-20).

35 Iskhod k Vostoku: Predchuvstviia I sversheniia: Utverzhdeniie evraziitsev, 1921, Sofia.

36 Vernadskii, G.V, Nachertaniie russkoi istorii. SPb.: Lan', 2000, p.34.

37 Laruelle, M, Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire. Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2008.

the collapse of a specific regime like Soviet power does not entail the collapse of the country; b) any secession is destined to fail, and the new states have no choice but to revert to a unified political entity; c) Russia is inherently a superpower.[38] Political analysts rightly identified this movement as *restorationist*, and sought to understand why an obscure émigré ideology would be resurrected after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The explanations for this are given mainly in political terms. Some interpret it as a substitute for "empire savers".[39] Others view this as an attempt to substantiate Russia as a "Natural Power"[40] or as Russia's intention to reject the "intrusive" West.[41] Without seeking to cast doubt upon these explanations, I would like to look at these phenomena within the context of cultural trauma.

Cultural Responses to a Crisis and Russian Identity

It is strange that the breakdown of the Soviet Union is rarely discussed in terms of cultural trauma. Maybe one of the reasons for neglecting this issue stems from the widespread belief that the fall of the Communist system was welcomed by the international community, including by the peoples of the former Soviet Union. However, even if the Soviet plan to shape a new "Soviet man" failed and the majority of Soviet nationalities preserved their ethnic identities, there still were people with inculcated Soviet identities, the so-called "internationalists".[42] For this category of the population,[43] the fall of the Soviet Union was a catastrophe. They undoubtedly experienced a threat to their collective identity. This is especially true for some Russian intellectuals, people from the military, security and older Communists who felt a powerful sense of disappointment, constructing a nostalgically viewed past, and drew upon emotional language to describe how Russia had been "shamed," "humiliated," reduced to a "second-rate state". It is not an accident that Russian president Putin (a former KGB officer) once called the collapse of the Soviet Union as the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century.[44] Individuals from these groups have taken an active part in reviving Eurasianism following the collapse of the Soviet Union. From this perspective, the re-emergence of [Neo]-Eurasianism can be considered as a cultural response to cultural trauma

38 Ibidem

39 Dunlop, J, The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire. Princeton University Press, 1993.

40 Laruelle Op.cit

41 Schimmelpenninck van der Oye. D, Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2010.

42 Ignatieff, M, Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994.

43 If one is to believe to the results of a referendum on the future of the Soviet Union held not long before its collapse on March 17, 1991, the number of such individuals was not few. According to this referendum at least 70% of voters in all Soviet republics except three Baltic and two Transcaucasianstates voted for preservation of the renewed Soviet Union (Nohlen, D, Grotz, F & Hartmann, C, 2001, Elections in Asia: A data handbook, Volume I.)

44 See: http://www.volgainform.ru/allnews/444083/

It is strange that the breakdown of the Soviet Union is rarely discussed in terms of cultural trauma. Maybe one of the reasons for neglecting this issue stems from the widespread belief that the fall of the Communist system was welcomed by the international community, including by the peoples of the former Soviet Union.

caused by the fall of the Soviet Union.

So far we have discussed three examples of Russian cultural responses to cultural trauma caused by different events: a) the response to the fall of Tsargrad in the 1453 by creating a new ideologem, "Moscow - the third Rome", and the construction of new identity as "Russians –the God chosen people"; b) a response to the fall of the Russian Empire in the 1917 in the doctrine of Eurasianism portraying Russians as Asians; c) a response to the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 by the [re] emergence of Neo-Eurasianism, which asserts a common identity for former Soviet peoples. As one can see, these cultural responses include a set of ideas regarding ideology and identity. It should be noted that if ideas zbout what it means to be Russian vary (from Orthodox to Asians, or even Turanians), ideological construction remains constant by reproducing the same imperial idea ("Moscow- the third Rome") in different guises (Eurasianism, Neo-Eurasianism). This consistent ideological core, which can be regarded as sort of cultural DNA[45], helps us to understand the imperial nature of Russian identity. In connection to this, we may question why we continue to encounter this persistent [re]birth of the imperial Russia concept. The analysis of Russian narratives presented above provides us with some insights. Our analysis has shown that the Russian historical narrative tradition has preserved the imperial ideologem of "Moscow- the third Rome" through many different forms,[46] such as "conquest as liberation", "conquest as triumph over alien forces", or "conquest as sacrifice". In this context, we can conclude that Russian historical narratives as mnemonic devices and cultural memory tools very much sustain the [re]construction of imperial idioms.

These considerations also provide us with insights regarding the question posited at the beginning of the essay: Do Russians remember Tsargrad? The answer would be formulated as following: So far as "imperial" constructs are preserved in a Russian nar-

45 Wertsch, J.V, Deep Memory and Narrative Templates: Conservative Forces in Collective Memory. In: A.Assmann and L.Shortt (Eds.),Memory and Political Change. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp.173-185.

46 Transformed form is a philosophical category introduced by Karl Marx for analysis of complex systems (Marx, K. (1962). Capital. Volume III. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House). Having no space to go into details of this complex category I only offer some examples of these transformations. For example, these are dreams which may symbolize (in transformed form) instinctive desires (Freudian concept) or capital which is derivative of exploitation of workers by capitalists (Marxist concept).

Do Russians remember Tsargrad? The answer would be formulated as following: So far as "imperial" constructs are preserved in a Russian narrative toolkit, Russians do remember Tsargrad on the level of a collective or cultural memory.

rative toolkit, Russians do remember Tsargrad on the level of a collective or cultural memory. This also means that even if new Russian generations do not remember the Tsargrad story specifically, and their "imperial identity" is dormant, they might be "reminded" and "awakened" one day by specific constellations of domestic and/or international political events and political/cultural/religious entrepreneurs since collective memory "devices" provided by narrative toolkit are always there.

Conclusion

Based on these lines of inquiry, let us return to the Eurasian Union project. This Russian project, which is to some extent inspired, in the view of some political analysts, by postulates of Neo-Eurasianism, evokes some concerns among post-Soviet countries.[47] For several reasons post-Soviet countries are wary of Putin's Eurasian Union project. Their reluctance to share power with any kind of supra-state structure is usually explained by the fear that their sovereignty and access to natural resources will be weakened, along with the lack of appeal of contemporary Russia to its neighbors.[48] From the perspective of my analysis, the issue of Russian imperial identity should also be considered seriously. This type of imperial identity confounds Russians' quest for a secure and a sustainable modern Russian consciousness. In this regard, Putin's article, "Russia and the National Question", published soon after he took up the presidency on 23 January 2012, hardly presented the new "Eurasian Union" in more attractive terms for neighboring peoples. The article confused terms and notions related to categories of nation and identity, not to mention history. I list just some of these aspects of this article without comment: 1. Nowhere in the article is there reference to "Empire" but rather, "historically great Russia"; 2. "The Russian people have a great mission to join, to pin together our Civilization"; 3."We are a multinational state but a single people"; 4. Nowhere in the article does one find reference to *Rossiiane* (a term for civic identity), but rather the term "Russians" (russkie); 5. All people in Russia are Russians: "Russian Armenians, Russian Tatars…." 6. "Russian people made their choice to live together with other nations - self-determination"; 7."To be Rus-

47 Laruelle, Op.cit.

48 Aliyev, F, Discussing Eurasianism and Eurasian Integration within the Azerbaijani Context. In Central Asia Program Publications Memo 2012.The Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies (IERES).The George Washington University, 2012, at http://www.centralasiaprogram.org/images/Publication_Memo_2012.pdf

sian means to be culturally Russian: Russian language, Russian literature, and Russian history"[49].

This discourse is simply embarrassing for peoples of post-Soviet states, and evokes two, related, questions: How do Russians address their identity problem in the 21st century? Will Russia become a multinational, democratic country or return to the old Soviet boundaries defined by the proposed Eurasian Union? The future of the Russian Federation and to some degree that of the CIS countries is dependent on how the dilemmas of Russian national identity formation (imperial, national-ethnic, or national –civic) are resolved in the coming decades.

49 Putin, V, Rossiia: national'nyi vopros. Nezavisimaia Gazeta, 23 January, 2012. at http://www.ng.ru/politics/2012-01-23/1_national.html