Modernization in Russia

Baltic Worlds’ special section
Studies on Russian culture and modernization

This special section presents a selection of essays that address the choices and challenges facing Russian culture and those involved in producing it in the post-Soviet era, an era characterized by post-industrial globalization, neoliberal policies, Western-style consumerism, and the rise of cultural pluralism and transnational identities.

The essays by Irina Kotkina, Elina Kahla, and Katja Lehtisaari take on a variety of topics, including the branding of Russian cultural institutions, the place of Russian Orthodox culture vis-à-vis secularization, the political use of the word "culture" in the discourse of the current leaders, and the change in Russian print media over the past 20 years. The contributions highlight the cultural complexities and paradoxes that characterize Russia’s recent societal and political transformations, which Vladimir Gelman, one of the project leaders of the Center of Excellence, has described as a form of authoritarian modernization.

The selection starts with Irina Kotkina’s essay in which she looks at the restoration and reopening of the Bolshoi Theater’s historic stage in Moscow in 2011. She links one of the spheres of Russian life that has experienced radical change in the post-socialist era is religion. Recently, Russian Muslim communities and the Islamization of Russia, and the rise of religiosity in general, have received much attention from commentators on Russian culture and society. The topic this Baltic Worlds special section on Russian modernization takes up is the reentry of Orthodox traditions and practices into Russian society. Elina Kahla’s contribution is an attempt to bring Russian articulations of Russian religiosity into a dialogue with its Islamic counterpart in the world of Russian culture and society. The topic this Baltic Worlds special section on Russian modernization takes up is the reentry of Orthodox traditions and practices into Russian society. Elina Kahla’s contribution is an attempt to bring Russian articulations of Russian religiosity into a dialogue with its Islamic counterpart in the world of Russian culture and society.

A nd, finally, Katja Lehtisaari outlines the changes that have taken place in post-Soviet Russian language print media. She approaches this transformation by analyzing the usage of the word “market” (rynok) in the Russian press since 1990, and includes in her research materials an impressive number of Russian metropolitan and provincial newspapers. She shows how the keyword takes on new meanings, reflecting and relating to the different social and political roles of the press outlets in an evolving, modernizing environment.

In addition to providing us with her essay, Katja Lehtisaari is also the guest co-editor of this section on Russian culture and modernization. I would like to thank her and the other three contributors for providing me, and the Baltic Worlds readers, with these fascinating case studies that shed light on the recent transformations and developments of Russian society from the perspective of cultural analysis — a perspective often absent in day-to-day politics but necessary for anyone trying to grasp the complexity of Russia’s past, present, and future.

Sanna Turoma, guest editor

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The reopening of the Bolshoi Theater

The Bolshoi Theater has always had a very special position on the Russian cultural map, so the success of its “modernization” could be seen as justifying Medvedev’s modernization in general. Officials constantly stress the importance of the Bolshoi Theater for the entire post-Soviet space, which is not only ideological meanings of unity and diversity, but also a way to strengthen the movement of various national elites towards the central power and national values. The Bolshoi’s website confidently stated, “The reconstruction and rehabilitation of the Bolshoi Theater’s Historic Stage was a colossal, world-scale project. The Theater’s building has long been seen as one of Russia’s symbols. The Theater’s rehabilitation therefore came under constant scrutiny from state authorities and the public alike.” Despite the international character of opera and ballet, and status as part of the global cultural milieu, the Bolshoi Theater very much serves to promote escalating nationalism. The image of the Bolshoi Theater, now open after its reconstruction, is being created instrumentalizing of various historical legacies and by manipulating imagery and emotions related to these past legacies. The theater’s Stalinist past – that is, the period when this theater had the highest position on the cultural map of the USSR – is idiosyncratically amalgamated with the Tsarist imperial period. In addition, the Soviet and pre-Soviet periods of the past are equally embraced by the Kremlin for commercial use. However, the combination of imperial and Soviet traditions brings a certain dissonance to the stylistic image of the Bolshoi Theater. Here one can trace the inner logic of official rhetoric, apparently aiming at the future, modernization and progress, but at the same time longing deeply for imperial greatness and stability. This is a traditional dichotomy, which was described in Russian Cultural Studies (edited by Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd) as one of the most characteristic features of Russian culture, and it has left its imprint on the Bolshoi Theater reconstruction project both rhetorically and visually.

NOSTALGIA FOR THE SOVIET PAST is tightly bound up with the search for the new Russian cultural identity, which is sought in certain clusters of excellence – ballet, opera, chess, sports, physics, and so on. The Bolshoi apparently remains one of the most prestigious examples of Soviet cultural life inherited by the contemporary Kremlin. It is almost as highly valued and treasured by officials today as the myth of the Great Patriotic War, another source of national pride and ideological unification. The newly restored Bolshoi Theater combines the most advanced technologies of stage production with the preservation of the building’s beauty and traditional architectural features, a task accomplished with great difficulty. The interior of the Bolshoi Theater has been refreshed in the most eclectic manner, combining the features inherited from “the last Russian tsars and the Bolsheviks” in a most peculiar and significant way (while pretending to be “historically authentic”), revealing the dualism of the governmental attitude towards the theater. In his article “Go Russian!”, Medvedev named his “heroes of innovation” from Russian history. He wrote: “Some elements of innovative systems were created – and not without success – by Peter the Great, the last Russian tsars, and the Bolsheviks. However, the price for these successes was too high.” It clearly follows that a less painful modernization is needed, one that does not reject conservative values and traditions. However, what Medvedev had in mind when he criticized Peter the Great was the idea of “conservative modernization” – not the freshest of political concepts. Nevertheless, the fact that Medvedev explicitly called for it makes the application of this concept unique. The appearance of this term in the media and in the program documents of the government party Edinaia Rossia (United Russia) signifies the aspiration to back modernization with conservatism. The two contradictory concepts, change and traditionalism, are peculiarly united in the statements of the governing party: “It is very important to take into consideration that most of the successful reforms were undertaken thanks to a balanced combination of fresh ideas and conservative values.” The Bolshoi Theater, with its cherished traditions, thus becomes one of the most impressive, yet modernized examples of such “conservative values.” Operatic art, as it is presented at the stage of the Bolshoi Theater – conservative by nature, time-honored for generations, associated with luxury, and possessing an international character, but also bearing links with past Soviet successes – is able to attract everyone, to unify what might otherwise be incompatible, and to provide a feeling of belonging. But this sense of belonging is, in fact, far from democratic. The Bolshoi Theater building, modeled as a baroque opera house, is hierarchical in its nature, with its rows, parquet, amphitheater,
bones, and tiers. The revival of “baroque” hierarchization under Stalin made an indelible imprint on the whole of Soviet culture and shaped the self-image and the media representation of the Bolshoi Theater during the years of its most impressive artistic impact. Featuring opulent regal boxes, opera houses were constructed as much to dramatize the power of princes as for enjoying the Gesamtkunstwerk of opera. Simultaneously, opera houses enacted a symbolic reunification of the “grassroots” spectators with their rulers in the same hall, embraced by the same cultural environment and with the same purpose of enjoying the music and performance. In this sense, opera theaters were a metonymic embodiment of the traditional nationalizing empire. Strange as it may sound, the “golden age” of opera is taking place today. It is driven by the open transmissions of opera productions from the best opera theaters in the world (the Met, the Grand Opera, etc.) to the cinema screens. Opera is no longer associated with court entertainment; on the contrary, the democratic atmosphere of cinema screenings, the cosmopolitan commercialization and global outreach reflect the structure of the modern, globalized world.

The Bolshoi Theater Redux: Restoration or Reconstruction?

The opening concert of the Bolshoi Historic Stage, which took place on October 28, 2011, was delayed by Dmitry Medvedev’s speech. Medvedev, then the president of Russia, was the first person to perform on the legendary stage. His speech intentionally reminded one of other events that had taken place at the stage of the Bolshoi Theater, such as Lenin’s public appearances or Stalin’s speeches. Medvedev symbolically reconfirmed the hierarchical importance of the Bolshoi Theater for the new Russian society now being modernized. The Bolshoi Theater again took on the mission of being the “flagship” of Russian theaters, but still more than a theater, it again became a national symbol, the producer of eminently approved art, and the instrument and ideal arena for transmitting ideological messages. In a figurative sense, the person who dominates the Bolshoi Theater holds not only Russia, but all the territories that value the imperial traditions. Medvedev took possession of the powerful discourse, and he confirmed his primary position in the hierarchy of power: he was symbolically “crowned” by the Bolshoi Theater as the official holder of the discourse.

Nevertheless, what Medvedev stated in his speech was far removed from the solemn speeches of former imperial leaders, both Russian and Soviet. He called on the Bolshoi Theater to become “one of our few national brands”: “Our country is very big indeed,” proclaimed Medvedev, “but the number of symbols able to unite everybody, the amount of our national treasures, which we might call ‘national brands’, is very limited.”

In Today’s Russia, some values, such as identity, spirituality, and the independence of national culture from globalized culture, are seen as supremely national matters. But afterwards, the values that have been conceptualized as exclusively Russian “spiritual treasures” are sold abroad for the highest possible price. The same features can be seen in talk of Russia as an “energy superpower”. Russia’s superpower qualities are solely determined by the availability of uniquely rich oil and gas reserves. By proclaiming the Bolshoi Theater as its national “brand”, Russia is seeking to become a cultural superpower as well.

At the same time, cultural modernization aims not only at the external, but also at the internal market. The Bolshoi national brand strives to legitimate power by triggering the emotions of pride and joy, the sense of belonging to a great culture, and the collective celebration of nationhood. Merely to mention the Bolshoi Theater becomes a performative act in itself, because it means not only expectations of artistic accomplishments in the present or future, but also the continuation of a long historical tradition of cultural excellence which is supposed to be important for all the peoples of the former USSR.

Here, one may discern the traces of the old Soviet utopian idea of total “culturalness”, which in turn reminds one of another powerful utopia – the creation of a new man with better qualities and emotions. Thanks to the efforts of the officials from the very beginning of the Soviet era, listening to opera became an everyday practice and operagoing turned out to be a very common thing: it was assumed that every good Soviet citizen was “cultured enough” to listen to opera and could afford the price of a ticket at the Bolshoi Theater. The Soviet mythology of the opera theater implied (among other things) that, once the rulers and the ruled were reunited under one roof, the grassroots would rise to historical importance as the subject of artistic-cum-political activity.

The whole history of the reconstruction, reopening, and restructuring of the Bolshoi Theater is thus presented as a resurrection narrative for the nation. In a figurative sense, the person who dominates the Bolshoi Theater becomes a performative act in itself, because it means to legitimate power by triggering the emotions of pride and joy, the sense of belonging to a great culture, and the collective celebration of nationhood. Merely to mention the Bolshoi becomes a performative act in itself, because it means to legitimate power by triggering the emotions of pride and joy, the sense of belonging to a great culture, and the collective celebration of nationhood. Merely to mention the Bolshoi makes the citizen more obedient and more grateful to Soviet power. Even Lunacharsky intended to keep the Bolshoi Theater open only temporarily, as the “laboratory” of the new Soviet art, until more ideologically suitable spectacles and stages (he imagined great mass spectacles and huge open theaters) would be opened. However, the ideologically charged Soviet idea of culturalness was totally detached from profit-making motives (an enormous difference to contemporary cultural politics). On the contrary, the state was to spend a huge amount of money to “keep the Bolshoi Theater”, bearing in mind its future ideological mission.

The Relationship of Contemporary Russian Cultural Politics to the Bolshoi Theater is discursively reminiscent of the Soviet “total culturalness” project, but only superficially. The big Bolshoi reconstruction project, although spoken of as if it were addressed to, and important for, everyone, does not, in fact, mandate any education or cultivation of middle-class, young, or working spectators. (Unlike many contemporary opera houses, the Bolshoi Theater has no education department at all.) On the contrary,
The Bolshoi Theater of feelings: constructing the affective community

The legacy of the Bolshoi Theater has been discursively constructed. We may even say that a special emotional regime has been institutionalized at the Bolshoi Theater. The official emotional regime is constructed by using and creating powerful emotions (in a broader sense of this term), that is, verbal means of creating an emotional background for Bolshoi fans. The real theater conservators position their own emotional regime and language. The official task is to create another community that would be affected by loyal emotions.

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The friendship of the peoples of the USSR, and, finally, the demolitions were easily adapted to the imaginary monarchist, imperial symbolism. Andrey Galkin, the chief director of the company with rhymes by the same poet, Sergei Mikhalkov.

The chandelier weighs two tons and has a diameter of 6.5 meters. It was decorated with a very thin layer of gold; the new one out of upgraded acrylic.

Thus the Bolshoi Theater acquired a perfectly “authentic” imperial symbol in place of the Soviet one, made of updated, up-to-date synthetic materials. But one curtain, which was the tradition in the Bolshoi, was not enough. After the reconstruction, the theater acquired a second curtain, a rising one. This curtain depicted the entrance of Minin and Pozharsky into Moscow after its liberation from the Polish troops. Originally, a curtain with this image was produced in 1856 by the now forgotten Italian painter Corsoe Dune. This curtain was used in the Bolshoi for only 30 years, and then replaced with a different one. None of those around later knew what the original curtain had looked like in color. The curtain of 1856 was re-created by the artists Vladimir Cherniy and Eugeny Kcevrait, after an engraving made in 1856, and then painted by hand, guided by black-and-white archival photographs from the Museum of the Bolshoi Theater. Since the engraving did not reveal the details and liveliness of the poses, the artists tried to re-create them from the photos. Another guiding source was the large painting of the Alexander Hall of the Grand Kremlin Palace, made in the same year, 1856. It helped the artists reproduce the artistic style of that era.

The press praised the curtain for “historical authenticity”, but, in reality, the historical context of 1856 was quite different from the contemporary presentation. In 1856, the Bolshoi Theater was provincial, and its art and design could not have served the contemporary surrounding of the new appearance. Significant was the succession surrounding the appearance of the new curtain of the Bolshoi Theater in 2013 centered to a great extent on the technological advancement of the production, not on its symbolism. Andrey Galkin, the chief director of the company ES-Design, which won the tender for the production of a new curtain, explained in an interview:

“First we studied the old curtain fabric. We did a spec-

analysis and examined all the weaves. And then we started the restoration. Our restoration is characterized by the fact that the new one was made with the application of new technologies, yet rooted in the old product. ... The new curtain will last longer than the old one because it is made of synthetic material. ... The old curtain was made of silk with metallic thread coated with a very thin layer of gold; the new one out of upgraded acrylic.”

The Bolshoi Theater is, charged with “primordial” idealism. Modernization has left it reconstructed at the cutting edge of technological progress, yet at the same time charged with unceremonious associations, historical parallels, and overpowering traditions. The history of the curtains raises questions about the success of cultural modernization in general. The resurrection of forgotten or fictitious traditions leads to an illusory “authenticity.” The artificial combination of monarchist and Stalinist traditions is proclaimed to be both a spiritual national treasure and a luxurious brand. Nowadays, the fact that authentic authenticity is recreated by means of the latest technologies and the most advanced equipment, it still does not stimulate to any further development of the arts. Real progress is possible not in the development of “sacred national traditions” and their “brandization”, but in openness to universal accomplishments, competitiveness, and the exchange of ideas with the world’s best stages. And in the Bolshoi’s case, the newest technologies lead to stagnation, which puts an end to the efforts of cultural modernization.

Since the reopening of its Historic Stage, the burden of the theater’s “symbolic mission” and its closeness to Kremlin officials seem to have prevented it from developing artistically, and instead have caused many scandals, criminal prosecutions, and controversy, if not scandals, appointments and dismissals. The change of theater management in the summer of 2013 seemed inevitable.

The curtain depicting Minin and Pozharsky’s entrance into Moscow, though painted in 1856, produces the strongest associations with another era and another production. The red Soviet curtain in turn looks monarchist today, and does not remind one of 1935, the year in which it was originally designed. The Bolshoi Theater is...
Civil religion in Russia

A choice for Russian modernization?

by Elina Kahla

This essay addresses aspects of the cultural traditions and practices of Russian Orthodox believers and bearers of that church’s legacy in contemporary society, especially in the gray area between the secular and religious spheres of life. The theoretical basis of the present study is rooted in Jürgen Habermas’s understanding of the “post-secular”, by which is meant the refiguring of religion by individuals and societies. Habermas proposes a new “third way” for a social contract, one that requires an equal dialog between religious and secular citizens. My aim here is to elaborate on the improvement of the relationship among the church, the state, and society in the contemporary Russian situation by comparing it with the West, where secularization has been seen as a key component of modernization. I call for a dialog between the Western social theory of civil religion and Russian statements on its own cultural tradition. The guiding research question is: to what extent are cultural traditions—such as the shared value of symmetry—or practices of form, rhetoric, and collective, circular control (as discussed by Oleg Kharkhordin)—still at the core of self-identification and ingroup communication in Russian cultural Orthodoxy? My hypothesis is that such cultural traditions and practices are crucial, and therefore they should be openly integrated into societal dialog and form the key components of Russia’s unique model of civil religion. I also posit that, due to Russia’s Orthodox legacy, its potential for civil religion is fundamentally different from the Western (here: American) model, and therefore should be analyzed in its own, non-Western context. What is vital is that Russian political tradition emphasizes symmetry between secular and sacred authority, and the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), by virtue of its history and as the religion of the ethnic majority, has dominated other confessions. As a result, cultural and political Orthodoxy formed the modus vivendi that in the public sphere of symbols, legislation, and practices, ruled not just over its own adherents but over non-Orthodox, non-Russians, and non-believers as well. By inertia, the ROC and the Kremlin today aspire to revive the prerevolutionary tradition of monarchy, while simultaneously admitting the multiconfessional and secular status of the state. Given this controversy, it is safe to posit that a better analysis of the Russian model of civil religion is urgently needed—even more so today, when the conflict in Ukraine is drawing two Orthodox nations into fratricide.

Today, a self-identification with the spiritual and historical legacy of Russian Orthodoxy unites the majority of ethnic Russians and/or Russian speakers. Adherence to “cultural Orthodoxy” is to some extent also shared by non-Orthodox citizens, due to its ubiquity and intangibility, which helped it to transform and survive 70 years of communism. Because of this combination of shared tradition, ubiquity, and intangibility, it seems that practices of symmetry, thesis, and circular control apply to both the Orthodox Christian (prosvodnyy) and the non-Orthodox (rossiiane, inosovrye, inoslovnye) citizens, and even those russiiane living abroad in “Greater Russia”. My point is that the ubiquity of cultural Orthodoxy lies in the fact that it relates deeply to the public sphere and therefore creates a potential realm for agency and choices, and ultimately for an updated contract between church and state and between church and civil society. Due to its ubiquity, it forms an organic part of political culture as well. Accord-
or as a “crime against the state”, as in the scandalous Pussy Riot trial.1 That trial exposed, more than any other example, the unpreparedness of the ROC or the state to deal with the antagonistic sphere between the Orthodox authority and the modern, a priori secular civil agency whose openness and globalism are evident in social media.2 It is worth noting that without social media, especially YouTube, no scandal would ever have taken place. However, social media are not only a threat but also an opportunity; the Pussy Riot case also pointed to potential affirmative agency by revealing taboos that cannot be dealt with in formal institutions.

Given the huge challenges, self-reflection is a must. It is crucial that the ROC, within the frame of its specific traditions and historic trajectory, take up the challenge of self-reflection posed by post-secrecy, and accepts the existence of competing denominations, the autonomy of secular knowledge from sacred knowledge and the institutionalized monopoly of modern scientific expertise. Meanwhile, the ROC needs to develop an epistemic stance regarding the secular reasoning predominant in political arena.3

AS FOR DEMOCRATIC values held among Orthodox adherents, Christopher Marsh has claimed that “religious belief and practice have virtually no impact on democratic values, suggesting that Orthodoxy may not be the obstacle to democracy that some have ever thought before”.4 More recently, Irina Papkova has contested this mass campaign against electronic identification pointed out that within the formal ROC structures there are fractions of liberals, traditionalists, and fundamentalists. “And finally, Kristina Stoeckl5 analysis of the Social Doctrine and the Human Rights

Doctrine debate has shown that modernization of the ROC is truly in progress: The ROC recognizes that modern society has become the natural living environment for the majority of Orthodox believers, and while the ROC criticizes the excesses of modern society it also responds to the legitimate desire of the Orthodox believer to be part of that society. I would argue that the changes in the human rights debate actually stand for an ideological renewal, and not only for strategic political adaptation.6

With this in mind, one would conclude that Orthodox faith and practice in Russia are not per se obstacles to the country’s democratic development. If peace prevails, openness will grow and human rights debates will gradually contribute to an ideological renewal. On a closer look, the ROC is neither a monolith nor a remnant of an idealized past, but consists of a wide range of clerical and lay actors whose choices will contribute to the content of the contract between secular and religious authority, even if the dogma of symphony remains untouched.7

American ‘civil religion’ and Russian Orthodox tradition

As was argued earlier, modern Western social theory has so far failed to take Russian traditions of the sociology of religion into serious consideration when discussing Russian social development. What we need is better and more egalitarian integration of Western and Russian academics’ work. To attempt a step forward along this path, let us next compare the concept of civil religion proposed by the American sociologist Robert N. Bellah with some remarks on the situation in Russia. In his original essay “Civil Religion in America” (1967) – written during the crisis of the Vietnam War – Bellah was inspired by Jean Jacques Rousseau’s Social Contract (1762). Rousseau outlined four simple dogmas of civil religion: “the existence of God, the life to come, the reward of virtue and the punishment of vice, and the exclusion of religious intolerance. All other religious opinions are outside the cognizance of the state and may be freely held by citizens.”8 Rousseau’s dogma is still valid. In addition, the Durkheimian emphasis that civil religion is an “objective social fact”, a sine qua non, is important here.9 Comparing Bellah’s theory with the historical trajectory and recent developments of post-Soviet Russia leads us to focus on the following points:

Civil religion deals with ultimate questions of faith and power. Sovereignty rests with the people, but ultimate sovereignty has been attributed to God. Civil religion deals with tensions between secular and religious authorities and the legitimacy of political authority. This definition is universal, but manifests itself differently in different historical and national civil religions.10

In Russia, the historical trajectory, the question of faith and power is exhibited in the narrative of statehood. The birth of the state is associated with Vladimir I’s baptism and the Christianization of Kievan Rus in 988. The ROC backed the political authority until 1917 in the name of symphony; Russian ethnicity meant adherence to Orthodoxy. In the officially atheistic USSR, the ROC was involved when its help was needed, as during WWII. In post-Soviet Russia, sympathy has been revitalized, especially during Putin’s second term. The ROC plays a dominant role in an unusual way to Bellah’s essay, a combination of a Manichaean confrontation between East and West, where “honor is at stake”.11

In Russia, emancipation from the Mongol yoke, World War II, the wars in Afghanistan and Chechnya, and even the battle for hegemony over Crimea may represent analogous “trials”. Today, the ROC pointedly propagates the restrengthening of lost links between the ROC and the Russian peoples, “in order to make peace flourish in the minds and hearts of brothers and sisters in blood and faith”.12 Richter has pointed out that in Ukraine, hardline Orthodox nationalists wish to see the division of Ukraine and the integration of its eastern parts into Russia.13 In military training, Russian soldiers are taught to sacrifice their lives as a way of imitating Christ’s ultimate sacrifice, hence a form of thesis.14

Civil religion is messianic: one’s own nation is regarded as chosen by God and a light unto all nations, one’s own country as the New Jerusalem; it is eschatological and ultimately transnational. “A world civil religion could be accepted as a fulfillment and not a contradiction of Christianity.”15

In Russia, the manifestation of messianism is analogical, most famously elaborated by Slavophiles and Pseudo-Dionysius, and today by neo-Eurasians such as A. Dugin, an influential advisor to President Putin. Patriarch Kirill constantly stresses the heritage of Holy Rus and the unity of the great Eastern Slavic civilization into which brethren in blood and faith are called. In

CIVIL RELIGION PROVIDES different solutions to the religious-political problem that seem to correlate with phases of religious evolution. In archaic societies, the focus of both political and religious attention was on a single figure, often identified as a divine king. Although the Millennium is a millennium of political and religious power was broken by the emergence of the historic religious, “it remains a permanent possibility in human history”. Once the historic religions arise, there can be a direct correlation between religious and political authority. This means a radical reorientation in the divine-kingship symbolism. “The symbolism of Confinatus or Jesus suggest (Jesus’ throne is a cross and his crown is thorns) that the relations between political authority and religious authority and ultimate meaning turn out more problematic than ever thought before.”16

In Russia, another historical path was taken: centralism and the idea of symphony persist, implying that the ruler of the state is Orthodox and the Moscow Patriarchate’s position is dominant; a national redemption process focuses on the sin of regenerate, legitimacy and power struggles continue. However, due to the low numbers of people joining the church (votserkovlenie) and strong propaganda and catechization via cultural Orthodoxy, the distinction between Orthodox and non-Orthodox adherents is blurred and gradual, especially in “Greater Russia”, where Eastern Orthodox civilization is the focus. Non-Orthodox citizens have formal access to political processes.

Civil religion shifts over time through “trials”. In America, the Declaration of Independence and the abolition of slavery are examples of such trials, whereas the Vietnam War, an acute crisis, is probably the most profound evidence of a Manichaean confrontation between East and West, where “honor is at stake”.17

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the Patriarch’s policies, Ukraine is important for its size and history, Kiev being the “mother of all Russian cities” and symbol of national bap-
tism. Today, clerics’ support for the integration of Eastern Ukraine into Russia (rukovodstvo za retour tsentralnyh na vlast’ rossii) is important. Today, missal dates related to na-
tional sacrifices, secular and religious martyrs, and redemption show the momentum of civil religion in the public sphere. The
Piskaryova, Levashova, and Solovetski memorials, for example, stress the universal, multiconfessional and multi-ethnic charac-
ter of mourning.

WE CAN CONCLUDE that there are both fundamental differences (a different history, the dominant position of the ROC, and the ubiq-
tuity of civil religion in Russia versus American pluralism and modernism), but also similarities (strong momentum for re-
surgence through sacrifice; messianism) between Bellah’s model of Eastern Ukraine into Russia (1870–1965), “combination of freedom and unity of many persons
sobornost symphony and the Russian model of civil religion. Next, let us examine in more detail the elements of the model’s key concept symphony and the practices related with it.

Symphony in the service of secular power?

In today’s Russia, the division between religious and secular power remains unresolved due to the adaptation of the Byzantine ideal of theocratic mission, which the Byzantologist H. G. Beck re-
fers to as “political Orthodoxy.”31 By this coinage, Beck meant the
Church’s dual role of temporal and ecclesiastical power. The
truth about Religion in Russia (Pravda o religii vRossii), published in 1942 by the Moscow Patriarchate to win the support of the allied powers by reassuring them that the Soviet govern-
ment does not persecute the faithful. The book bears witness to the patriotism of the ROC hierarchs led by Ioan (Iron) Metro-
politan Sergius (Stratordvorski). Although obviously propagandis-
tic and denying many facts, the pastoral speeches reveal an un-
questioned bond between the Russian nation and its Church and a willingness to sacrifice, and the authors declare that the only hope of defeating the enemy is by turning once more to God and
his help. Importantly, as Pospielsky points out, notwithstanding
the apocryphal death of 1942, Pravda o religii also contains wording condemning war in a true Christian spirit.32

TO EMPHASIZE THE UNBREAKABLE bond between secular and reli-
gious authority, the sermons quoted in Pravda o religii draw an
explicit parallel between the German invasion and the “Teutonic
invasion” of 1242, which Prince Alexander Nevsky repelled. Hitler’s attack is presented as analogous to the medieval one:
again, seven hundreds years later, the faithful are requested to collect money to save the homeland by supporting the Red Army. The manifestation of symphony and unquestioned loyalty to
the state authority is strongly implied in a photograph in which Metropolitan Sergius is sitting by his typewriter in a posture similar to Stalin with no visible past.”33 or religious markets except
a humble black cap, clack the, on his head. 34 This example testifies to situations of extreme external danger which compels religious and secular leaders to unite, bringing the contract between state and church under reconsideration, and invite the perse-
cuted ingroup back into the collective. The epigraph of Pravda
o religii is from the Old Testament Book of Ezra: “Truth is great and will prevail” (Ezra 1:1). The reference to Ezra as a model — negotiating
with the king, leading a group of exiles from Babylon back to their native Jerusalem, but also enforcing observance of the Torah
and cleansing the community of inter-ethnic marriages — may per-
haps be seen as a vignetage of Sergius and his behavior at that time. A相似 but secular version of the motto is on the Red Army’s
1943 victory medal: “Our cause is just — victory is ours,” and was
praised by Molotov in his radio speech of June 22, 1941: “Our cause is just, the enemy will be defeated, the
victory will be ours.” The analogy between the religious and secular
leaders’ mottoes consolidates the idea of symphony: side by side
they use, if needed, repressive means within their ingroup as a
model of collective penance and redemption. Up until 1948, Stal-
in used the church as his ally in international politics; in periods of
detente, the ROC actively and systemically supported Soviet
proposals in international peace organizations.

WHEN THE SOVIET COMMUNIST PARTY and ideology eroded and lost their legitimacy, Orthodox institutions gradually replaced them as defenders of the soft power agenda. Important milestone in-
cluded the millennial celebration of Russia’s baptism in 1698 and
the canonization of thousands of new martyrs, most notably that
of Tsar Nicholas in 2000.35 These events attest to a return of sym-
phony between state and church. Although the Social Doctrine36
of the Church is a reassertion of the doctrine of separation of Church and state, seen from today’s perspective, the Doctrine has not uprooted the sym-
phonic tradition and the informal practices related to it.

Consequently, a closer analysis of symphony and the related
practices is needed for a better understanding of religion in con-
temporary Russia. However, the Russian sociologist Oleg Khark-
hordin has recently contributed to the analysis of cultural prac-
tices in the Russian context. He suggests that there exists a
specific Russian conception of civil society in which the relations between civil and religious traditions are negotiated in a man-
ner different to those of Protestant and Catholic communities
and their perceptions of the ethical role of a congregation.37

Kharkhordin refers to Dostoevsky’s Slavophile concept of the
Theocratic mission of the Orthodox Church. It is best manifested in
the famous episode in which Ivan Ilyitch suggests that ecclesiastical
councils should regulate all aspects of secular life too, so that
the Christian church would finally fulfill its mission in this
world, Ivan stressed to the Church related not to take on the
responsibility of stopping crime and sustaining political
life — as Catholicism allegedly yearns to do. The Church should not punish; it should not become the state, but all social relations
should be recast in accordance with the New Testament.38

From the point of view of the characters in the Dosto-
evsky novel, this Orthodox vision still reflects the true, “right” (the meaning of “orthos” in Greek) project of the
Christian church: to not coexist with the violent state as a neces-
ary evil (a point on which both Catholics and Protes-
tants are explicit) but to emphasize the unBreakaBle denial of this evil through the deification of man (a famous
Orthodox theosis) and through the reconstruction of the world on church principles.39

Indeed, definition, theosis, originally equivalent to initium Dei,
is of major importance in Orthodox dogma and the practice of
working on oneself (podvizhnie). Kharkhordin convincingly
adopts theosis as his starting point in translating cultural tradi-
tions from one regime to another. The radical denial of evil is related to the ideal of utmost humility, which stems from Jesus’
teaching in Matthew 18:15–17: “If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault alone: if he hear
thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in
the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be
established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it
unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let
him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.

The three-step pattern of ingroup control is crucial: it stands as a model for religious and secular congregations and
collectives. As suggested by Kharkhordin, all Soviet groups and communities on a given factory shop floor to group of inmates in a given cell or tourists in a given hotel, “were all supposed to be transformed to become a collective.”42

The concept of “collective” turned out to be very stable. Ac-

cording to Kharkhordin, the secret of this stability and of the
limited use of physical violence in normal Soviet life consisted in
the fact that each Soviet collective functioned as a quasi-religious
congregation, employing the principles of the New Testament to
maintain the powerful system of circular social control within the
collective.41

In political and secular rhetoric, loyalty to the values of Or-
thodox symphony (especially cherished by Slavophiles) has
often been presented as an antithesis to Western individualism,
pluralism, and democracy. In aggravating circumstances of war or power struggle, periods of disorder (mutiny) and purges
(chaos) of the ingroup, the Orthodox have tended to support
the legitimacy of the secular regime. The ROC hierarchy backed the
state with little reward in return, even during the worst years
of Stalinist terror. Today, we see no other explanation for the im-

cense popularity of the cult of the Blessed Matrona of Moscow
in the past decades.44

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Russian Orthodox Old-Rite Church, Yelizarov, Orekhovo-Zuevo District, Moscow Oblast.
Cossacks for Christ.

that context’s premises and its specific religious-cum-political- cum-cultural practices in earnest. When Bellah reminds us of the American founding fathers’ vision, he emphasizes it was based on rejection of particularism; instead, it relied on a vision of the common good and an artist-people’s creative idea.45 Recalling the artist-people’s creative idea, is to some extent, parallel and compatible with the ideas of Russian fin-de-siècle philosophers, such as Vladimir Solovyov. The creative idea is at the core of the civil religion proposal: it offers a solution to national (and nationalist) lethargy by involving an acknowledgment of mystery, but it also rejects the legitimation of state repression.

9. Young Muscovite artists performed “punk moleben” with openly political, antireligious, and allegedly blasphemous lyrics directed simultaneously at the President and the Patriarch. “Punk moleben” (yezos), accessed June 30, 2012, http://swordandlight.com/1011/index.html. In December 2010, the performers Maria Alekhina and Nika Tolokonnikova were arrested and charged with incitement to contempt of law and announced that they would continue to protest.
10. The harsh response from Russian authorities, both secular and religious, is discussed by, e.g., Dmitry Uzlaner, “The Pussy Riot Case and the Peculiarities of Russian Post-Secularism”, State, Religion and Church i no. 11 (2012): 25–38.
14. I. Papkovs, The Orthodox Church and Russian Foreign Policy (New York: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Washington, D.C., 2010: 118–120. Papkovs defines Orthodoxy fundamentalism in terms of four factors: “On the political side, they are anti-Western, anti-modern, and anti-market; on the theological, they justify their political stance based on an apocalyptic interpretation of covenantal revelation.”
17. Thus far, the ROC hierarchy’s stance toward values in modern society has mostly been defensive, both outside and inside, posing a double confrontation. See S. Ramet, “The Way We Were – And Should Be Again: European Orthodox Churches and the ‘Idyllic Past’”, in Religion in an Expanding Europe, ed. P.J. Katzev and T.A. Bentley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), and K. Stoeckl, “European Integration and Russian Orthodoxy: A Europeanising Perspective”, European Journal of Social Theory i no. 2 (2009): 219. Outside, vis-a-vis Western countries, the main threats are secularist and pluralist values, and competition among different religions. All this is often referred to as “multiculturalism”. Inside, in societies of prevailing Orthodox tradition there also are processes of modernization and secularization which threaten the authority of religion. Patriarch Kirill has made notable efforts to meet these challenges. Perhaps the confrontation of Orthodox religion with modernity will even appear as a central theme of his patriarchy. In both his Social Doctrine (2008) and his Human Rights Doctrine (2008), Kirill defines the ROC’s conservative stance on questions ranging from sexual ethics to environmental protection. Responding to those


In the search for freedom and the rejection of corruption, they stressed the radical denial of evil. Perhaps ideas of symphony and cultural practices by self-identified adherents of Russian Orthodoxy, (St. Petersburg and Moscow: EUSEH, Letnii sad, 2002).

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Cf. Habermas, Religion in the Public Sphere, 14.


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questions, Kirel also recognizes that they are legitimate for the Orthodox citizens of today, regardless of their residence on citizenship. Patriarch Kirel has so far fairly systematically kept a balance between Orthodox fundamentalists’ pressures on one hand and the threat of Western hegemony and its ‘value-containing’ on the other. Understandably, Kirel, or the Western-schooled Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev) and others in today’s ROC top hierarchy, are far better equipped to participate in scholarly, interconfessional and interfaith dialog with the ‘world society’ as defined by Habermas in his Religion in the Public Sphere, than the more domestic market-oriented Archbishop Vsevolod Chaplin, let alone the grassroots clergy and laity across Russian dioceses. Given the situation in which the post-totalitarian ROC is for the first time confronted on so many levels and fronts (theological, intellectual, and institutional), the challenge it faces is huge.


30 C. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America”.

31 Bellah, Civil Religion in America, 18.


34 Bremer notes that throughout history canonization politics is an important indicator of church-state relations. Given the situation in which the post-totalitarian ROC is for the first time confronted on so many levels and fronts (theological, intellectual, and institutional), the challenge it faces is huge.

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36 A. Verkhovskii, “Moskovskaia Patriarkhiia kak politicheskaia Partiia” [The grassroots clergy and laity across Russian dioceses. Given the situation in which the post-totalitarian ROC is for the first time confronted on so many levels and fronts (theological, intellectual, and institutional), the challenge it faces is huge.]

37 “Habermas in his Religion in the Public Sphere”.

38 A. Ledeneva, “Civil Society and Orthodoxy Christianity”, 52.

39 A. Ledeneva, “Civil Society and Orthodoxy Christianity”, 52.

40 Kharkhordin refers to late Brezhnev-era empirical surveys, according to which Russians valued spending leisure time with friends substantially more than Americans. The respondents mentioned various reasons ranging from mutual help to the exchange of information not accessible via official media. Importantly, meetings with friends did not devalue when repression stopped: the high value Russians attach to friendship is not related to the regime but rather to ‘subjugating practice’. Kharkhordin, Druzhba, 12.


44 Bremer, Little was noticed of the “Third Rome” until 812, when [the monk] Filofei’s Letter against Astrologers was published. Ostrom, “Moscow the Third Rome”, 29.

45 Ostrom, “Moscow the Third Rome”, 29.


48 Bremer notes that throughout history canonization politics is an important indicator of church-state relations. See his analysis of political canonizations in Moscowian Russia and in Thomas Bremer, Arvus and Komm: Aakte Geschichte der Orthodoxen Kirche in Rusland (Budapest, 2003) 113–125.

49 “These are the things objective and external.”

50 “These are the things objective and external.”

51 Druzhba, 430.

52 Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical, 31:12.

53 “Little was noticed of the ‘Third Rome’ until 812, when [the monk] Filofei’s Letter against Astrologers was published.”

54 Druzhba, 430.

55 “Little was noticed of the ‘Third Rome’ until 812, when [the monk] Filofei’s Letter against Astrologers was published.”

56 Shlapentokh, “The Post-Soviet Russian Orthodox Church”, 105.


58 The focus of the present essay is the deployment of this metaphor in the official patriarchal discourse of identity dominant in contemporary Russia, in which the sphere of cultural values is perceived, conceived, and described in terms of natural resources. Moreover, insofar as its functioning depends on the reigning system of ideas, the metaphor relies on the same mechanisms that determine the foundations of an economy dependent on resource extraction. As a result, a structural homology emerges between the spheres of material, economic activity and immate-

59 “The politics of history and the economies of rent” by Ilya Kalinina 

60 Ilya Kalinina 

61 Ragni Svensson

62 “The politics of history and the economies of rent” by Ilya Kalinina 

63 Ragni Svensson

64 peer-reviewed essay

65 peer-reviewed essay
ing such a mechanism permits us to reconstruct these processes, revealing how reality is discursively produced. Because the metaphor realizes the speaker’s desire, it carries his fingerprints. In other words, the metaphor represents a certain form of evidence which allows us to postulate how the subject thinks and looks at things. By retracing in reverse order the chain of symbolic equivalences through which the metaphor endows the subject with discursive power over the reality he produces, we can approach the set of conscious and unconscious motifs that determine his image of the “objective” reality with which he identifies.

The concept of metaphor I am using here has implications far beyond those of a simple rhetorical device, even one that plays a significant role in organizing the space of official discourse in post-Soviet Russia. My task is to discuss the fundamental similarities in the functioning of spheres that would seem to be absolutely distinct — or, more precisely, the similarities in the collectively held conceptions of how these spheres function. This is why the equivalence between cultural heritage and natural resources captured in this metaphor is not so much a decorative poetic trope as a social-cultural symptom; it is more an economic than a rhetorical phenomenon. The question may arise here as to what this symptom expresses — that is, what “objective reality” of material or immaterial production it expresses, or what perception of these productive processes on the part of those involved in them (whether as producers or consumers of the finished product).

However, from the perspective that interests me, this question is largely irrelevant.

The historical past as a resource

A noteworthy example of this political-economic symptom is a small text titled “Global Shame and Disgrace”, published in the peer-reviewed essay “View”. Its author, Olga Tukhanina, who calls herself a “provincial housewife”, originally published the text on her personal website under the more eloquent title “The Historical Klondike”. The tone of the piece makes it impossible to decide whether it is a parody written by a liberal who wants to expose the paranoia of patriots, or a di-rect expression of patriotic paranoia masked as a liberal parody. But this is not important. What matters is that this text insistently, obsessively reproduces the symptomatic association of natural resources with the historical past. And with this as its central metaphor, the article’s basic thesis appears in an alarmist tone:

“The world has a debt to us. And the debt is such that it can’t be repaid even over several centuries. For, in the twentieth century, the United States and Europe stole all of Russia’s victories and the goodness of life. The thieves can’t be repaid even over several centuries. For, in the twentieth century, the United States and Europe stole all of Russia’s victories and the goodness of life. The thieves

One can’t be surprised that, immediately after identifying the historical past as a social-cultural symptom; it is more an economic than a rhetorical phenomenon. The question may arise here as to what this symptom expresses — that is, what “objective reality” of material or immaterial production it expresses, or what perception of these productive processes on the part of those involved in them (whether as producers or consumers of the finished product). However, from the perspective that interests me, this question is largely irrelevant.

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As our own historical experience has also shown, cultural self-consciousness, spiritual and moral values, and ethical codes are a sphere of fierce competition, at times an object of open informational confrontation. I’d rather not say “aggression”, but “confrontation” is precise — and it is, precisely, a sphere of well-orchestrated propagandistic attacks. And this is no phobia, I am not inventing anything here, this is how it really is. At the very minimum, it is a form of competitive struggle. Attempts to influence the worldview of entire peoples, striving to subject them to one’s will and bind them to one’s own system of values and ideas — this is an ab-
The fundamental political economy of state corporate capitalism, trying to establish a monopoly of the state by the appeal to historical traditions of statehood and the national idea (“spiritual braces,” in Putin’s terms), is quite eloquently revealed here in the sphere of historical politics, which is called upon to access the resources of the historical past that are necessary for the production of tradition and national identity. By that production I mean the conscious efforts of the political elite and the state structures under its control to impart a specific historical consciousness to society by controlling the production and circulation of historical knowledge. The appropriated and thoroughly interpreted past allows the political elite to base its legitimacy not only on electoral results, but also on the right of inheritance, on an image of historical choice, rooted in tradition. In one way or another, this kind of politics instrumentalizes historical knowledge, using it as an argument both in internal political struggle and in foreign policy.

However, there is another possible perspective from which to describe these deformations of historical knowledge and collective representation of the historical past—a perspective of political manipulation. In addition to political instrumentalization, which is inscribed in the logic of the state’s monopoly of the political power, historical politics (and more broadly, all cultural politics) has an economic dimension—and one that goes beyond the financial margins. One of the leading theoreticians of cognitive capitalism describes this transition to a “knowledge economy” thus: “[The products of social activity are no longer crystallized labor but crystallized knowledge].” However, when it comes to the production of politically useful historical knowledge, the issue is less the expansion of production and more the expansion of the resource base.

Russian historical politics is realized through a “knowledge economy” in which the product of public activity (a specific kind of state patriotism and national identity based on the “continuity tradition of Russian statehood”) is not crystallized knowledge but a crystallized resource—that is, the historical past capitalized for the benefit of the ruling elite. Moreover, the goal of this state mobilization of the past is not to extract economic profit, as in the “capitalist mobilization of culture,” but to invent tradition, nation, and political legitimacy. The past contains within its depths “historical Russia” and “the unity of Russia’s historical destiny,” and serves as a natural resource for the invented tradition of “units and arousing.” The political capital meaning of this concept consists in Russia’s role as the “civilizing core” around which other peoples have gathered, and in the development of the surrounding resources, the most important of which has been, and still is, land: “The settlement of huge territories, which occupies the entire history of Russia, has been the collective endeavor of many peoples.”

The historical past as a limited resource

The perception of the historical past as a resource automatically activates a chain of assumptions, the traces of which can be understood as the history of the state’s leaders and which flows through the discursive capillaries of the official politics of history. These assumptions include the following:

1. Work on the past has an instrumental character because the production of historical ideas serves more goals than mere historical knowledge. Unlike political knowledge, historical knowledge is not produced, but inherited, and used to support political stability. At the same time, national identity today has become completely synonymous with such an inherited tradition, which is considered to be a stable and unchanging set of values that must be preserved and protected against any transformation.

2. The historical past is understood as a substance that fulfills the task of patriotic education. In other words, modernization is not produced, but inherited, and used to support political legitimacy. Therefore, it is very important to be more than just interested in history—we must know it.… It is necessary first of all for us to pass historical knowledge from generation to generation.19

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4. The rhetoric of a struggle for symbolic resources, in which the state strives to reduce discussion of the historical past, reproduces the logic of a zero-sum game in which not everyone can win. Equated with inherited tradition and immutable identity, the historical past is perceived as a large, but limited quantity—i.e., as a limited resource—which is not enough for everyone. In this model, the past appears not as an effect of historical knowledge and experience, but as the totality of a historical legacy. And since it is our inheritance, it is essential that we protect it from others—illegal heirs who might try to take advantage of it without regard for “state interest” and “Russian prestige.”

It is very important to be more than just interested in history—we must know it.… It is necessary first of all for us to pass historical knowledge from generation to generation.19

The competition for resources is growing ever fiercer. And I want to assure you, respected colleagues, and emphatically: this is not only competition for metals, oil, and gas, but primarily for human resources, for the intellect. Who will burst forward, and who will remain an outsider and inevitably lose their independence, depends not only on the economic potential, but primarily on the will of each nation, on its inner energy, on what Lev Gumilev called passionness.

The key mechanism in this great industry of the production, preservation, and distribution of historical ideas exists in maintaining control over access to the resource of the historical past (conceived as “our historical memory”, “national and spiritual identity”, “traditional values”, or “the inner substantive logic of a resource, but according to the symbolic, constructive logic of capital. Identity and modernization are thus ordered in accordance with the reductive formula of pragmatic Marxism as base and superstructure. The base contains the resources (in the economy, the mineral resources; in cultural politics, the resources of the image). The superstructure is realized through the modernization of technology for the exploitation of those resources. In other words, modernization serves only to perfect the mechanisms for explicating the fixed and immutable depths of identity. It is a closed system, excluding any fundamental changes:

We must completely support institutions that bear traditional values and have historically proven their ability to pass them on from generation to generation.20

We must not only persist in our development but also preserve our national and spiritual identity, lest we lose ourselves as a nation. We must be and remain Russian.21

9. According to historian S. Yashina, the political task of the state is to control over the production of cultural values and historical ideas. The symptom’s structure is based on the logic of the discursive control and distribution of natural resources. In this sense, the production and dissemination of historical ideas can be described by the economic model of a diversified holding company in which the mother company (in this case, the state) places orders and issues licenses for the development of historical resources by other companies (the media, the Academy of Sciences, the school system, institutions of high and mass culture, and NGOs close to the state, such as the Geographic, Historical, and Military History Societies). In return, these institutions pay for the right to use the resources and to distribute goods produced from them. The form of payment is their political loyalty and the ideological characteristics of the products they supply.

10. The expansion of the capitalist economy into the sphere of historical politics is steadily growing, crowding industrial labor into the margins. One of the leading theoreticians of cognitive capitalism describes this transition to a “knowledge economy” thus: “[T]he products of social activity are no longer crystallized labor but crystallized knowledge.”

11. The production of immaterial goods is steadily growing, crowding industrial labor into the margins. One of the leading theoreticians of cognitive capitalism describes this transition to a “knowledge economy” thus: “[T]he products of social activity are no longer crystallized labor but crystallized knowledge.”

12. However, when it comes to the production of politically useful historical knowledge, the issue is less the expansion of production and more the expansion of the resource base.

13. The metaphor emerges as a conceptual symptom of state sovereignty, the unity of the nation, the political legitimacy of the ruling elite, and so on. Thus, the past, appearing as a horizon of symbolic legitimization for the elite and its political program, turns out to be the only plan for the future:

Essentially, we ourselves and our future are the result of the Great Patriotic War. [This is] the future of our children.22

14. Schools and universities, essentially, create new citizens, forming the new consciousness. They pass on the generation of meanings, values and culture, and they determine the ideas and vision of the future that will move society forward through several decades (Vladimir Putin).

15. History can only have one indivisible subject — namely the people united by a strong state — and therefore only a representative of the state can grant the right of access to the riches of the national past. Only the state has the monopolistic privilege of controlling the use of this resource. Attempts at unsanctioned access are blocked as falsifications of history and international warfare:

Of course, in every science there can be different approaches, but this is probably also because there are fewer and fewer people who participated in the war, who saw it with their own eyes. And so this vacuum, this gap — either through ignorance or even intentionally — is filled by a new way of seeing and understanding the war.... Essentially, we find ourselves in a situation where we must defend the historical truth or even prove facts again that seemed absolutely self-evident not so long ago. This is difficult, and sometimes, one must admit, it is even abhorrent. But it must be done ... we will not allow anyone to raise doubts about the heroic achievement of our people.

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The key mechanism in this great industry of the production, preservation, and distribution of historical ideas exists in maintaining control over access to the resource of the historical past (conceived as “our historical memory”, “national and spiritual identity”, “traditional values”, or “the inner...
energy of the nation). The historical past must be capitalized exclusively for the purpose of national and state construction, the agenda of which is completely controlled by the ruling elite. By this logic, the future depends on memory of the past, and modernization depends on the “inner energy” that is condensed in tradition. To be victorious in international competition, one must understand the scarcity not only of natural resources but of symbolic resources as well. These must also come under the control of the state. Publishing a mandatory history textbook for the schools, a single historical doctrine, is an example of precisely this logic of struggle for the past as a limited resource.

**The Nationalization of the Historical Past**

By the state (or its privatization by the elite) would seem to contradict the unchangeable character of the object itself. How can one trade what belongs to everyone? What cannot be traded on the market cannot be capitalized. It has no owner, no value, that can become someone’s property. In this respect, the historical past and memory of the past are a public heritage which cannot be appropriated by the state or by any group that speaks and acts on the state’s behalf. However, the unexchangeable, non-capitalist character of this immaterial object may be deformed if someone manages to co-opt it and establish a right to control access to it. This includes, for example, natural resources, which cannot be produced by human labor and, to an even greater degree, that are not producible, together with those things that are not exchangeable or intended for exchange, have no “value” in the economic sense. This includes, for example, natural resources, which cannot be produced, cannot be made into property, cannot be “valued”. In principle, this is also true of any common public heritage (for example, the cultural heritage) which cannot be distributed among property holders, cannot be exchanged for something else. Of course, one can take possession of natural resources or public cultural legacies.

The irony of the capitalization of the historical past and cultural memory in Russia is that they are being privatized by the elite under the guise of nationalization. The resource cannot be produced, but its distribution can be controlled, and this “pseudo-commodity” can be exchanged for the political loyalty of those who strive to retain or to become a part of the ruling elite. The state speaks, access rights to the historical past serve not only as a commodity exchanged on the market of political loyalty, but also as a kind of glue holding the ruling coalition together. Moreover, control over the privatized past is the stability of the dominant coalition, but also allows it to dominate the market for historical ideas.

The hegemony over collective historical ideas - at the level of their production (the academy and the upper school system) and at the level of the infrastructure for their distribution (from the schools to television) - forces society to consume precisely what is bought into the market in the form of certified state knowledge, labeled with the trademarks “historical truth” and “our memory” to give the product a symbolic surplus value. The same thing happens in the capitalist sphere of immaterial production: not only commodities are consumed, but also brand names confer a special identity on their bearers by symbolizing a style of behavior and way of life (indeed, the brand name constitutes the chief value of the commodity). Of course, in the case of historical politics, the goal is not the production of economic value, but the reproduction of political domination. By producing and consuming certified historical ideas, institutions and individuals acquire the corresponding national, cultural, and political identity, which refers back to the brand name – in this case, that of the Russian state, “historical Russia”, demonstrating the historical choice of that identity again and again.

For the rebirth of national consciousness we need to unite the historical eras and return to an understanding of the simple truth that Russia did not begin in 1917, nor even in 1991: we have a single, uninterrupted thousand year history, and relying on this gives us our inner strength and the meaning of our national development.

Any attempt to form a different understanding of history or to suggest different ways of revitalizing national consciousness is considered an internal threat motivated by something other than intellectual interest.

**Rent and the Past**

The effort to establish monopolistic control over access to the historical past and to extract political and administrative dividends from this control can be described as the economic phenomenon of rent - that is, income regularly received from capital, land, and labor. Rent is the income from ownership of one resource or other which is necessary, after all, in order to receive rents. This effort is not only related to maintaining the required level of control, that is, limiting access to various privileges and rents. As Wallerstein and others write, rent - the past's control access (and with it the license to produce historical knowledge) and support among the masses who consume the licensed state product. In his analysis of the political-economic ethos of the bourgeoisie, Immanuel Wallerstein highlights the phenomenon of rent as an opening for the intrusion of political will into the principles that regulate economic activity (in fact, Wallerstein finds in rent a bourgeois aspiration to imprint a traditionally aristocratic economic mode). His broader understanding of the resources that allow the collection of rent provides further justification for applying the concept of the political elite's “rent”. Rent, in other words, “is the income that derives from control of some concrete spatio-temporal reality which cannot be said to have been in some sense the creation of the owner or the result of his own work (even when there has been an effort to make it so). We can recognize the historical past of Russia as such a “spatio-temporal reality” over which control is established to generate rents although it in no way results from the labor of its owner. “Historical Russia”, in the view of the Russian political elite, belongs only to those who are prepared to produce historical knowledge in the framework of official historical politics, that is, to those who recognize the right of the political elite to control production. In other words, “the single, uninterrupted thousand-year history of Russia” (Putin) and “our memory” (Medvedev) belong only to the true patriots of Russia, and since only Russia's political elite issues licenses for such patriotism, it is not difficult to deduce who really owns the trademark. Indeed, many would like the counterfeiting of this brand to be prosecuted under Russian law. Of course, the ownership referred to here is only a claim made by the dominant elite, but to the degree that thisclaim is supported by political power, it is a reality, since a high degree of control over the most powerful institutions for the production of historical ideas and the channels for its dissemination is already established. At the same time, the intensity of historical politics and the attention that the political elite gives to questions of history are growing. However, the elite still considers the current level of control insufficient.

**In this Sense**

The income from ownership of one resource or another does in fact require a certain kind of labor – not to produce the resource, but to manage it. And since the claim of monopolistic control is always accompanied by the threat of losing it – and the maintenance of such a threat – the labor of efforts to maintain control takes on an increasingly intensive character. The logic of maintaining control is suicidal: it is self-defeating; but, on the other hand, the state, the monopoly on access to economic resources coincides with the economic phenomenon of rent - that is, income regularly received from capital, land, and labor. Rent is the income from ownership of one resource or other which is necessary, after all, in order to receive rents. This effort is not only related to maintaining the required level of control, that is, limiting access to various privileges and rents. As Wallerstein and others write, rent - the past's control access (and with it the license to produce historical knowledge) and support among the masses who consume the licensed state product. In his analysis of the political-economic ethos of the bourgeoisie, Immanuel Wallerstein highlights the phenomenon of rent as

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has been derived, in the main, from renewable natural resources, led by the sun itself. Usable energy only accumulated over relatively short spans of time. The situation changed radically at the beginning of the nineteenth century:

From around 1800, however, these organic supplies were steadily replaced with highly concentrated stores of buried solar energy, the deposits of coal laid down 150 to 350 million years ago, when peat bog forests and marine organisms accumulated the necessary carbon-containing substances, which, after millions of years under pressure and temperature, turned into coal. The transformation of the natural environment from the era of two hundred years ago—this one a political-economic transition, the other a geological transition—was linked to the rise of new technologies for work with the past, both in the form of inherited natural resources from prehistoric times and in the form of a historical legacy unexpectedly acquired by descendants in search of a rational justification of their identity and the boundaries of their community.

In this new historical epoch, post-Soviet Russia—like many other Eastern European states that have had to rebuff their political identity while also dealing with an incomplete process of modernization during the formation of the nation—is in fact reproducing a situation from the age of Romanticism. The past must again supply answers to the questions posed by the present. The problem is that this present is different, and the questions addressed to the past in the epoch of the nation’s birth, which are now resounding again in the Russian media, seem more and more anachronistic. Despite the universalparing phrases such as “spiritual braces”, “the national will”, and “our single, uninterrupted thousand year history” cannot conceal the private interests of the Russian ruling elite who stand behind them, compensating for the emptiness of quickly invented traditions with such rhetorical distillations, and the political weight of those who have taken on the responsibility of preserving and protecting “our memory”.

There is another difference that separates the current situation from the era of two hundred years ago—one a political-economic transition of the post-modern and the other a geological transition. This difference is the proportion of the inheritance belonging to specific groups’ descendants.

The historical past belongs to everyone. Even the elite that has taken on the role of its management affirms this fact in its rhetoric. However, verbal constructions such as “our past”, “our memory”, and “our legacy”, which nuance the official discourse of historical politics, have not an inclusive but an exclusive character—something for a specific group—the members of the elite and those who serve them, feeding themselves on the common inheritance and transforming it into the private property of the ruling elite. The latter has to privatize the common past in the interests of the ruling elite in order to capitalize that work in the interests of a specific group.

In his book Carbon Democracy, Timothy Mitchell describes the political metaphors of democratization and counter-democratization of the nineteenth through twenty-first centuries, revealing the connection between these processes and the characteristics of the dominant natural resources in the economic systems of each period. The technology of extracting coal and the infrastructure for transporting it made the world economy dependent on the labor power engaged in these fields, and this forced capital to make concessions to workers. The transition to new sources of energy gave big capital an opportunity for revenge, since the extraction and transportation of oil and gas required fewer people and made the infrastructure of fuel extraction and transportation more flexible and less dependent on the people working in those fields. While the technological leap forward in the twentieth century depended on the development of technologies for turning the past, concentrated in natural resources, into energy, the political order based on those technologies depends on the ability to control access to the dominant resource of the given moment.

However, while the technological and economic modernization of the nineteenth century was due to the exploitation of an energy source accumulated over millions of years, led to a transformation of the political order, we must also note that this transformation took place simultaneously with a revolutionary change in the attitudes to the historical past. The transition to coal, concentrated in the depths of the earth, coincided with the age of Romanticism and its unprecedented interest in the historical past, in which romanticism interpreted the world not for the first time but always anachronistically as a new source of energy, the enormous concentration of which was connected with the extended period of its accumulation, coinciding with the emergence of the concept of “the historical and cultural heritage”—that is, the concentration of the past in monuments of material and non-material culture.

In both cases, the driving force was the possibility of extracting energy from these concentrated sources. Coal became an energy source as a result of new technologies for extracting deep coal deposits and the invention of the steam engine, and the past thanks to the new technologies for working with the past in the formation of nations. Thus the process of modernization, including nation-building, was linked to the invention of technologies for working with the past, both in the form of inherited natural resources from prehistoric times and in the form of a historical legacy unexpectedly acquired by descendants in search of a rational justification of their identity and the boundaries of their community.

References


2 Simon Kuperovskiy has written on the structural isomorphism between the different spheres of a state that is organized like a corporation for the extraction of natural resources: “The resource hype that dominates the present state is replete, that is, in any given level it reproduces its basic structural characteristics. Each fragment of the state structure, including people, is a resource for another fragment. And the state gives each of these fragments the ‘task’ of being a resource. In other words, they must be useful from the perspective of achieving the great goal of the state, which can be conceptualized even at the level of an individual person.” S. Kuperovskiy, Negrivoe gorizonto / Resource state (Moscow: Regnum, 2007), 14.


4 These are primarily presidential addresses to the Federal Assembly and
other speeches directly related to the themes of patriotic education, nation building, and the memory of the war in which historical problems are organized in accordance with the discourse of modernization.

5 “Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor.” — G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, Metaphors We Live By (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).


7 See http://suhannia.ru/2012/09/10/vior_i_klonzhi_i_klokiadj.

8 Ibid.


10 The term “spiritual braces” (dikhtovye skelty) has become a commonplace in Russian political rhetoric over the past several years. “Braces” in this usage presents the image of the structural elements that hold together the beams of a large building such as a church, for example. See Y. V. Putin, “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly”, December 12, 2012, http://pda.kremlin.ru/news/7168.

11 This thesis was embodied in the idea of the “culture industry” as early as 1947 by Adorno and Horkheimer in their book Dialectic of Enlightenment. See the chapter “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” in L ’immatériel: Connaissance, valeur et capital [The immaterial: Knowledge, Value and Capital] (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), 41.

12 The correction of the continuity of Russian statehood was most clearly developed in the process of preparations for the 2012 celebration of the 1150th anniversary of Russian statehood. See, for example, “Zasedanie po voprosu podgotovki k prazdnovaniiu 1150-letiia narodnoi i stolitsnoi rasskaznoi” [Meeting on the issue of preparing for the 1150th anniversary of Russian statehood], http://state.kremlin.ru/face/12075.


14 The examples are taken from ten selected publications: the nationally distributed news magazines Kommersant Dengi and Kommersant-Weekly; and the regional newspapers Delovaya gazeta, Komsomol’skaia gazeta, and Vedomosti; and the regional newspapers Delovaya gazeta, Komsomol’skaia gazeta, and Vedomosti; and the regional newspapers Delovaya gazeta, Komsomol’skaia gazeta, and Vedomosti; and the regional newspapers Delovaya gazeta, Komsomol’skaia gazeta, and Vedomosti.4


18 Ibid.

19 Between 2009 and 2012, there was a special state institution in Russia that tried to control work with the historical past, “The Commission for Countering Attempts to Fake History and Damage the Prestige of Russia”. D. Medvedev, “O Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine, interlokiointu inti o naishi pamiat”.

20 Ibid.

21 “The term ‘security’ simply became a bugbear used by the bureaucracy in Russian media, and the question of particular importance or significance1 — in the Russian press over the past twenty years: this is evident in its frequency and in the range of contexts in which it is used.”

22 “The world ‘market’ is at the core of the process of modernization in Russia, especially in regard to the economic aspects of modernization. This article analyzes the usage of the word ‘market’ (rynek in Russian) in the metropolitan and provincial press in the Soviet Union and in post-Soviet Russia from 1990 to 2010. “Market” has been a key word — in the dictionary sense of a word, expression, or concept of particular importance or significance — in the Russian press over the past twenty years: this is evident in its frequency and in the range of contexts in which it is used.”

23 In this article, I analyze the relationship of language and society by studying the usage of the word “market” (rynek) in the late Soviet and post-Soviet Russian press since 1990. I examine how the word takes on new meanings, and how its changing usage is related to the changing social and political roles of print media in a modernizing environment. The material studied consists of newspaper and magazine text collected by a search of the Integral database. The examples are taken from ten selected publications: the nationally distributed newspapers Izvestia, Sputnik, Kommersant, and Kommersant Deng; the nationally distributed newspapers Nezavisimaia gazeta, Rossiiskaya gazeta, and Vedomosti; and the regional newspapers Delovaya, Delovaya gazeta, Komsomol’skaia gazeta, and Vedomosti. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the beginning of Russia’s transition to a new economic order, a new lexicon has come into use. The term “market” has become a central one in the discussion of economics and business. The media have framed the events and processes of Russia’s post-communist transformation, including its economic transformation. Efremtsev, Mal’ta, and Gastro point out that the world media have produced a linear narrative of Russia’s transition from “communist dictatorship” to a “free market and democracy”. In Russian media, however, the narrative is not as straightforward as in the materials researched by Efremtsev et al., and my aim in the present study is to show how “market”, as an element of the press vocabulary, has gained new meanings and become an active keyword.

THE CONCEPT OF MARKET

in Russian media, and the question of modernization

by Katja Lehtisaari

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In this article, I analyze the relationship of language and society by studying the usage of the word “market” (rynek) in the late Soviet and post-Soviet Russian press since 1990. I examine how the word takes on new meanings, and how its changing usage is related to the changing social and political roles of print media in a modernizing environment. The material studied consists of newspaper and magazine text collected by a search of the Integral database. The examples are taken from ten selected publications: the nationally distributed newspapers Izvestia, Sputnik, Kommersant, and Kommersant Deng; the nationally distributed newspapers Nezavisimaia gazeta, Rossiiskaya gazeta, and Vedomosti; and the regional newspapers Delovaya, Delovaya gazeta, Komsomol’skaia gazeta, and Vedomosti. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the beginning of Russia’s transition to a new economic order, a new lexicon has come into use. The term “market” has become a central one in the discussion of economics and business.

A major change has occurred in media market structures in post-Soviet Russia. The Russian media have gone from the centralized Soviet system to a more pluralistic one: in 1990, there were 43 national

THE TERM ‘MARKET’ HAS BECOME A CENTRAL ONE IN THE DISCUSSION OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS.”
The usage and meaning of the word “market”

The present article focuses on the following questions:

- a. How has the quantity of publications in the Russian press concerning the word “market” changed from 1990 to 2012?
- b. How was the word “market” used in the Russian press from 1990 to 2010, and what kinds of institutional structures does that usage reflect?
- c. How has the term of the word “market” reflect the institutional change in the Russian press?


THE FINAL SELECTION included the following media:

- Nationally distributed magazines: Vokrug sveta, Ogonok, Kommersant Weekly (only in 1999), Kommersant Dengi (2000, 2010)
- Regional newspapers: Delovoi Peterburg (St. Petersburg, 2000 and 2010), Nizhegorodskie novosti (Nizhny Novgorod, 2000 and 2010), Chelabinskii rabochii (Chelyabinsk, 2000 and 2010)

These publications were chosen because most of them (Vokrug sveta, Ogonok, Kommersant Weekly, Nezavisimaya gazeta, Rossiiskaya gazeta) published at least some stories containing “market” (raskol) in 1990. Kommersant Weekly has been renamed after 1993, and Kommersant Dengi after 2006. For the years 2000 and 2010, I added a business newspaper (Vedomosti, founded in 1993) and three regional newspapers (Delovoi Peterburg, Nizhegorodskie novosti and Chelabinskii rabochii) to the selection for the years 2000 and 2010. In addition to comparisons between national and regional perspectives (in 2000 and 2010), the selection permits comparisons of the interest media (Vokrug sveta, Ogonok, Nezavisimaya gazeta, Rossiiskaya gazeta, Nizhegorodskie novosti, and Chelabinskii rabochii) and business media (Kommersant Weekly, Kommersant Dengi, Vedomosti, and Delovoi Peterburg).


The frequency of the word “market” (raskol) in the Russian press increased dramatically between 1990 and 2012. The selection of metropolitan and regional or local media in the Internet data base contains only about 300 articles dated 1990 and containing the word “market,” but nearly half a million dated 2012 with that word. However, this change can be explained in part by the fact that the number of sources available in the Internet database has grown over the years. The majority of the documents in the Internet database are from the 2000s. Nonetheless, we can observe a huge increase in the use of the word. In 1990, Russia was still part of the Soviet Union, and although the market economy model was a subject of debate, the discussion was limited to some metropolitan publications or only those specialized in economic issues. Later, “market” became a topic for all kinds of general-interest, political, and business-oriented media. A crucial point is that the frequency of the word “market” (raskol) in the metropolitan print media seems to have undergone only modest changes after an initial ten-year period of growth, while in the provincial media its frequency continues to grow sharply until 2012. The two curves start to diverge in 1995-1996. Until 1995, almost all occurrences were in nationally distributed publications. After that, the proportion of other publications increased sharply. In 1996, 18,532 articles out of 27,971 that contained “market” were published in metropolitan print media. In 2012, only 57,048 out of 489,007 articles containing “market” were published in the metropolitan press. THERE WAS A DROP in the overall frequency after 2001, and again after 2008. Could this have something to do with changing economic conditions in Russia? That might be at least a partial explanation. In the late 1990s, the Russian economy was growing and the business environment was more favorable for companies than in the reform years of the early 1990s. The ruble devaluation of 1998 briefly halted growth, but the economy recovered quickly and continued to grow. In 2001-2002, the Russian GDP growth rate decreased.

“The LANGUAGE USED IN THE PRESS MAY HAVE A GREAT IMPACT ON THE FORMATION OF SOCIETY.”
after growing 10.0 percent a year earlier, the GDP grew by only 5.1 percent in 2009, which caused the GDP to decrease by 7.8 percent in 2009 from the previous year’s figure, and influenced media and consumer behavior. Furthermore, in autumn of 2008, Russia was hit by a financial crisis, which caused the GDP to decline by 10.7 percent. Retail sales and advertising revenues decreased while production and distribution costs increased. As a result, the media companies cut personnel and salaries and closed down media outlets. The search results for later years may therefore be affected by the reduced number of publications. Another possible explanation is that “market” was more frequent in the press lexicon just before the financial crisis, when the economy was more heated. A similar correlation could also explain the 2001 frequency drop.

**Figure 1: Frequency of different senses of “market” in the 1990 sample**

- 25: A system of relations that is based on free sales of goods: “the free market”;
- 17: “market economy”;
- 12: “transition from a planned economy to a market based system”;
- 2: An area or arena in which commercial dealings are conducted; the state of trade at a particular time or in a particular context: “the labor market”;
- 1: “the Russian market”;
- 1: “the domestic/international market”; “a free market”; “to form a common market”; “the black market”; “the bottom has fallen out of the market”;
- 2: Demand for a particular commodity or service: “there is a market for ornamental daggers”; “the commodities market”;
- 1: “the wholesale market”; “the raw materials market”; “the labor market”.

The first definition is the most traditional one: a “market” as a physical place for the exchange of goods. The traditional Russian usage and in the press idioms. The principal definitions include the following:

1. A regular gathering of people for purchases and sales of livestock and commodities, an open space or a covered building where vendors convene to sell their goods: “to buy groceries at market”.

2. A system of relations that is based on free sales of goods: “the free market”; “market economy”; “transition from a planned economy to a market based system”.

3. An area or arena in which commercial dealings are conducted; the state of trade at a particular time or in a particular context: “the labor market”; “the Russian market”; “the domestic/international market”; “a free market”; “to form a common market”; “the black market”; “the bottom has fallen out of the market”.

4. Demand for a particular commodity or service: “there is a market for ornamental daggers”; “the commodities market”; “the wholesale market”; “the raw materials market”; “the labor market”.

The second definition refers to the system of relations in society based on the free exchange of goods. Typically, this usage occurs in discussions of the market economy as compared with some kind of other economic system, such as the planned economy. The third definition refers to a “market” as a sphere of activity. This sense is used in the Russian press in, for example, texts on the domestic market, the international market, the Russian market, or the black market. The fourth definition refers to markets for certain commodities or services, such as the stock market, the financial market, or the market for clothes. In this usage, “market” usually occurs with an attribute.

These four senses of the word “market” (рынок) form the basis for the following analysis of the word’s usage in the late Soviet and post-Soviet Russian press.

**The crucial year 1990: discussing Soviet markets**

In the year 1990, there were discussions in the press on different economic systems, including the market economy. All the articles found with our search phrase appeared in nationally distributed publications. In the sample, the word “market” was most often used to denote a sphere of activity.

Judging by the stories in the sample, many things were new to Soviet society in 1990: foreign companies entered the Soviet Union, including restaurants such as McDonald’s and Pizza Hut, and including some publishers. There were stories on foreign investment in the Soviet Union, giving their contact information in case Soviet entrepreneurs wished to contact them. A currency exchange market was opened, and the papers reported that most currency exchange was done on the black market.

**The pluralism in decision making introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1980s was visible in the press articles on Communist Party meetings, the transcripts of speeches published in Rossiiskaia gazeta reflected diverse opinions on economic reforms and the market economy. The discussion in Rossiiskaia gazeta was mostly based on politicians’ speeches, such as those given at the Congress of People’s Deputies of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. In 1990, Boris Yeltsin was elected Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR. The sample includes his speech to Russians living abroad, in which he called for the continued help of emigrants in the process of obtaining sovereignty for the RSFSR.**

1. “The most valuable achievements of human civilization, such as the market, the rule of law, democracy, mechanisms of social partnership, pluralism – in a word, all that forms the basis for the progress of contemporary developed countries, can be created in Russia. Here they are filled with original substance and will be enriched with new, bright colors. For us it is especially important that the first steps of the new parliament of Russia and its government have the support of many Russians residing abroad, their willingness to help.”

**IN THIS SPEECH, Yeltsin refers to the market as one of the most valuable achievements of civilization. For Rossiiskaia gazeta in 1990, “market” seems to have been a subject of political debate. Kommersant-Weekly on the other hand, in which a large proportion of the examples collected for 1990 were published, shows a different pattern. In this business-oriented weekly, the discourse referred mostly to the market as a sphere of activity and to markets for specific goods or services. Since the publication was oriented towards business-minded people and entrepreneurs, there was no debate as to whether the market economy was actually needed: the shift from the planned economy towards the market economy appears to have been taken for granted. The following example is characteristic of how Kommersant-weekly wrote about “the market” in the sense of an economic system: “In the country today, a situation has emerged in which the economy is in practice no longer under planned control, but the market as a new regulator has not yet formed.”**

The ambivalent situation described in that example was evident in Kommersant-weekly’s pages in 1990. While the country still had a planned economy system, the publication had taken up the position of discussing “the Soviet market” (советский рынок) and the different players in it, including foreign companies and businessmen. The paper discussed the opportunities for trade and business in the Soviet market. Issues included the possibility of establishing a free currency market in the country (March 26, 1990) and views on the development of the fast food market (September 23, 1990). A short time later, the paper offered advice on how to act in a market economy and what such a system means in practical terms.

**Ten years later, in 2000: market as fact**

In just ten years, the state structure and the media had changed greatly. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia had embraced the market economy, and in 2000, the economy was growing again after the slowdown of 1998–1999. As predicted, there were no more debates on planned versus market economy in the sample of the Russian press in 2000; the market had become “naturalized” and the keyword “market” was frequently used in public discussion in the domain of economics.

In 2000, the new business daily Vedomosti closely followed the stock, currency, and financial markets as well as major industries and the international economy. The magazine Kommersant Dengi, while also business-oriented, concentrated on specific market sectors: the housing market, the oil market, the market for luxury brands, and so on. It also published stories on business-related crime. Rossiiskaia gazeta meanwhile wrote...
about domestic industries, export industries, and various sec-
tors of the economy, from the currency market to the oil mar-
et. A curious coincidence was that, in the sample, two out of
ten stories in Rossiiskata gazeta were on the weapons industry.
Although it is just a coincidental, it may reflect the weight of
the weapons industry in the country, which is a major empha-
sis on economic policy and the intersection of politics and
the economy, mostly on major industries such as the energy
market.

The Sample Stories from Ogonok concentrated on historical
topics, especially on the Soviet Union. There was also an emphasis
on travel stories and other international issues. In Volgograd,
no stories containing “market” were found in 2000.

In the regional press, Delovoi Peterburg published many
market analyses, especially of the currency, financial and stock
markets. Local or regional companies were less visible than
had been expected. Nizhegorodskie novosti in particular kept an eye
on the regional and local industrial sectors, including the food in-
dustry, and also referred to consumer markets. Chelabinskii rabo-
chii differs from the two other regional media in this sample in its
orientation towards the connection between the local economy
and the national and global economies. One of the most typical
forms for stories in this category was that of an interview with
an expert or a politician.

After times of change, in 2010: focus on financial and stock markets

In 2010, the change from 1990 is clear. First, there is a great qua-
vitative change: in 1990, the number of articles containing the
word “market” - just three hundred - was tiny compared with
half a million in 2010. Furthermore, almost all the articles found
for 1990 were in nationwide publications, but most of the occur-
dences dated 2010 were in regional and local media.

Second, we can observe a qualitative change; a quality that helps to distinguish the post-Soviet me-
dia and regional and local publications. In magazines, original-
ity and playful expressions may be part of the house style, while
in the regional and local press, there is a need to invent new ex-
pressions in order to describe new realities. In other words, the
appearance of new expressions and a widening scope of usage
reflect the derivative potential of the keyword.

“Market” is more frequently used, and local companies and market
places. This marks a certain difference between the publications’
profiles.

In 1990, local companies and development work
with nationwide distribution, most of the stories discuss “mar-
ket” in the sense of a sphere of activity or the market for some-
thing.

(2) With state financing, a limited amount of development work
in the nuclear energy, space, and aviation industries could
be taken to the market in the next 15 years. (“Sphere of activity.”)

(3) Probably, the market has not yet realized that
the company’s profits will decline this year since in 2009 it sold oil from reserves made
in 2008. (“Sphere of activity.”)

(4) Now he is responsible for banking and insur-
ance systems and the stock market. (“Market for something.”)

(5) Krutikhin thinks that the world natural gas market will gain, provided that it is possible
to keep the prices of gas and oil from being sold in the world.

(6) The shadow taxi market is many times
greater than the legal one. (“Market for something.”)

The qualitative change in the press vocabulary has been re-
markable. In particular, the expression "market" as an economic system, but in 2010, there were few stories on this
topic. The discourse in the Russian press has shifted from discus-
sions of “the Soviet market” and “the black market” to the news
of changes in stock and financial markets and the activities of
players in the market. “Market” in the sense of “a place in cities
and towns for the outdoor sale of goods and for gatherings” now
plays a minor role in the Russian press.

The fast frequency growth and the establishment of the word
“market” indicate how important the concept has become to
Russian discussions of economics and business. The press is an
inseparable part of the economy, publishing reports and down-
as well as new openings and competition. The quantitative analysis
of the word’s frequency shows some important points of change
in society. The number of occurrences of “market” in the Rus-
sian press peaked before the financial crisis of 2008–2009; this
can reflect the heated economic situation and high economic
growth. In 2010, when the Russian economy stagnated, there
was a decline in the number of articles using “market.” At
the same time, the qualitative analysis indicates the shift towards
the international markets for goods and finance – that is, Russia’s in-
volvement in the world economy.

The differences between the roles of publica-
tions with national and regional distribution, and
between newspapers and magazines, are easily observable in the sample of articles containing the
word “market.” National magazines and regional newspapers contained the most original expressions: “shadow taxi market” (Ogonok, April 12, 2010), “erythroploi-
etzin market” (Ogonok, February 14, 2010), “mar-
ket for fighting nicotine addiction” (Ogonok, January 18, 2010), “clandestine key market” (“podpet’i my ryuk faml’che”; Nizhegorodskie no-
voi, April 1, 2009). National newspapers on the
other hand limited themselves for the most part to conventional expressions: “oil market” (Ros-
sistskai gazeta, January 11, 2010), “banking market” (Vedomosti, January 11, 2010), “equity mar-
ket” (Vedomosti, January 12, 2010), “advertising market” (Ve-
domosti, January 12, 2010). The national newspapers seem to have a more limited vision of what the concept of “market” means to the maga-
zines and regional and local publications. In magazines, original-
ity and playful expressions may be part of the house style, while
in the regional and local press, there is a need to invent new ex-
pressions in order to describe new realities. In other words, the
appearance of new expressions and a widening scope of usage
reflect the derivative potential of the keyword.

Conclusions

The frequency of the word “market” (rynoch) in the Russian press has dramatically increased from 1990 to 2010. In the early 1990s, the word belonged mainly to the vocabulary of national publica-
tions, especially those with an emphasis on financial and busi-
ness issues. Since then, its use by the regional and local press has grown rapidly, and “market” has become a concept discussed in all kinds of national, regional, and local media.

The qualitative change in the press vocabulary has been re-
markable. In particular, the expression “market” as an economic system, but in 2010, there were few stories on this
topic. The discourse in the Russian press has shifted from discus-
sions of “the Soviet market” and “the black market” to the news
of changes in stock and financial markets and the activities of
players in the market. “Market” in the sense of “a place in cities
and towns for the outdoor sale of goods and for gatherings” now
plays a minor role in the Russian press.

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was a decline in the number of articles using “market.” At
the same time, the qualitative analysis indicates the shift towards
the international markets for goods and finance – that is, Russia’s in-
volvement in the world economy. Many of the stories in the sample
are about the Chinese, American or in-
ternational markets, reflecting Russia’s participation in the world markets for goods and finance.

Examining the Usage of a Single Word

allows us to observe tendencies in the development of press language and dif-
fences between publications in different categories. “Market” is not one concept, but many, reflect-
ing the ability of a single word to occupy multiple roles in dis-
course. It proves useful in differentiating the profiles of national and regional media, and those of general interest and business media. However, it is too weak a marker to differentiate between busi-
ness media that seem to have relatively similar orientation in the sample stories (that is, in this study, between Vedomosti, Delovoi Peterburg, and Kommersant Weekly/Kommersant Dengi). Looking at more specific expressions, such as “funding market” or “real estate market” would help to reveal the differences between them. However, the difference between national and regional publications and between newspapers and magazines can be ob-
served in the use of the keyword “market.”

The differentiation of roles among print media is a sign of modernization in the Russian press. More than ever before, the press consists of publications focused on particular audiences and that serve the different needs of those audi-
cences. The change is easy to observe in Rossiiskaiia gazeta, for example. In 1990, the paper referred to politicians’ speeches and participated in debates on economic reforms, but in 2010, “mar-
ket” had become a “naturalized,” everyday concept in the press and was mainly used in business and economic news.

The study shows the rich usage and frequency, changing with the economic situation, of the word “market” in the Russian media. “Market” is connected with many positive aspects of mod-
erization, including economic growth and diversification, but also with its side effects such as the “black market.” These phe-
nomena reflect the ability of the word rynok to form the center of a “phraselogical cluster,” to cite Anna Wierzbicka’s descrip-
tion of keywords that occur frequently in proverb-like, idiom-like, or book titles, and so on. “Market” is not one concept, but many, reflect-
ing the modernization and changing economic relationships of Russian society.

References

try/325606/redirectedFrom/KeywordSearch, accessed July 28, 2014, and
Raymond Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, revised
language and in Russian media, see e.g. Shimelev, “Krizis” (“Crisis”) as the
Keyword of the Present Moment,” and Anna Wierzbicka, Understanding
Cultures through Their Key Words: English, Russian, Polish, German, and
Japanese (Cary, N.C.: Oxford University Press, 1997). Keywords can also
be seen in the main works that form the conceptual tools of discourse in a
selected research area, as in David Morgan, ed., Key Words in Religion,


Ibid., 108.

See Ekecrantz et al., “Media and Modernities”, 102.

Kaarel Nordenstreng and Jukka Pietiläinen, “Media as a Mirror of Change”, in Witnessing Change in Contemporary Russia, ed. Tomi Huttunen and Mikko Ylikangas (Helsinki: Kikimora, 2010), 141.


See e.g. the overview by Kjaer and Slatta, “Mediating Business”, 18.


The search phrase рыноч!т (рынок) was used to find articles containing one or more instances of the word for “market” in its root form, which is the nominative and accusative singular.

For a discussion, see Wierzbička, Understanding Cultures through Their Key Words, 12.

For the qualitative analysis, I chose every fifth occurrence in chronological order (i.e., the first, sixth, eleventh, etc.) in the selected publications, up to a maximum of three stories per day and ten stories per medium per year (but up to a maximum of 29 stories per medium in 1990, since the total sample was relatively small). This yields 56 to 81 examples in each selected year, and 217 examples in all for the qualitative analysis. All the material was accessible through the Integrum database, and the selection of newspapers and magazines was based on the results of the initial quantitative analysis described above. The structural changes in Russian media affected the selection of examples: some of the publications in the selection of 1990 are no longer published, and some have undergone changes of name or ownership.


According to a search of the Integrum database.

See Nordenstreng and Pietiläinen, “Media as a Mirror of Change”, 143-144.


“Do samogo dna” [To the very bottom], Novosti SMI 13 (2010), 20–21.


This may be due to the fact that the Integrum database contains little of the local and regional press of that time.

Rossiiskaia gazeta, December 26, 1990


We must bear in mind, however, that the number of sources available in Integrum was smaller for 1990 than for 2010.


Vedomosti, January 12, 2010.


Ogonek, April 12, 2010.

See Shmeleva, “Krizis (Crisis) as the Key Word of the Present Moment”, 63.

Wierzbička, Understanding Cultures through Their Key Words, 16.