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From Patriotic Education to Militarist Indoctrination—Disciplinary Power and Silent Resistance in Russia after the Onset of the War against Ukraine

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ABSTRACT

Since the beginning of Russia's war against Ukraine, various militaristic initiatives have been implemented in Russian schools. This article examines how teachers, pupils, and parents interpret state-driven patriotism amidst the war. Analyzing social media posts from the labor union Alliance of Teachers, employing a Foucauldian understanding of power and resistance, the article highlights that despite the propaganda's content faltering in reception, informal practices and campaigns surrounding official patriotism serve as a conduit through which the state legitimizes the escalating oppression. The consequent societal atomization adds an element of unpredictability to Russia's prospects.

Introduction

> Wars are not won by generals, but by schoolteachers and parish priests. —President of Russia (2023)

Schools have always functioned as mirrors of societies. For more than two decades, Russian patriotic education has shaped new generations by intertwining loyalty to the Kremlin with the notion of patriotism (Kratochvíl and Shakhanova 2021). Since February 24, 2022, patriotic education has extensively increased its volume with various initiatives, the militaristic and nationalist content of which is used to seek support and justification for the prolonged 'special military operation.'

International media speculate anxiously about the potential radicalization of youth through patriotic programs. However, pre-war studies on the topic do not present strong evidence to support these concerns. The limited success of the state's patriotic efforts can be attributed to perceptions of patriotism, the content of patriotic education, and its implementation. Most of these factors are likely to remain unchanged, despite the expanded scope since the onset of the war.

In terms of perceptions, first, Russians differentiate strongly between public and personal patriotism (Goode 2016; Mitikka and Zavadskaya 2021), and the generational shift from the Soviet era has led to varied interpretations of patriotism (Lassila 2021; Le Huérou 2015). Second, the parents of today's students, representing the 'in-between' generation of the 1990s, often hold critical attitudes toward the militaristic elements of state-led patriotism (Lassila and Sanina 2022). Third, the younger generation displays lower levels of patriotism compared to older cohorts; despite significant investments in patriotic programs during Vladimir Putin's tenure, the overall level of patriotism has not shown a substantial increase, although Russian youth's patriotism does tend to be more intense and militant than that of their global peers (Alexeev and Pyle 2022).

Moreover, in terms of the content, the fundamental problems have persisted, despite the increasingly nationalist and threatening rhetoric. Since the inception of patriotic programs in 2011, education has largely consisted of 'empty things' bolstered by emotional phrases, without real connection to the actual processes of fostering patriotism (Sanina 2017, 30–31). The same issues are evident today: concepts and meanings remain poorly explained and the methodological materials echo Soviet-era phrases that resonate poorly with today's youth.

Finally, in terms of implementation, state patriotic programs lack targets, forethought, and transparency. Unclear policies show no indication of how results could be achieved, evaluated, managed, or how the listed normative acts are related to programs (Bækken 2021, Sanina 2017, 37–38). The reason may lie in the fact that the programs lack formal government status, which would require clearly defined stages and timelines for implementation, cross-regional coordination, and explicitly stated expected outcomes. Instead, they hold a 'special government status.' Year after year, the indicators and numbers fail to align, with regional programs being even less measurable (Sanina 2015, 51–52). This vague official framework, coupled with substantial budget funding, I argue, facilitates the growth of 'patriotic business,' which sometimes leads to corruption scandals (see e.g., Moscow Times 2024) and enables the unofficial exercise of power. In this context, patriotic education is guided more by abstract norms and ideals of its outward appearance rather than by well-defined programs.

The apparent ineffectiveness of patriotic education prompts an exploration into why a significant portion of the population seems to support the war and embrace militarization. While pre-

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war studies on Russian patriotism predominantly focused on individual opinions, the state's use of power through patriotic education and its resultant 'side effects' have remained understudied. Relevant to the current context is J. Paul Goode's (2016) observation on how state-led patriotism in Russia has led to 'show-patriotism' – public displays of loyalty, albeit inauthentic and ritualistic. In contrast, privately held notions of patriotism are more varied and personal. Despite this, the prevalence of public displays creates a perception among many that, while they keep themselves unaffected by official patriotism, the majority around them seem genuinely devoted patriots. Goode likens this phenomenon, to some extent, to Timur Kuran's (1997) concept of *preference falsification*, where individuals conceal their true beliefs and publicly espouse views they do not genuinely hold due to fear of repression (57). However, since the private side of this patriotic dichotomy is entirely apolitical and lacks an alternative political project for mobilization, Goode uses the term *preference compartmentalization*. I chose to use the original idea, as the intensifying authoritarian environment in Russia may eventually bring political dimensions within the patriotic framework. Kuran's theory, a foundational aspect of this article, will be explored further in the subsequent theory section.

Throughout Russia's war against Ukraine, politicized patriotic education has permeated the entire Russian education system and is now obligatory for all – a substantial shift from the pre-war era. Studies post–February 24, 2022 have delved into the revised content of patriotic education (Hurkivska 2023), altered textbooks (Baumann 2023), and 're-education' initiatives and 'russification' in the occupied Donetsk and Luhansk regions (Barbieri 2023; Honchar 2022). Håvard Bækken (2023) contends that Russian military-patriotic clubs 'merged the wars' in their communications during the first three months following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. While state-run media use various rhetorical strategies for legitimization, patriotic youth organizations depict the conflict solely as a continuation of the Great Patriotic War. This rhetorical strategy relies on symbolism, repetition, and emotional appeals without clarifying the relevance of the Great Patriotic War to the current context, thereby maintaining the perceived 'emptiness' in pre-war studies. However, this rhetorical framework is intended to shape how 'millions of Russian minors will remember the ongoing war in the future' (18).

The reception of 'post-war patriotism' in Russia warrants further investigation to comprehend the nature of patriotic education and the mind-set of the next generation. However, obtaining reliable data remains challenging. Heightened oppression fosters silence, trustworthy polls are scarce, and critical sociological studies have become rare due to political control over universities.

This article investigates the interpretation and responses of teachers, students, and parents to the prevailing state patriotism in Russian schools since February 24, 2022. The analysis centers on paradigm shifts, educational practices, the exercise of power, and ways of resistance. I argue that, although the content of patriotic education falters at the level of reception, informal campaigns and implementation practices function as mechanisms for exerting power, thus having a more profound impact on educational outcomes than previously recognized. The resulting silence and ritualized support for the Kremlin can be interpreted as a triumph of state patriotism.

The article is structured as follows: it begins with an overview of official patriotic initiatives, followed by sections on research methodology, theoretical framework, and research materials. The analysis is divided into four parts: informal campaigns, implementation and use of power, reception, and resistance. The discussion then contextualizes the findings, and the article concludes with summary.

Wartime Patriotic Initiatives

In 2022, nearly 40 billion rubles were allocated to the patriotic budget for the implementation of new initiatives (Moscow Times 2022). Monday mornings in Russian schools now commence with a mandatory flag-raising ceremony and the singing of the national anthem, following the standard approved by the Minister of Education, Sergei Kravtsov, on June 9, 2022 (Fontanka 2022). After the flag-raising, all grades, ranging from first to eleventh, engage in a mandatory lesson termed 'Important Conversation' (Razgovory o vazhnom, n.d.-a). These sessions extensively cover state ideology, spanning from traditional family values to portraying Russia as a besieged fortress, all intricately tied to legitimizing the ongoing 'special military operation.' Furthermore, the subject of history has been expanded: history instruction now begins as early as the first grade, and high schools have introduced a mandatory history course for all students. A new history textbook characterizes the 'special military operation' as a pivotal moment in Russian history, highlighting the government's role as the guardian of an 'eternal Russian civilization' (Baumann 2023). As the sole approved textbook, coupled with a one-sided media environment and the absence of critical voices, it further narrows the future understanding of history (Mikkonen 2023). As if this were not enough, the Duma plans to rewrite textbooks across all subjects, asserting that 'patriotism should not be the subject of individual lessons but rather the theme of the entire education system' (Chentemirov 2022).

In addition to the written content, patriotic education takes on more physical and visible forms. In 2023, Soviet-style military training lessons were reintroduced into the curriculum, allocating 160 hours for the tenth and eleventh grades, equivalent to approximately four teaching hours per week (Bashlykova 2022). The reintroduction of standardized school uniforms in 2024, for the first time since the collapse of the USSR, reinforces societal norms, including those related to appearance (Shirokova 2023). In addition to the existing state-sponsored youth patriotic organizations and agencies, on May 19, 2022, marking the 100th anniversary of the Pioneers, a legislative initiative on a new youth movement, 'Big Change,' was introduced in the Duma (Novaya Gazeta 2022). The name was later revised to the 'Movement of the Firsts.' Led by the president of Russia, the movement aims to ready children for societal life, inculcate traditional values, and foster love for the Fatherland, with plans to reach all 18 million Russian children and youth. The implementation of all the above-mentioned initiatives is supported by 'advisors to the director for education and interaction with children's public associations,'

operating in all 40,000 schools as of 2023 (Vasil′eva 2023). The concept of advisors, reminiscent of the youth counselors in Soviet schools, aims to provide someone to discuss politics and hold rallies with students and attract them to patriotic youth organizations (Prodlenka 2022).

Although these initiatives in themselves seem extensive, they are only official and surface, openly declared and discussed within certain limits. Concurrently, numerous informal militaristic campaigns exist in schools, supporting the official objectives. The combination of these formal and informal actions shapes the framework for a new ideological indoctrination, with its implementation accelerated by oppressive practices.

Research Material and Method

For this research, I analyzed posts from the independent labor union Alliance of Teachers' Facebook page (FB 2022–2023) during the first year of the war, starting on February 24, 2022. I selected this organization due to its deep understanding of how the war and related initiatives affect Russian educational institutions. While the Alliance of Teachers (Al'yans uchiteley, n.d.-a) has limited political influence with only 300 members, its strength lies in sharing information. In contrast, Russia's largest teachers' union, the All-Russian Labor Union of Education Workers, has 4 million members but primarily functions as an extension of the state, being the successor to the Soviet-era union. Another significant union, the independent Interregional Labor Union of Education Workers 'Teacher,' with a few thousand members, performs valuable legal work but remains politically cautious (Nikushina 2022). This article focuses on the Alliance as a source of information rather than as an influential labor union.

The Alliance disseminates information about the Russian educational landscape across various social media platforms. As of September 2024, their follower count stands at 5,268 on Telegram, 3,396 on Vkontakte, 1,200 on Facebook, 7,563 on Twitter (X), 247 on Odnoklassniki, and 4,880 on YouTube, suggesting that the organization has a communicative influence extending beyond its core membership. I chose Facebook for analysis for several reasons. First, the Alliance shares nearly identical content across all platforms, but I found Facebook's interface more user-friendly, particularly for searching posts by date, which is why I also skipped Telegram. I chose to omit Twitter due to its character limit, which restricts post length and, consequently, the depth of content. Additionally, Facebook posts frequently link to the Alliance's Telegram and YouTube channels, making Facebook a representative platform for analyzing the Alliance's overall media presence.

Following the onset of the war, the leadership of the Alliance emigrated. The union's role also shifted dramatically, with the majority of its tasks and posts now focusing on the new reality in Russian schools. In the first year of the war, the Alliance posted 332 messages on Facebook, serving as the primary source for my research. Among these, 124 posts featured screenshots from parents' and teachers' chats or photos of local educational documents, unveiling pressure for patriotic actions. Another 163 posts included links to news articles or YouTube videos from 51 different internet news sites in Russian, German, and English, discussing themes related to the militarization of children and the pressure on teachers in Russia. The remaining posts included the Alliance's writings on the situation, links to their Telegram channel, and links to online petitions against patriotic initiatives. I meticulously followed each link, incorporating the text or underlying idea into the analysis. The data collection methodology bears resemblance to a case study.

In addition to the analyzed data, I monitored over 50 Russian Telegram channels during the first year of the war. These channels were operated by deputies, patriotic organizations, opposition activists, and discussion groups focused on education among ordinary citizens. I also interviewed the leader of the Alliance of Teachers. These supplementary activities contributed to the evaluation of the primary data.

For the methodological approach, I employed Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA). Drawing from Michel Foucault's work, particularly *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), the simplification provided by Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine (2017) elucidates FDA as a body of knowledge shaped by rules, discipline, and a system of knowledge, encompassing practices and techniques through which objects and strategies are formed. This article's focus on 'texts' of social practice, political discourse, and social interaction aligns well with FDA, which can encompass personal observations, descriptions of spatial surroundings, and the generation of social practices. Foucault's perspective emphasizes that 'meaning' is not solely derived from the internal structure of language but also from the external conditions of its expression, allowing the analysis of discourses based on descriptions of people's behavior rather than solely on verbal statements.

To analyze the data, I used the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti. I began by collecting relevant texts and descriptions from news articles, YouTube videos, and screenshots. Next, I coded excerpts and quotations, categorizing them under themes such as 'militarism,' 'repression,' 'criminal charges,' 'helping,' 'resistance,' and others. Finally, I grouped these codes into three main categories: 'use of power' 'reception,' and 'counter-conduct.' This coding framework formed the basis for further analysis, allowing me to examine these three entities – each representing several phenomena or, in Foucauldian terms, discourses.

The data introduce inherent bias and limitations, given that the Alliance's standpoint aligns with liberal perspectives within the Russian context. Consequently, the extent to which the data accurately represent the diversity of opinions and experiences within the broader Russian education system remains uncertain. The emphasis on resistance within the dataset skews the findings and hinders their generalizability to a wider population. Therefore, I refrain from speculating on the overall scope of oppositional behavior. Nonetheless, the data provide a valuable opportunity to analyze the dynamics of power and forms of resistance within the context of education. The similarity of descriptions from hundreds of sources, coupled with additional research material, attests to the non-marginal nature of the observed phenomna.

Theoretical Insights to Power and Resistance

I scrutinize power and resistance through Foucault's (2010) lens, examining how the state employs practices to regulate,

monitor, and discipline the population in the pursuit of internal cohesion. Foucault terms this set of practices as *governmentality*. Within governmentality, the exercise of power takes three distinct forms. First, *sovereign power* operates from the apex, dealing with law-making, legal authority, and the right to administer punishment. In the context of this study, shifts in sovereign power are evident in laws enacted post-February 24, 2022, such as the legislation against spreading 'fake news' about the Russian military, carrying potential 15-year prison sentences (Faulconbridge 2022). This law has been applied even to minor expressions like 'No war' stickers, effectively stifling voices of civil society.

Second, Foucault conceptualizes *biopower* as the regulation of life and death, birth and reproduction, and health and illness to optimize population life (Lilja and Vinthagen 2014). Makarychev and Medvedev (2015, 53) assert that the biopolitical shift in Russia since Putin's third term in 2012 has reinforced domestic sovereign power while fostering a sense of community by evoking deep-seated complexes and phobias, patriarchal instincts, communal belonging, and mob mentality. While the entirety of patriotic education can be seen as a biopolitical effort – steering citizens toward healthy lifestyles and conservative values under military discipline – on a smaller scale, it is reflected in educational content that reinforces binary gender roles, encourages childbirth, and addresses the human losses caused by war.

Third, *disciplinary power* stands out as the most visible form of power, given the inherently disciplinary nature of educational institutions, centered around correct training. Disciplinary mechanisms function through determination, not by dictating what cannot be done, but by focusing on what must be done, thereby rendering all other actions 'prohibited.' Disciplinary power supplements reality: the more reality resists, the more artificial and compelling the regulations and obligations become (Foucault 2010, 58). Discipline, through norms, normalizes and seeks to conform people and activities to a prescribed model. That which aligns with the model is deemed normal, while anything that does not is labeled abnormal (58, 69).

Lilja and Vinthagen (2014) have extended Foucault's model, illustrating that each facet of power encounters specific forms of resistance. Resistance against sovereign power tends to be overtly defiant, manifesting through actions like strikes and rebellions (113). In contrast, resistance to biopower takes on a more abstract form, resembling cultural resistance without central planning. This resistance fosters shared logics based on mutual knowledge, creating new spaces, nurturing an 'other,' and supporting subcultures that reject dominant ideals (120). Resistance to disciplinary power involves refusing to engage in the construction of new subjectivities, skills, or organizations (114).

To comprehend the prevalent form of resistance identified in the data – *silent resistance* or *silent sabotage*, as Russians call it – I turned to Kuran's (1997) notion of preference falsification. Kuran employs preference falsification, characterized by a culture of deceit, to elucidate why despised communist regimes in Eastern Europe endured for an extended period. While brutal terror propped up the system, it was the falsification of private opinions that sustained it. Concealing private sentiments distorts public discourse, and the narrowing of public space eventually narrows personal beliefs (157). This creates a cycle where propaganda, despite lacking logic or evidence, becomes effective through repetition, as it appears accepted by those around. The unawareness of dissenting opinions leads to societal atomization, with individuals, knowingly or not, becoming complicit in sustaining the oppressive system (153). The nuanced nature of preference falsification poses a dual challenge, affecting both the regime and those seeking change by obscuring revolutionary thresholds (275). The concept explains both the persistence of the regime and the sudden emergence of chain reactions when private opinions become public due to specific events (247). Alexei Yurchak (2006, 283) explores a similar discourse transformation in late socialism, noting that while people did not foresee the Soviet Union's collapse, they were somehow prepared for it. This highlights how the pervasive reproduction of the system's authoritative and immutable discourse led to a profound internal displacement within it

James C. Scott (1985, 1990) elucidates the resistance of subordinates in repressive conditions through concepts like *everyday forms of resistance, weapons of the weak*, and *the hidden transcript*. In the wartime context in Russia, Vera Dubina (2023) highlights how coded language has become a new weapon of the weak. Anonymous anti-war posters, graffiti, and slogans disrupt the government's narrative. Even subtle acts, like wearing underwear in Ukrainian flag colors, serve as individual protests, aligning with Scott's concept of resistance.

In conclusion, assessing resistance in Russia requires looking beyond visible protests and opinion polls. It necessitates understanding authoritarian constraints, potential forms of resistance, and the evolving nature of opinions. Now, let us analyze the evidence supporting the application of these theories.

Analysis

The analysis takes two perspectives. First, it broadens the context by presenting informal militarist activities alongside official initiatives, thereby enhancing the understanding of Russian patriotic education as a system closely tied to the exercise of power. Second, the examination of reception and resistance reevaluates Russian state patriotism, demonstrating how imitation in both implementation and reception distorts the 'command chain' in patriotic education.

The examples in this section are drawn from various research sources. I have cited key orders, arguments, and opinions but omitted certain references to protect individuals who may face repercussions or later regret the opinions they expressed in the press during the first year of the war. Words in quotation marks are from research material, although they are not always cited for this reason.

Informal Patriotic Campaigns and Events

Beyond the federal campaigns mentioned in the introduction, much more is done under the banner of patriotism. Though not universally mainstream, these semiofficial events are

reportedly widespread across Russia. Together, they extend state-sponsored patriotism to include nationalist, militarized, and even fascist elements, and demonstrate the physical and mental coercion imposed on teachers and students.

Following the commencement of Russia's military actions, the state propaganda apparatus quickly launched hashtags like #WeAreNotAshamed (#NamNeStydno), #WeDontAbandonOurOwn (#SvoikhNeBrosaem), #ImProudOfRussia (#GorzhusRossiyey), #ForRussia (#ZaRossiyu), and #ForPutin (#ZaPutina). These hashtags spread into schools, with some slogans later becoming official campaigns to channel aid and support for the war. The Latin letter 'Z' came to symbolize a pro-war stance, and images of Z-marks on school premises, students wearing Z-symbols, waving Z-flags, and forming Z-shaped formations with their bodies spread across the internet. A widespread initiative, 'Letter to the Soldier' (*Pis'mo soldatu*), involved schoolchildren writing supportive letters to frontline troops.

Militarized practices, concerts, and memorial boards honoring Russian soldiers killed in Ukraine, including those from Bucha, have become commonplace in schools. Collaboration between schools and military and security organizations has intensified, with representatives from the state army, private military companies, Cossack Society atamans, the National Guard, OMON special police, and patriotic clubs visiting schools to explain the aims of the 'special military operation' and present themselves as potential employers. Priests visit schools to console children whose fathers have been deployed to the war.

Personnel and pupils have been asked to contribute monetary and material aid for the conflict. Many schools required teachers to donate 10 percent of their salaries to support war-related needs, often through state campaigns like 'WeAreTogether' (MyVmeste) or via local and regional deputies of the ruling party, United Russia. Vocational schools have produced uniforms, balaclavas, underwear, raincoats, woolen socks, and even potbelly stoves for frontline deployment.

> And it was made to seem as if the students did all of this voluntarily. Of course, that wasn't the case at all. We were simply assigned this task during the 'Introduction to the Profession' class, not even during practical training, where we are usually allowed to bring our own projects and deviate somewhat from the curriculum. As far as I heard, even students with disabilities were sewing stretchers. —A student from Syktyvkar Polytechnic College, which began producing clothes for the mobilized (Starikov 2022)

On July 28, 2022, the Ministry of Education announced that participation in patriotic events would allow students to apply for an increased stipend (Kodifikatsiya 2022). According to the Alliance, while authorities previously rewarded students discreetly with 500 rubles for attending pro-government rallies before the war, such participation is now explicitly endorsed at the state level (Al'yans uchiteley 2022). This development reveals two key observations. First, the state no longer pretends to adhere to democratic principles, requiring individuals who wish to advance within state structures to openly support and contribute to the war. Second, it highlights the gradual transformation of disciplinary norms into formal laws and regulations.

The 'partial' mobilization in September 2022 increased the burden on schools. Teachers often distributed mobilization subpoenas on behalf of the commission head, and some schools canceled lessons to gather those being mobilized. Many male teachers either were mobilized or emigrated or went into hiding. Many female teachers followed their emigrating husbands. The shortage of teachers became a pressing issue. Universities and vocational schools advertise opportunities for contract soldiers on their premises, indicating increasing pressure on the next generation to enlist. Many vocational students received mobilization subpoenas despite assurances that students would not be mobilized. In various regions, students' deferrals for military service were revoked, leading to their earlier conscription. In some cases, administrators, such as in Khabarovsk, compelled school directors to submit lists of employees they were 'ready to send to the front,' with empty lists considered unacceptable (Sibir'.Realii 2022).

In response to the stress induced by mobilization and subsequent losses, the Belgorod region initiated the 'Care Together' (Zabotimsya vmeste) program, which gained recognition in the 'Accelerator of Social Solutions' competition. Their project 'Loss of the only breadwinner' (Poterya edinstvennogo kormil'tsa) trains teachers to discuss the loss of a father with students (Mediazona 2022). Efforts to standardize the suppression of potential resistance due to increasing human losses are underway, with grief and anger expected to align with the state's patriotic narrative.

The examples illustrate how deeply Russian schools are involved in the war. Schools not only provide moral support but also actively contribute to the conflict. However, understanding militarization from a citizen's perspective is complicated by two factors: the uneven distribution of burdens across regions and schools, and the portrayal of war efforts as individual grassroots initiatives. The following section will demonstrate how these campaigns are carried out.

Implementation and Use of Power

Over the years, the strategic implementation of patriotic education has gradually embraced a vertical exercise of power, wherein reforms initiate with the president's speech and swiftly cascade downwards (Iashchenko 2023). In hierarchical power systems, higher authorities demand compliance from lower echelons, while the latter act independently to please their superiors and gain personal benefits. Although this dynamic is often associated with high-level politics, a similar pattern emerges within the patriotic system, where at regional and local levels, it manifests in distinctive patriotic acts and the arbitrary use of power. The rapid transformation of patriotic education into a war-supporting apparatus illustrates the flexible functioning of vertical power. Yet it has its weaknesses. Directives from higher authorities to schools may create a favorable image for the Ministry of Education on paper, but for many grassroots actors, the process reflects the Kremlin's uncertainty about societal cohesion. According to the Alliance, approximately 95 percent of initiatives are directed from 'above,' despite attempts to portray them otherwise. The implementation is marked by informality and the 'divide and conquer' principle. Orders and methodological guidance

are communicated verbally or through WhatsApp chats, lacking official seals or signatures, reflecting authorities' attempts to evade responsibility. Legally, this is not an approved means of conveying information to employees, and it prevents teachers from later challenging the legitimacy of orders (Kholod 2023).

Teachers play a pivotal role in this system. They are both subjects of discipline, facing the threat of prosecution, and agents of discipline, exerting pressure on students. Why do most of them seem to submit to the modus operandi? Fear of potential consequences is likely the primary reason. Additionally, the informal and multifaceted nature of implementation creates uncertainty about the extent and official status of the campaigns. When teachers perceive these events as isolated incidents, it becomes easier to downplay their significance and connection to broader indoctrination efforts, thus lowering the moral threshold for participation. As a result, unifying for resistance is also challenging.

From the perspective of students and parents, the supposed voluntarism of patriotic events is circumvented in various ways. Frequently, ostensibly voluntary patriotic acts are incorporated into mandatory lessons. Some teachers falsely present these activities as mandatory, citing non-existent federal laws to justify their claims. Students are often threatened with poor grades in other subjects, potential expulsions, or difficulties in university admissions if they opt out of patriotic activities. Some teachers argue that participation is mandatory because students are in a state university, reflecting a worldview that if the state provides something, one must align with the state in all circumstances.

Examples here entail the exercise of disciplinary power to establish new norms. The primary tools used are social pressure and intimidation, mechanisms designed to induce self-restriction. The ambiguity arises in whether teachers use their power to subjugate students or to protect them. When teachers warn students about potential criminal liability for 'discrediting the army,' it can be seen both as a form of pressure and as an effort to safeguard students, teaching them to navigate the current conditions.

Monitoring is a crucial aspect of disciplinary power, and its presence in schools has increased since the start of the war. In some educational institutions, teachers are instructed monthly to use tools such as the 'Gerda Bot' (n.d.), which analyzes students' social networks and reports potentially harmful messages and groups to the teachers.

> According to the director, my refusal to monitor students' social networks without their parents' consent is extremism. —Fired Russian language and literature teacher from Sverdlovsk region (Dovod 2022)

Video cameras have been installed in classrooms to monitor teachers deemed 'suspicious,' aligning with Foucault's concept of panopticism, derived from the architectural design of the Panopticon. This form of monitoring represents the panoptic gaze, encouraging self-discipline. Beyond physical surveillance, values and opinions are also monitored through various unofficial tests, assessing students' attitudes toward Putin, their willingness to engage in protests, and even their opinions on abortion (Al'yans uchiteley 2022).

The frequency of denunciations has increased, representing a relatively new phenomenon in educational institutions. Students have recorded 'anti-war' teachers during lessons and shared these recordings with their parents, who then report teachers to the police or school administration. Schools reinforce this culture, for example, by publicly displaying lists of donors to war efforts, thereby exposing those who choose not to contribute. While some educators view denunciations as a marginal issue, they nonetheless contribute to a climate of mistrust and fear, pressuring individuals to conform publicly while concealing their private views. This echoes the denunciations prevalent in the Soviet era, which according to Hannah Arendt (2021, 395) were the result of 'collaborative crime.' In the Soviet Union, the relatives of those accused of dissent were also often prosecuted, which led to the fact that people voluntarily began to give information to the authorities to protect their families. This practice resulted in the breakdown of social and kinship ties, speeding up the atomization of society.

Selective coercive measures are used to reinforce the 'soft' mechanisms of disciplinary power. While the Alliance characterizes dismissals and prosecutions as marginal, these instances act as cautionary examples, reflecting Foucault's concept of sovereign power. Although verbal threats to report teachers to the FSB are more frequent than actual legal proceedings, many individuals have faced substantial fines for 'discrediting the army,' along with months of pre-trial detention and home searches. Both adults and children have been affected, with some students being removed from school by the police, particularly in response to anti-war social media posts (see e.g. Chiknaeva 2022).

The Alliance believes that the persecution of teachers is an institutional decision, as Vyacheslav Volodin, a leader of United Russia, proposed in July 2022 in the Duma that teachers unwilling to support the war should vacate their positions (Vedomosti 2022). Institutional shifts are also evident in the escalating pressure on teachers to manipulate elections in favor of United Russia. While this phenomenon existed before the war as well, teachers acknowledge a notable change in the level of coercion.

In conclusion, both disciplinary and sovereign power have intensified significantly during the reviewed period. New norms gain legitimacy within the ambiguous domain of state patriotism, strategically used to support wartime efforts. However, this does not necessarily equate to greater effectiveness of state patriotism. As explored in the following sections, an analysis of sentiments and resistance strategies reveals a complex landscape.

Reception

> We have little developed values of humanism. [. . .] When we think that children in uniforms are normal – it is only a half step to the killing of citizens of a neighboring country being justified. – Director of college, Novosibirsk (The Insider 2022)

Teachers, pupils and parents describe the situation in schools with the following words: 'surrealistic,' 'absurd,' 'clownish,' 'frightening,' 'insane,' 'horror,' and 'disappointing.' Propaganda lessons

are 'hated,' 'pointless,' 'harmful to the psyche,' 'brainwash,' 'humorous,' 'offensive,' 'uncomfortable,' 'shameful,' and above all, 'boring.' 'Important conversations' have elicited more resistance than any other initiative, which suggests that ceremonial actions are not deemed as threatening as the distortion of history and truth, which teachers are compelled to impart to children. Teachers 'do not want to be a source of these lies,' 'to be a sheep,' they are 'sorry for the children.' Some have a feeling of depression and anxiety, 'involvement in something bad.' Many are considering leaving the country. Smaller schoolchildren are reported to be passive and 'little interested,' while older ones are 'overfed with pseudo-patriotic husk,' 'conscious,' 'skeptical,' and understand that 'propaganda is fatal to the country.' Parents are concerned. Everyone is tired.

Contemporary patriotic practices often draw historical parallels with the Soviet Union. Notably, just as the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League (Komsomol) during the Soviet era prioritized patriotism over Bolshevik ideology (Gould 1951), current methodologies can similarly be applied without requiring a complete ideological overhaul. Similar Soviet characteristics, such as heightened censorship, punitive measures, and political interference are identified in current actions. However, attempts to replicate Soviet concepts are seen as unsuccessful, representing rather a nostalgic effort by authorities to fill an ideological void from their childhood experiences (Akhmedova 2023). Today's Russia, with its global attributes and societal structures, differs significantly from the Soviet Union. Youth of the Internet age are not blind to simplistic methods. The weakness of propaganda lies in its failure to clarify key concepts and ideas, such as why people in Donbas are Russians or what defines 'traditional' norms. Teachers contend that the continuous repetition of the same propaganda fosters aversion among students, particularly when only one 'correct' norm of behavior is imposed.

On the flip side, propaganda is effective. Teachers and older students agree that for lower graders it goes well. Quasi-humanitarian endeavors like the 'Letter to the Soldier' evoke emotions and prompt children to act rather than merely listening. When teachers, who play a pivotal role in children's lives, begin to espouse the same propaganda presented on state television channels, it enhances the credibility of the message but over time erodes the authority and trustworthiness of teachers.

> One day, my child came home from school in tears. The teacher had shamed her in front of the class for not buying carnations and wearing a St. George ribbon. My daughter explained that the St. George ribbon is now associated with support for the war in Ukraine. This led to an argument among the children about the war, and during recess, none of the other kids would play with her. —Mother of a 9-year-old schoolgirl (Dolinina and Marokhovskaya 2022)

The state's use of young children for ideological purposes not only hampers their development but may also raise aggression. Propaganda conflicting with the values of numerous families has the potential to traumatize sensitive children. Ultimately, it adversely impacts the quality of education by diverting valuable time to 'nonsense.'

Due to data limitations, it is impossible to determine whether the aforementioned perspectives represent the majority. While the data portray a picture of concerned and resistant individuals, the teachers admit that 'of course' there are 'patriots' in the class, considering it normal. However, even these students express dissatisfaction with the time-consuming nature of patriotic education. Given that students' lives are already hectic, and propaganda lessons are not subjects tested in the unified state exam (EGE), they are considered unnecessary.

Regarding reception, regional disparities are apparent, though challenging to definitively characterize. In major cities, there is a prevailing belief that individuals in Russian provinces, with limited access to alternative information, are more susceptible to propaganda. While this is partially supported by the fact that many pro-war images on the internet come from these regions, it's important to note that opinions about efficiency of propaganda often come from larger cities. The data surprisingly uncovered a substantial number of militaristic cases in both St. Petersburg and Moscow. Commonly held beliefs presumed that 'light patriotism' would suffice in these cities, either because the recruitment of soldiers was targeting more remote areas, suggesting a need for more intense propaganda there, or due to the assumption that citizens in major cities, being more educated, were immune to the state's efforts to instill patriotism.

On the other hand, many regions are not fully embracing *Moscow's* initiatives, particularly when no additional compensation is provided for conducting propaganda lessons in already low-wage areas. Furthermore, despite the large salaries offered to recruit teachers for occupied areas, enthusiasm for relocation has been low, underscoring the resilience and resistance of these provinces. However, in distant regions, a 'military way of life' has traditionally been more common. Boys often join the army, shooting skills are valued in hunting families, and teachers are typically older, which makes it easier for patriotic initiatives to take root. At the same time, the spread of patriotic pictures from the provinces unintentionally exposes dismantled schools and common poverty, amplifying the perceived dissonance between reality and propaganda. The increasing economic disparities may pose a challenge for the Kremlin in maintaining high levels of patriotism in regions where growing human losses further strain social structures.

A predominant theme among recipients is uncertainty. Individuals are unsure whether their thoughts align with the majority or if those around them are merely pretending to support the government. This uncertainty fosters a fear of openly expressing one's position. Several factors contribute to this silence: students fear repercussions for their parents employed by the state; parents advise their children not to speak openly at school; and school directors, caught between propaganda demands and resistance, try to avoid open conflicts with superiors and parents. Many teachers have also refrained from discussing the topic with their colleagues. The word *private* (privatnyy, lichnyy) frequently appears in the data, representing a space to express thoughts and feelings when public discourse is dominated by 'patriots.' As one respondent aptly noted, a cold civil war is quietly unfolding within schools.

Another large discourse is the dissonance between reality and propaganda.

> But in fact it has all become a big oxymoron. Give children a chance to speak their various opinions, but only those that are approved. Talk about the situation, but only from the state's perspective. Teach kids kindness and humanity, but only so that they are proud of the war. —Teacher from Altai region (Tkachev 2022)

Students have found propaganda lessons to be not only incomprehensible but offensive. Lofty speeches about heroic fathers as family heads are viewed as absurd when a quarter of the pupils come from single-mother households. The notions of 'traditional gender roles' are met with laughter, reflecting a generational shift and a rejection of the imposed worldview. Young people sense the pressure and injustice, as they are compelled to stand outside and participate in flag-raising and anthem-singing 'for fun.' For many, school propaganda ranks low on their list of concerns. Fathers, brothers, or uncles of numerous children are either mobilized, hiding, or emigrating. In such circumstances, the heroic war propaganda becomes only hurtful.

> It's important that people don't lie to themselves. When there's silence all around, and there's a certain official line on TV, you're sitting by yourself thinking, 'Okay, people shouldn't be killed. But everyone's silent – does that mean there's something wrong with me?' —A teacher from Perm Higher School of Economics (Malysheva 2022)

To theorize the dissonance between reality and propaganda, we can turn to Timur Kuran (1997, 214), who posits that, for example, material shortages and oppression fall within the realm of individual experience, forming the basis for *hard knowledge*. Even if individuals recognize failures in their own system, limitations in time or education can hinder a deeper understanding of underlying issues. Consequently, individuals rely on social proof, constituting *soft knowledge*. Although the current 'iron curtain' is not as stringent as during Soviet times, the increasing restrictions on 'Western' content on the internet and the narrowing of public discourse may further distort soft knowledge in society, diminishing the ability to critically evaluate their own system by comparing it to the outside world.

The indication of this is that irritation about patriotic indoctrination is primarily directed at the state's excessive intrusion into individuals' daily lives, rather than at the government or the war itself. Familiar phrases to those studying Russia, such as 'This is not ordinary Russians' fault,' 'I'm not interested in politics,' and 'We are just small people,' appear in the research material. These expressions reflect a sense of passivity, political apathy, and a lack of collective responsibility for the war. However, this does not imply the absence of resistance. Let us now examine it.

Resistance

> When rumors started that these lessons would not be paid for, the desire to keep them disappeared completely, even among patriots and those who were ideologically 'for' these class hours. —A teacher from Barnaul about Important Conversations (Kholod 2022)

The Alliance encourages teachers to invoke the Education Act, which prohibits politics in schools and grants them the authority to choose class topics. However, few teachers are aware of their rights. Disseminating legal information is a crucial aspect of the Alliance's resistance efforts, and success may arise if teachers collectively defend their rights. Thus far, this has not happened.

Instead of being overtly radical or legally based, the resistance takes on a more individual, everyday form with nuanced strategies. Teachers frequently observe that students show little interest in patriotic activities. This indifference is expressed through disruptive behaviors like making noise, interrupting, laughing, arguing, ignoring, sleeping, using phones, or chatting. Some students arrive late or feign illness. In some schools, entire classes have skipped 'Important Conversations.' In Foucauldian terms, these behaviors represent forms of counter-conduct, wherein individuals resist attempts to control their thoughts and beliefs. It is evident that propaganda is ineffective for the majority of students.

The role of school administration is pivotal in determining teachers' capacity to resist. Although no school can outright reject patriotic activities, leadership can attempt to 'minimize the toxicity.' Schools with competent leadership empower teachers to conduct lessons in their own way rather than adhering strictly to predefined manuals.

Since the onset of the war, many teachers have resigned. Among those who remain, the most common form of resistance is described as 'silent sabotage,' with teachers adapting to the evolving nature of disciplinary power. Some take sick leave, while others rush through the patriotic lesson or redirect the discussion to more everyday topics. Others stick to the lesson's theme but use the time to teach 'critical thinking skills that benefit the students.' Some prepare students for exams 'of real importance' during the allotted propaganda lesson time. In cases where video surveillance is present, teachers might play propaganda films but mute the sound or subtly demonstrate that students can focus on other tasks. Some read mandatory texts in a monotonous, exaggerated voice – another form of resistance within the panoptic gaze. Yet another form of resistance involves school leadership assigning patriotic lessons to teachers who are enthusiastic about them, while allowing others to avoid these duties. Similarly, in some schools, students who are already aligned with patriotic movements are permitted to raise the flag, while others can stay indoors. According to psychologist Yuriy Lapshin (2022), teachers have developed an Aesopian language to subvert the content of ritualistic patriotic procedures. This concept, originally coined by Soviet writers to bypass censorship and convey hidden meanings, is now employed by modern citizens. Their ability to understand and employ the Aesopian language may not be worse than authorities' ability to use Soviet discourses in education.

Parents need to adopt a new form of readiness to engage in the educational process. An open exchange of information between teachers and parents not only protects children but also supports teachers facing administrative pressures. Since the onset of the war, many children have been transferred to private schools or home-schooled. Patriotic education has driven some families to leave the country, while others avoid

propaganda lessons by sending their children to school later, despite potential conflicts with school administration. However, most parents prefer to keep resistance within the home, discussing and teaching skepticism to their children, thereby undermining the state narrative.

> "At the parent meeting [in Saint Petersburg], everyone was politely nodding and taking notes. No one raised any concerns, except for me," she says, frustrated. Elena told them that her 12-year-old son is not required to attend the flag-raising ceremony. They responded that attendance is mandatory and that "it's federal law." In reality, no such law exists, and Elena knows this: "Don't take me for a fool. If every citizen knew their rights, we would live in a different country." (Zotova 2022)

Silent resistance to patriotic education is widespread, with both supporters and opponents of the war participating. This prevalence indicates that the state's interference has penetrated too deeply into individuals' belief systems and lives. At least, engaging in silent resistance allows individuals to maintain a sense of dignity and autonomy amidst increasing repression.

Discussion

A key insight in this article pertains to the extent and character of resistance. While overt rebellious resistance against sovereign power has diminished, reflecting heightened oppression, resistance to disciplinary power is more pervasive and multidimensional than conventional polls suggest. These discernible patterns extend beyond the educational sphere and provide valuable insights into broader societal dynamics.

The initial argument asserts that the reception of patriotic education is largely ineffective, aligning with previous studies. This ineffectiveness is attributed to the unappealing nature of 'Soviet-style' knowledge for contemporary youth. The failure is primarily unrelated to political opinions but rather stems from a perceived 'waste of time.' Poor implementation, influenced by bad governance, corruption, unclear instructions, and vague ideology, results in significant disparities in execution across schools and regions. These shortcomings not only create room for resistance but also impact the dissemination of state patriotism, with some schools nearly abandoning it while others freely embrace fascist and militaristic ideas. This dispersion is hardly conducive to the Kremlin's interests. Further research on regional differences is needed to comprehend the development of cohesion within Russian society.

Conversely, shifting to the second argument, patriotic education has succeeded, though not by conventional measures. Wartime patriotism, unlike in pre-war times, has been accompanied by oppression. Poor execution is compensated by the use of power. The implementation of patriotic education gives rise to 'side effects' – a broad range of unofficial practices through which the use of sovereign and disciplinary power becomes evident. This constitutes a tangible effectiveness of patriotic programs when gauged by the degree of ritualistic support for the state. Patriotism has evolved into a coerced norm, serving as a framework legitimizing the escalating repressions.

After the review period for the research material, Russian schools introduced a new subject in 2024, 'Family Studies' (Sem'yevedeniye), which follows the biopolitical and patriotic trajectory. The course emphasizes themes such as marriage, large families, and chastity, aiming to address Russia's demographic crisis, which has been exacerbated by the war (Krasotkina 2024).

Assessing the future remains challenging, given the unprecedented intensity of patriotic education. While many hope this period will be merely exceptional and will soon come to an end, it instead signals a deep entrenchment of state control. It is essential to bear in mind that anti-Western metanarratives emerged two decades ago and have intensified in patriotic education since then. Alongside enduring metanarratives, revisions to history books, internet censorship, and stifled dissent may not completely reshape individual belief systems but contribute to constricting public discourse, which gradually influences worldviews over time. Despite widespread silent resistance, the emerging generation appears largely politically apathetic, with their opposition driven more by everyday discomforts than by direct resistance to the regime's politics. This trend is compounded by a rise in preference falsification, a notable finding of this study. Ignorance of others' opinions accelerates self-censorship and erodes trust in the community, contributing to societal atomization – a tactic aligned with the principle of 'divide and rule.' In such an environment, the state can easily escalate repression if deemed necessary. The disconnect between public and private spheres echoes the characteristics of the late-Soviet discursive space, conditioning the new generation to these dynamics and signaling a concerning trajectory of the perpetuation of authoritarianism. When the new generation begins to view 'double thinking' as a normal state of affairs, the centuries-old unhealthy 'governmentality' in Russia finds fertile ground to persist. Mere private dissent is insufficient to alter the state's course, though widespread dissatisfaction suggests hidden opinions and positions poised for change beneath the surface. It is within this latent unrest that the potential for transformation resides, potentially much greater than currently imaginable.

Conclusion

This article documented an epochal paradigm shift, when Russia commenced its war against Ukraine and domestically redirected its educational system toward indoctrination through patriotic education. The Foucauldian analysis revealed an escalation in the use of sovereign and disciplinary power, contributing to both suppression and a nuanced increase in resistance strategies against government control. The article argued that Russian patriotic education can be considered a success for the Kremlin when assessed by individuals' ritualistic support and passive adaptation, rather than by measuring their personal views on patriotism. The state has transformed patriotism into a framework that legitimizes escalating oppression. The ambiguous implementation of patriotic education is a key tool in fostering national unity to support both the regime and the war. However, widespread resistance and dissatisfaction simmer beneath the surface. The article's documentation of preference falsification introduces uncertainty about the future: prolonged stagnation is possible, yet a minor event could trigger a cascade effect in the interplay

between private and public opinions. Given the challenge of gauging private sentiments, a deeper understanding of power dynamics, repressive conditions, and behavioral patterns in authoritarian contexts is essential for anticipating potential developments in Russia.

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