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Triumphant memory of the perpetrators: Putin's politics of re-Stalinization

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I explore the interconnection between Putin's politics of re-Stalinization, historical memory, and a specific version of the post-Soviet neo-medievalism. I show that re-Stalinization is a mass movement that is grounded in the unprocessed memory of Soviet crimes and atrocities. The popular myth of the "Great Patriotic War" and the myth of Stalinism as the Golden Age exploited by Putin's memory politics became a golden mine for Putin's kleptocracy. I argue that re-Stalinization and the Kremlin-sponsored ideology of the Eurasianism represents two interrelated trends of a complex ideological process. The Eurasianism combines Soviet denial of individuality with the idea of a state-dependent patriarchal society and Russian historical messianism. It glorifies the reign of Ivan the Terrible and Stalin. The 'medievalist' discourse of Eurasian ideologists, which advocates a return to the medieval society of orders, on the one hand, and the Gothic monsters populating post-Soviet film and fiction, on the other, create a political language that expresses new attitudes to people in post-Soviet Russia. They depict new social contract that reconsiders the modern concept of citizenship, and creates a social basis for the criminalization and militarization of Russian society.

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The corpse of Soviet Past was reanimated.

This zombie is rising, and it looks disgusting (Sorokin, 2015).

1. Introduction

Targeted political terror against oppositional leaders and opinion makers, adoption of legislation and political measures that prevent citizens from expressing their political opinions, fraudulent elections and massive attacks on the freedom of press and media – these are the usual ways of oppression employed by dictators around the globe. They are also well-known realities of Vladimir Putin's Russia. In this article, it is argued that the specificity of the Russian's implementation of the above politics is undertaken through a double exploitation of historical memory. Putinism re-activates the historical memory of Stalinism and constructs the image of Russian medievalism as the foundation of positive national heritage and identity. I explore the interconnection between Russian historical memory, Putin's politics of re-Stalinization (also dealt with in Kuzio's article in this issue), and a specific post-Soviet version of the neo-medievalism, or 'Novoye srednevekov'e'. The role and place of re-Stalinization in Putin's anti-modern ideology cannot be accurately assessed without understanding its connection to neo-medievalism. I argue that re-Stalinization and Russian neo-medievalism has created a new ideology that established a consensus between the authorities and the majority of the post-Soviet society.

In the first part of the paper, I show that the analysis of re-Stalinization cannot be limited to Putin and the post-Soviet elites' personal preferences, strategic choices or political idiosyncrasies. Re-Stalinization is a mass movement that is

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grounded in the unprocessed memory of Soviet crimes that promotes neo-medieval views and ideas about society, citizenship, and politics. In other words, re-Stalinization is not an ephemeral and insignificant occurrence of the post-Soviet life: it reflects deep changes in post-Soviet culture and society.

Therefore, in the second part of the paper, I argue that re-Stalinization is related to the emerging ideology in Putin's Russia, 'Novoye srednevekov'e', advocated mainly through Eurasianism and its political leaders. Viewed from this perspective, re-Stalinization and neo-medievalism represents a part of a complex ideological process that involves the reconsideration of the social contract in post-Soviet Russia. Gothic Society, as I term this new social contract, becomes widely supported by the majority of Russians.

2. Re-Stalinization: Russia's base for social consensus?

2.1. Russian neo-medievalism

Existing studies of post-Soviet Russia provide wide range of economic, social or geopolitical explanations of Putinism. Before the occupation of the Crimea in spring 2014 and the war against Ukraine, post-Soviet transformations in general and Putinism in particular, have been presented by scholars as: a political system that acts in Russia's national interests, which it defends against American imperialism (Sakwa, 2014)¹; the triumph of the market economy combined with a failure of political democracy; "cowboy capitalism" or oligarchic corruption (Åslund, 2007); a conservative revolution engineered by the former Soviet elites (Kotz and Weir, 2007); a manifestation of neo-liberalism (Kagarlitsky, 2002) and finally, an expression of post-modernism (Petr Pomerantsev, 2014).

I argue that these models do not fully appreciate the effect of the Soviet totalitarian tradition on post-Soviet society and underestimate the role of historical memory in the criminalization of post-Soviet society that underpins Putinism as the new social contract. Putinism cannot be reduced to a manifestation of neo-liberal autocracy: it is a centralized system, which rejects liberalism in its all manifestations. It cannot be presented as the triumph of market reforms, because there is no free competition or unrestricted enjoyment of private property in Russia. On the contrary, post-Soviet economy is described as anti-modern regime, new feudalism (Erikson, 1999) or pseudo-medieval "conditional property," provided as an appendage under the control of the FSB.

The interpretations of post-Soviet society discussed above overlook important esthetic and ideological components of Putinism, which I propose to understand as a cultural system. However, before turning to this interpretation of Putinism, the term *neo-medievalism* and its usage in this article require some clarifications. Since mid-1970s, medievalism has become an important way of understanding the present day reality. Umberto Eco was the first to point out the rapidly growing interest in fictional Middle Ages especially in relation with the escalating popularity of fantasy as a genre. In 1973, he introduced the notion of neo-medievalism in his essay "Dreaming the Middle Ages". Linking together certain social practices emerging in the European society, Eco stresses the role that the image of the Middle Ages performs in contemporary culture. According to Eco, the resemblance among certain social practices of the contemporary Western society with quasi-medieval practices and customs, and attentiveness to the pre-modern ideas and values, permits this historical analogy to demonstrate the disavowal of the democratic institutions. Although Eco did not specify what set of values neo-medievalism promotes in the contemporary culture, and paid surprisingly little attention to its esthetic component, he pointed out that Middle Ages are characterized by massacres and intolerance, and warned against idealization of this époque, which he felt was in the air. In addition, a historian by training, he was well aware of the pitfalls of historical analogy and consistently emphasized a danger of drawing direct parallels between the Middle Ages and contemporary world.

However, shortly after the publication of Eco's article, this analogy was turned into an analytical tool. In 1977, an English political scientist, Hedley Bull, introduced a notion of *new medievalism* and offered a political theory predicting that the future awaits us in the new Middle Ages (Bull, 1977). He argued that the contemporary state would be replaced by a system similar to the medieval governance. Political power would cease to be a privilege of a state and would be shared by a number of nongovernmental institutions. He contemplated new medievalism as an alternative to the state monopoly on power. Bull's approach has soon become a powerful trend in the political science, which was enthusiastically supported by his numerous followers. The success of his new term could be also attributed to the popularity of neo-medievalism as cultural trend. While believing that they offer an analytical model for predicting the political process of the European society, the political scientists acknowledged, to the same extent as Eco did, the fact that their analogy with the Middle Ages was inspired by contemporary fantasy and science fiction.

Bull's attempt to apply this intuition to political theory results in an interesting paradox. This 'scientific theory' is based on the assumption that the international political system is heading "towards new medievalism", namely towards a historical past. "Back to the future" as one of the founders of this theory, Steven Kobrin, summarizes this view (Kobrin, 1998, 361–386). Historical past and not future is presented, in this scientific doctrine, as the most plausible scenario of political development. This does not only challenge the idea of progress, which implicitly remains, despite all criticism addressed to it, one of the most important logical presuppositions of the social sciences. More alarmingly, such theory tacitly presupposes a reversibility

¹ This view remains highly popular among American intellectual fellow-travelers of Putinism \ (Koposov, 2014).

of historical time, which has grave consequences for the idea of causality and, hence, for the scientific rationality in the interpretation of the social and historical facts.

For our analysis, it is important to point out that differently from Bull's optimistic scenario, analogies with the Middle Ages - whether or not they reflect adequately the realities of this epoch - consistently serve to stimulate and promote conservative political ideas. Historically, the image of the Middle Ages has been constantly used to legitimize antidemocratic political projects, based on conservative values.²

In relation to Russia, Vladimir Shlapentoch (Shlapentoch, 2008) advocated for a somewhat similar to Bull a-historical use of the analogy with the Middle Ages, although his attitudes to this type of society were rather negative. Departing from the Marxist theory of “formations,” he believed that different “formations” – capitalism, feudalism and so on – can coexist in modern society and that peculiarities of Russian society of the 1990s could be explained by such a “coincidence.” This belief that medievalism or feudalism actually represents the realities of post-Soviet society remains quite widespread in contemporary Russian debates.

Departing from Eco's usage of neo-medievalism, I do not imply that feudalism or medievalism has been repeated in Russia. The concept of neo-medievalism refers to a particular image of the Middle Ages that is getting more and more widespread in contemporary world. This image reduces Middle Ages to the system of values that radically opposes the heritage of humanism and the Enlightenment ideals, but, contrary to the Humanists and the Philosophers, it calls for an admiration of this new “Dark Age”. Neo-medievalism becomes a potent metaphor to deny basic values of the democratic society by promoting new attitudes to people (Khapaeva, 2012).

2.2. Putin's Gothic Society and historical memory

To provide a unifying picture of post-Soviet society I define the interdependence of Putin's aggressive foreign policy, Soviet historical memory, and a specific post-Soviet version of the neo-medievalism as the *Gothic Society*. The concept of Gothic Society (Khapaeva, 2007, 2012) emphasizes the crucial role of aesthetics and historical memory in shaping social, political, and ideological arrangements in the contemporary world. It describes a new type of social contract built on quasi-feudal relationships of dependence that originate largely from the unprocessed experience of the ‘zona’, the Soviet camps and prisons. This social contract relies heavily on particular aesthetics that becomes an important vehicle of an accelerated dehumanization of “outsiders.”

As I showed elsewhere (Khapaeva, 2007), post-Soviet fictional and cinematographic monsters acting in the horrifying nightmares are expressions of the suppressed memory of Stalinism. These idealized Gothic and medieval monsters – vampires, werewolves, zombies – express denigrating attitudes to people. I demonstrated that the analysis of Post-Soviet fantasy novels and movies permits to investigate the hidden mechanisms of suppressed historical memory that corrupts and corrodes post-Soviet society.

The collective denial of the Soviet crimes reflected in current re-Stalinization makes historical memory an important vehicle of this social contract. I argued that selective historical amnesia, focused on the rehabilitation of Stalinism, has been instrumental for Putin's memory politics (Khapaeva, 2012). The unwillingness to recognize the criminal nature of the Soviet regime and condemn its practices and customs allows the mores of the ‘zona’, to get converted into a matrix for social relations.

This approach allows to demonstrate that the neo-medievalist discourse of Eurasian ideologists, on one hand, and post-Soviet film and fiction populated by Gothic monsters, on the other, despite their apparent belonging to the opposing – Russian Nationalist and Pro-Western – discourses, create a political language and metaphors that have been leveraged to renegotiate the citizen's role in contemporary Russia.

The theory of Gothic Society helps to refine existing interpretations of Putinism. For example, this approach allows supplementing existing studies of the criminalization of Putin's Russia (Dawisha, 2014), by demonstrating that criminalization is conditioned by a neo-medieval political mindset and esthetic symbols that deny the value of humanism and humanity.³

In my approach to historical memory, I rely on the works of Pierre Nora (*Lieux de mémoire*, 1984) and Gabrielle Spiegel (1997, 2002). A methodological discussion of various approaches to memory studies and their applicability to post-Soviet conditions bypasses the scope of this article. Nonetheless, unlike most studies of post-Soviet historical memory, my focus is not on the memory of the victims but on the state-sponsored memory of the perpetrators (Crownshaw, 2011). I hold that

² On uses of new medievalism see Frank Ankersmit, (Ankersmit, 2007, 179–196). Historically, the image of glorious Middle Ages has been consistently used to legitimize antidemocratic ideas, especially that of the society of orders, based on religion and conservative values (Zafirovski, 2011). The reference to the Middle Ages is capable not only of inspiring conservative ideology but also of influencing direct political actions in a highly anti-humanistic way. For example, the definition of the Taliban as a medieval nonstate organization has served to legitimize torture during George W. Bush's presidency. As Holsinger (2007) demonstrates, this assisted the authors of so-called torture memorandums to argue that these medieval organizations cannot be considered subjects of contemporary law and consequently, do not fall under the Geneva conventions against torture. On appropriations of medievalism by contemporary political discourse see the debate between Gabrielle Spiegel (Spiegel, 2008) and Bruce Holsinger (Holsinger, 2007).

³ While the use of medieval allusions and monstrosity in Russian and Soviet culture have been the subject of some attention (Brooks, 2013), no attempts have been made to systematically elaborate the concept of Gothic and apply it to post-Soviet ideology and society. Eric Naiman's book *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* (Naiman, 1997) explores Gothic metaphor in relation to sex and power in Soviet and not Post-Soviet experience.

the unwillingness of the majority of Russians to come to terms with the post-Soviet past has inspired Putin's politics of memory and has been crucial in making his regime popular. Therefore, the massive support for re-Stalinization in Russia considerably limits the applicability of the concept of trauma to post-Soviet society when the majority of citizens prefer to identify themselves with the criminal regime rather than with its victims. The concept of trauma was borrowed by the scholars of post-Soviet Russia from Jewish studies and Holocaust studies which legitimately use this concept to reflect the experience of the victims of Nazism. I argue that re-Stalinization turned the “memory of the perpetrators” into a mainstream version of post-Soviet historical memory.

2.3. Grass-roots re-Stalinization

Until March of 2014, post-Soviet politics of re-Stalinization have not been high on the agenda of Western opinion makers. This consistent domestic policy, despite constant protests against it by a small segment of Russian intellectuals and human rights activists, had been usually neglected or considered a minor issue, irrelevant to Russia's ‘Real Politik’. However, the annexation of the Crimea belatedly changed the viewpoint that Putin is a “predictable leader” and that his regime is a “guarantor of stability in the region”. In what follows, we will observe how post-Soviet public opinion was “re-Stalinized” in the 2000s. Here we will analyze the most outstanding grass-root initiatives towards re-Stalinization supported by Putin's regime, as well as measures taken by authorities that reflect the consensus between power and society.

The most visible signs of re-Stalinization are the newly emerging monuments to Stalin across Russia. They deserve to be mentioned first. Over the past 15 years, there has been a movement of erecting monuments to the dictator who personally signed 40,000 death sentences and under whose rule more than 9 million innocent citizens were murdered during peacetime for political charges (Khlevniuk, 2004, Kuposov, 2011a). Northern Ossetia, a region which inhabitants were deported at the end of World War II, is probably the leader of this movement counting by various estimates more than two dozen Stalin monuments (<http://www.rosbalt.ru/federal/2015/05/10/1396849.html>; <http://x-time.info/novosti/rossiya-segodnya/1359-v-severnoj-osetii-uzhe-36-pamyatnikov-i-v-stalinu.html>). The Caucasus region is not alone: beginning in 2001, several major provincial cities: Vladimir, Penza, Tambov, Sochi, Mirnyi, Lipetzk, Marii El, Orel, Yakutsk, Orenburg and Atkaraks erected Stalin monuments, not to mention several smaller provincial Russian towns and villages that have also been active in this campaign.⁴ Usually, Stalin's busts or statures are erected as a private initiative of a local city dweller. Most often, these activities receive support from the local administration. The Russian Communist Party, (KPRF), constantly lobbies for the erection of Stalin monuments and tables such requests to city councils and the Russian parliament. Most often, the pretext for the erection of these monuments is commemoration of the following anniversary of the victory in the ‘Great Patriotic War’, as World War II is described. Nonetheless, the tribute to the war is not the only context in which this movement takes place: frequently, these initiatives are regarded as the expression of national pride and patriotism.

Monuments are certainly not the only popular way of commemorating the dictator. Since the early 2000s, the recurrent attempts to rename Volgograd as ‘Stalingrad’ have become another highlight of re-Stalinization. Named after Stalin in 1925, the city's name was changed to Volgograd in 1961 as part of the de-Stalinization campaign under Nikita Khrushchev (at the same time Stalino was renamed as Donetsk). From 2003 on, there have been countless local projects that have debated the renaming of the city. They received a new inspiration in 2004, when Putin decided to replace the name ‘Volgograd’ by ‘Stalingrad’ on the Memorial for the Unknown Soldier in Moscow (<http://lenta.ru/russia/2004/07/23/stalingrad/>). In 2013, Volgograd city council decided to call their city ‘Stalingrad’ during the “memorial events and celebrations important for local history” (<http://lenta.ru/news/2013/01/31/stalingrad/>). In June 2014, after the annexation of the Crimea, Putin proposed to hold a referendum of Volgograd citizens on the subject of renaming their city, emphasizing that local authorities have “democratic” power to make such decisions. However, on February 25, 2015, the Russian Parliament rejected the project to rename Volgograd ‘Stalingrad’ proposed to the State Duma by the KPRF fraction (<http://lenta.ru/news/2014/06/06/stalingrad/>).

Among the central initiatives to “rehabilitate” Stalin and his memory, the reconstruction of Moscow's Kurskaya metro station proved especially controversial in Russia, to the point of catching the attention of the Western media (Kishkovskaya, 2009). This metro station, opened to the public in 1950, was designed by the architects G. Zakharov and Z. Chernycheva as “The Sun of Victory” to symbolize the triumph of Russian troops in World War II. Its architecture imitated an Orthodox cathedral with a monument to Stalin in the rotunda. The words of the Soviet anthem: “Stalin raised us — on loyalty to the people. He inspired us to labor and to heroic deeds,” decorated the ceiling. In 1961, during Khrushchev's Thaw, the statue and these lines were removed from the metro station. In 2008–2009, after the renovation has been completed, the praise to Stalin reemerged “following the due procedures and rules of historical reconstruction” (<http://lenta.ru/news/2009/10/24/words/>; <http://www.regnum.ru/news/448749.html>; <http://windoweurasia2.blogspot.com/2013/06/window-on-eurasia-russias->

⁴ Vladimir has two monuments (<http://www.vladimirgid.ru/monuments/vozhd.html>), Atkaraks since 2001 (<http://www.kp.ru/daily/22572/9675/>), Mirnyi in 2005 (<http://lenta.ru/news/2005/05/08/stalin/>), Sochi in 2008 (<http://lenta.ru/news/2008/05/11/monument/>), Orenburg in 2010 (<http://tinyurl.com/oty74ua>), Tambov in 2013 (<http://politikus.ru/v-rossii/8705-pamyatnik-ivstalinu-v-tambove.html>), Yakutsk in 2013 (<http://vragi-naroda.net/?p=2789>), Novocheboksarsk in 2014 (<http://kprf.ru/party-live/regnews/130711.html>), Lipetzk in 2015 (<http://echo.msk.ru/blog/echomsk/1544108-echo/>); <http://www.mk.ru/politics/2015/05/07/pamyatnik-stalinu-ustanovili-v.html>), Marii El in 2015 (<http://www.mk.ru/politics/2015/09/09/odnim-pamyatnikom-stalinu-stalo-bolshe-trekhmetrovyi-vozhd-poyavilsya-v-mariyskom-poselke.html>), Penza in 2015 (<http://tass.ru/politika/2248115>), and Orel in 2015 (<http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2689347>).

future.html). The protests of human rights activists and democratic intellectuals did not succeed in attracting broad public support to remove these words from the metro station (<http://lenta.ru/news/2009/10/24/words/>).

2.4. Stalin and his Great Patriotic myth at war

The last 15 years were also marked by constant attempts to decorate the streets and squares of Russian cities with Stalin's portraits, again for the celebrations of Victory Day in "The Great Patriotic War." Once again, number of these actions was launched by individuals – often veterans or members of the KPRF. The debates become especially heated in 2005 and 2010 during the celebration of the 60th and 65th anniversaries of the victory. The parades on Red Square and the atmosphere of these festivities resembled, according to critics, those of the Cold War era (Amalric, 2006). In 2010, proposals to put up posters and information stands educating the population about the important role Stalin had played as Chief Commander during World War II were discussed at the level of the Moscow city council (<http://www.interfax.ru/russia/129101>; http://www.memo.ru/stalinskaya_moskva/stalinskaya_moskva.htm; <http://ria.ru/moscow/20100217/209651703.html#ixzz3nBuVEHTa>). This "education campaign" reflected the strategic importance of the myth of the 'Great Patriotic War' for Putin's memory politics.

The myth of the "Great Patriotic War" is crucial to the understanding of Putin's regime, because it initiated the ideological consensus between the authorities and society. Under Putin, this Stalinist myth, which glorifies the Great Victory over fascism as a major event in world history, was reanimated as the fundamental myth of post-Soviet Russian society.⁵ According to this myth, the Russians single-handedly rescued civilization from the global evil of fascism and secured world peace under Stalin's leadership. The Soviet Union and the Russian nation are presented as the messianic nation, which sacrificed itself for the happiness of the mankind. Therefore, any crimes committed in the name of this global victory are considered justified.

This myth emerged during Stalin's time and acquired new prominence from the mid-1960s during Leonid Brezhnev's rule when Khrushchev's liberalization was dropped and covert re-Stalinization began. Its main function was to free Soviet society from its collective responsibility for the Stalinist terror and Soviet repressions. The myth countered the memory of crimes committed under the Soviet regime. It barraged the memory of the Gulag, and replaced the recollection of the irrational and unjustifiable suffering by the victims of the Soviet system with that of a "bloody but heroic struggle" against Nazi Germany. Stalin's leadership and his role as Chief Commander of the Soviet Army has always been the central part of this myth. Indeed, Stalin can certainly stand for a symbol of Soviet victory: the way this war was conducted and the victory was achieved constitute in themselves a crime against humanity – both against civilians on the occupied territories and against the Soviet civilians and soldiers. The rise of the mythology around the Great Patriotic War and its centrality to Soviet and post-Soviet national identity was analyzed by Tumarkin (1994), Weiner (2001), Uldricks (2009), Wood (2011), and Zhurzhenko (2011). Tumarkin (1994, 155) argues that this myth has become "the national Soviet religion". The reason for the success of this myth that made it a cornerstone of Putin's nationalistic regime and neo-conservative propaganda machine was that it resonated with post-Soviet society's unwillingness to deal with its criminal Stalinist and Soviet past.

The myth of the Great Patriotic War was destined to become *haut lieu de memoire* (place of remembrance) of the KGB-led re-Stalinization in Putin's Russia.

The need to reaffirm and protect the myth of the Great Patriotic War was obvious for Putin's opinion makers far beyond monuments, portraits and posters of Josef Jughashvili (Stalin) (Jones, 2012). This myth created an agenda for Putin's nationalism and Russia's politics of memory focusing it on the "memory wars" with Ukraine over the Holodomor, Poland over Katyn, and the Baltic states in the first decade of the 2000s. Memory wars offered Putinism a new discourse, which emphasized the messianic role of Russian people that was welcomed by the overwhelming majority of the population. Ironically, some fellow-travellers of Putinism translated it as "Russia needs recognition" and "Putin raised Russia from its knees." Memory wars with Central-Eastern European states followed logically from the fact that Putin – as well as many of his compatriots – considered the collapse of the Soviet Union "a major geo-political catastrophe in the world history" (41 percent of Russians now considers, like Putin, the collapse of the Soviet Union a tragedy for Russia and Russians (<http://www.levada.ru/category/tegi/eltsin>; <http://www.levada.ru/eng/stalin>)). A natural consequence of this view was the idea that the former Soviet republics and Soviet satellites naturally fall within Russia's sphere of influence and belong to a legitimate sphere of Russia's national interests. Memory wars prepared the ground for real military aggression; they served as a rehearsal of future wars. Today, after the annexation of the Crimea and the hybrid war in Eastern Ukraine, the influence of memory wars on the militarization of Russian public opinion could hardly be overestimated. As surveys have also shown, around 60 percent supported the idea of legislation protecting the memory of Stalin's state and the Soviet Army during the WWII against any accusations, and around 80 percent (by various estimates) supported Russia's annexation of the Crimea.

Putin's politics of memory wars followed in Stalin's steps with some precision. While Russia bears full responsibility for initiating the memory wars with its neighboring states, the Russian Federation sought to accuse the Central-East European countries of unleashing them by blaming the Eastern Europeans for not paying due respect to the memory of the fallen Soviet soldiers. The clashes surrounding the removal of the monument of the so-called Bronze Soldier in Tallinn in 2007 represented one of these episodes. This was the major goal of the campaign to "protect the memory of the war," initiated by President Dmitriy Medvedev, Putin's shadow presidency for 2008–2011. In 2009, Medvedev created a commission that was charged to

⁵ In the early 1990s, under Yeltsin, the myth of the Great Patriotic War competed with another myth of Alexander Pushkin, the Russian poet, who incarnated the Great Russian culture.

investigate the “falsifications of history to the detriment of Russia's interests.” As Russian historian Nikolay Koposov (2011a, 2011b) pointed out, the wording used by the presidential decree establishing this commission, was a direct quotation from a pamphlet “Falsifiers of History” published under Stalin's immediate supervision in 1948 to defend the USSR against accusations of initiating World War II. In August 2009, Medvedev sent a long open letter to President Viktor Yushchenko demanding revisions in Ukraine's approach to the Holodomor and World War II, steps that President Viktor Yanukovich implemented.

Alongside this commission, the United Russia ruling party that dominated the Russian State Duma and supported Putin's regime, proposed a project of a memory law aimed at the rehabilitation of the memory of the Stalinist state. Under the pretext of fighting against the “rehabilitation of Nazism”, this law criminalized those who violated “the historical memory of events which took place during the Second World War” and in particular those who would spread “falsified information” about the actions of the Allies during World War II (Koposov, 2011c). As Koposov (2011b) shows

According to its early draft, the law was to be operational within the borders of the former USSR as defined on June 22, 1941. One has to appreciate the uniqueness of the proposed law. Memory laws as they exist in the West defend the memory of those who suffered from crimes committed by the government or with its support. In contrast, the Russian law intends, above all, to defend the memory of the state, more precisely, that of the Stalinist regime, which many would consider criminal that committed crimes against humanity

Koposov, 2011.

After being presented in several versions to Duma, the memory law, which penalizes “dissemination of knowingly false information on the activities of the USSR during the Second World War, committed publicly” by three years in jail was adopted by the Russian parliament into the Penal Code in 2014.⁶ This is despite a vocal protest of the international historical associations and societies that included AHA, AAASS, Liberté pour l'histoire, human rights activists and many Russian historians and intellectuals (including the author of this article).

No surprise that portraits of Stalin are becoming a symbol of supporting Putin's regime outside Russia: Portraits of Stalin have been placed on public display in the center of Donetsk, the separatist stronghold in Eastern Ukraine (Agence France-Presse, 2015). A new monument to Stalin has been erected at Lugansk in December 2015 (<http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2015/12/19/7093027/>) and “Stalin Center” has been opened in Pensa to “share Stalinist practices and experience across Russia” (<http://grani.ru/Politics/Russia/Parties/m.247176.html>).

2.5. Re-Stalinization in education and archives

In parallel with paramilitary preparations and legislative initiatives, another important process of re-Stalinization was underway. In June 2007, Putin received 26 school principals and history teachers at his residence in Novo-Ogaryovo to discuss the teaching of history in Russian schools.⁷ This meeting signified the regime's intolerance to the ability of the history teachers choose freely from among the textbooks offering competing versions of Soviet history. Putin and the present teachers were resolute that a single state-sponsored version of Soviet and post-Soviet history should be given to the Russian students. At this meeting, Putin showed clear understanding that history has become again the potent tool of ideological propaganda, and proclaimed his hostility to the West: “People who write our history textbooks are paid by foreign grants. Those who pay order them to dance polka-babochka! (meaning ‘to their tune’-D.K) (Kolesnikov, 2007) The meeting's participants were in agreement that Russian schoolchildren and people in general are in need of a positive version of national history and that historical textbooks should foster optimistic attitudes to the present and past history of their country. No doubt, these history teachers were carefully selected by the FSB (after the collapse of the Soviet Union, KGB was renamed FSB), but this does not alter the fact that their views reflected the opinion of many of their colleagues. For example, when Svetlana Sorokina, one of the best democratic TV journalists of the Boris Yeltsin era, asked one Moscow school principal a question about Stalin, stating that the latter was “a monster and a man-eater,” the school principal responded: “Well, maybe he was, but he is our ancestor, and therefore we should respect him” (Sorokina and Kabaladze, 2008).

It is difficult to say whether what followed was the implementation of the Novo-Ogaryovo meeting's results or whether this meeting provided public sanctioning for a decision that had already been made by the authorities. Four days after Putin met with the history teachers, the State Duma's committee on Education suddenly decided to delegate the right to choose publishers and approve the list of textbooks recommended for use in Russian schools to the local municipal authorities. Putin's “vertical of power” was on the rise.

Four months later, in October 2007, a methodological blueprint on teaching history in high schools, *Textbook for Teachers*, was released by Putin's presidential administration. It covered Soviet and post-Soviet history from 1945 to 2007. The textbook offered the desired positive version of the Soviet past, including that of Stalinism. In particular, it contained the following statements: “Stalin's Empire” – the sphere of the political influence of the USSR – was larger than any other Eurasian Empires of the past, including that of Genghis Khan” (Filippov, 2007, 63). Stalin was compared with Peter the Great and was praised for extending Soviet territory “to the former borders of the Russian Empire and even beyond them,” and winning “the greatest victory of all wars.” In the first version of the textbook, Stalin was described as an “effective manager” and the author justified

⁶ (O vnesenii izmemeniy v ot del'nyie zakonodatel'nyie akty Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2014).

⁷ High school in Russia corresponds to 11–12K in the US, although secondary and high school offers 10 years curriculum.

political repressions by the high returns in terms of Soviet economic development and the need to modernize the country (Filippov, 2007, 93).

In October 2007, a school textbook based on the textbook for history teachers was co-authored by Filippov and Danilov (2008). Despite the resistance by some educators from the Ministry of Education that delayed the approval of this new schoolbook for two months, it enjoyed a gigantic print run and was endorsed by the Ministry of Education, which recommended it to schools (Razuvaev, 2007; Rybina, 2008; Scherbakova, 2008).

This history textbook reflected legitimization of the views about Stalin's role in Soviet history and signified a new trend in post-Soviet historiography. Oleg Khlevnyk, who published Stalin's archives during the Yeltsin era, assesses this trend in the following way

While this ideology formally acknowledges the (Great) Terror's countless victims and the high price paid for the “great leap” strategy, it sees Stalinism as an organic and unavoidable means of addressing the need to modernize and prepare for war. Within these postulates we can detect prejudices deeply rooted in the Russian social consciousness; that the interests of the state are an absolute priority, that the individual is insignificant, and that the flow of history is governed by a higher-order law. According to this paradigm, Stalin was the expression of an objective historical need. His methods were regrettable but necessary and effective

Khlevniuk, 2015, XI.

These efforts to provide Russians with a “usable past” may be compared to the stance of German historians Ernst Nolte and Andreas Hillgruber in the controversy about the Nazi past known as the *Historikerstreit* (“the Historians' Quarrel”). However, debates about Stalinism failed to have the same effect on Russian public opinion in the 2000s as the *Historikerstreit* unfurled in Germany in the 1980s.

The highly positive evaluation of Stalin's role in Filippov's textbook was not an accident. In their article “Rational choice,” Filippov and Danilov (2008) formulated their vision of the place of Stalin and Stalinism as an integral part of memory politics with even more precision than in their textbook

This picture of national memory irritates some of our opponents. Dina Khapaeva was straightforward: “People want to forget about their criminal past, and it is a duty of intellectuals to oppose this tendency.” We support an opposite viewpoint. To fight against national memory is senseless and dangerous. It is senseless because this memory in the long run will prove itself stronger than any textbook or monograph. (...) It is dangerous because it means to incite a kind of civil war. So, if national consciousness believes that despite repressions, Stalin has done more good than bad as all opinion polls amply demonstrate, we are not going to hide it [from our readers] either.

Filippov and Danilov (2008) referred to opinion polls that clearly indicated that Stalin remained a highly popular hero in Russian historical memory. Indeed, in May 2008, the popularity of Stalin was evidenced during the vote “Name of Russia: Historical Choice 2008” organized by the prime TV channel “Rossiya” to “vote for the greatest national hero of all times of Russian history.” By December 2008, the electronic vote of more than 1.3 million participants rated Stalin as the most popular historical hero of the past; indeed, his “approval rate” grew by 2000 votes per hour (<http://lenta.ru/articles/2008/12/29/name/>; Bocharova, 2008; <http://www.nameofrussia.ru/rating.html>).

For re-Stalinization, the first decade of the 2000s was significant in yet another respect: the historical archives that were partially opened by Yeltsin's government in 1991 were closed again, following a new law adopted in October 2004 (Chudakova, 2005; Ramazashvily, 2004). As Marietta Chudakova (2005) demonstrates, this law “protected” (that is, closed public access for 75 years) private information of Russian citizens, making it completely impossible to pursue any historical research – not to speak of any legal cases – against the perpetrators responsible for mass crimes against humanity under Stalin (Ramazashvily, 2006; Pavlova, 2006).

Let me remind that Russia has never experienced anything comparable with the truth and reconciliation commissions established in other countries that endured totalitarian regimes. There have been no trials of the perpetrators responsible for mass crimes (<http://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/ucdl20&div=13&id=&page>). The decree banning the Communist party by President Yeltsin in June 1992 did not result in a real trial over the Soviet communism, and shortly after the KPRF was reinstated as a political organization (Sobchak, 1995).

2004, the year of the “archival counter-revolution” as Russian historians sometimes called it, was also the year when Mikhail Khodorkovsky's trial took place in Moscow. In October 2003, Mikhail Khodorkovsky – a Russian oligarch who openly opposed Putin and invested in the opposition – was arrested under charges of tax evasion, fraud, and embezzlement. Khodorkovsky's affair was an important test of Russian public opinion. It demonstrated that the majority of Russians were reluctant to protest against oppressive political measures, and that such trials could even boost popular support for Putin's regime; undeniably, the period of 2004–2009 was marked by an extremely low engagement on the democratic side of political spectrum. Putinism received a confirmation that society was ready to move toward more radical re-Sovietization.

2.6. Commemorating the mass murderers

Among the most recent signs of the triumphant memory of the perpetrators, the closure of the memorial museum Perm-36 really stands apart. After perestroika, the museum was founded on the site of the former Soviet Gulag camp to commemorate the memory of the victims of Stalinist and Soviet terror. One among several other memorials Perm's museum

was supported through a Russia-wide human rights activism. It has grown into an important cultural center for the commemoration of the victims of Stalinism nation-wide. In early March 2015, the museum was taken over by the local authorities who removed all mention of Stalin's crimes. Victor Shmyrov, the director of Perm-36, considered this act "a symbolic gesture in the country on its way to re-creating a Stalinist type of state" (Lorens, 2015). By the end of March 2015, the museum was closed and re-opened again as a museum devoted to "the employers and personnel of the Soviet camps." No longer a museum dedicated to the victims of political oppression, it now serves to commemorate the "hard work" of the perpetrators, telling the story of "the system of camps, not political prisoners" <http://www.svoboda.org/media/video/26885761.html>; <http://www.svoboda.org/content/article/26892964.html>).

Finally, a museum dedicated to Stalin was opened in July 2015 in the village Khoroshego, near a small provincial city, Rzhev, famous for the WWII horrible bloodshed. Unlike provincial monuments that we discussed at the beginning of this article, this "Museum of Evil" (<http://tverigrad.ru/publication/v-tverskojj-oblasti-otkryli-muzejj-stalina>) is neither a private nor a grass-root initiative. Glorifying Stalin by exhibiting small – but intended as endearing for visitors! – details of his everyday life, including exquisite fine porcelain the dictator was served during his stay at the humble house of a local peasant, this museum is financed directly by Russia's Minister of Culture, Vladimir Medinsky, through one of the associations that he runs.

Victorious memory of the perpetrators of crimes against humanity also reveals itself in the constant threats by Putin's administration against the activities of the Memorial Society, including the paramilitary raid into Memorial's St. Petersburg office in 2008 and recent attempts to sue Memorial and close this organization as a "foreign agent." This means an organization that receives foreign grants and donations, and therefore should be registered as such to bear a stigma of an "anti-Russian entity," which also entails variety of financial sanctions. Characteristically, "foreign agent" is a phrase borrowed from Stalinist vocabulary going back to the purges in the Great Terror where it was a typical formula used alongside with the accusations of being foreign spies and "enemies of the people." This has proven to be not limited to rhetoric: Soviet-style spy affairs are reemerging in the Russian political space and have become yet another visible sign reminding one of the inglorious 1930s (Davydov, 2015).

However, it would be a mistake to believe that current adoration of Stalin has always been as popular and aggressive in Russia as it is today. During perestroika, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, negative evaluation of Stalin's role in Soviet history prevailed. Under the dominancy of democratic discourse even those who sympathized with the dictator (forming a considerable – up to 35 percent – group of nonresponses to the questions related to Stalin in opinion polls during that period) preferred not to reveal their attitudes. The shift in the expression of public sympathies has occurred during Putin's presidency. True, the radical nature of this shift should not be overestimated; in 1990, as well as in 2007, when Nikolay Kuposov and the author conducted opinion polls in St. Petersburg on the historical memory of Stalinism, the majority of respondents, while not rating Stalin personally very highly, still consistently evaluated life during "Stalin times" positively. The respondents shared the image of the country populated by "kind and benevolent people" who were more "open, friendly, and certainly more hard-working" than today, and who lived in a "society reigned by order and discipline." More than one third believed that life in Stalin's Soviet Union was "happy and merry" (taking for granted the infamous Stalin's slogan that announced the upcoming purges in the 1935). In other words, Stalinism, when millions of people were murdered and the lives of many more were maimed, has been consistently imagined by Russians as good times in a fair society, as a kind of "Soviet Golden Age" (Khapaeva and Kuposov, 1992).

Clearly, perestroika and the brief period of democratization of the 1990s were not able to dismantle the most important ideological beliefs created by Soviet propaganda and in particular, the Soviet view of history and the messianic mission of Russia. The reintegration of the major pillars of Soviet propaganda, in particular the revival of Soviet demigods (Sergei Kirov, Felix Dzerzhinsky, Sergo Ordzhonikidze, and others), into a state-sponsored historical narrative under Putin were important stages in Russia's re-Stalinization. The debates around reconstruction of the monument of Felix Dzerzhinsky, the founder of the CheKa (the Bolshevik party's secret police) which murdered many thousands of innocent people at Lubyanka square, in front of the ever functioning CheKa-NKVD-KGB-FSB headquarters, testify to the importance of the Soviet demigods for current ideology. As a recent study by the Levada center demonstrates (<http://www.levada.ru/category/tegi/eltsin>), in 2015 the "number of Russians who evaluate Stalin's role positively reached its greatest peak in all years of monitoring since the early 1990s-52 percent."⁸ In Russia the majority of the population have got used to identify itself with a criminal regime, not with its victims.

Russian public opinion has never been pressured by legislation, international public opinion, or lustration to work through its "Unmasterable past" (Maier, 1988) as it was the case in post-war Germany. The mass unwillingness to condemn Stalinism and the Soviet system provides a wide base for the popularity of Putinism. Instead of launching a campaign that may have changed or at least "tamed" these attitudes in post-Soviet society, Putin and his clique exploited these trends in the Russian mass consciousness. The golden myth of Stalinism became a golden mine for Putin's kleptocracy. It delivered to post-Soviet society habitual doses of what Theodor Adorno called "powerful fantasies" to communicate a sense of "togetherness" to "those people who, individually, had no power and who indeed could feel any self-worth at all only by virtue of such collective power." (Adorno, 1998, 95).

⁸ Back in 2010, 50% disagreed with the statement that Stalin should be considered a state criminal (<http://www.levada.ru/archive/pamyatnye-daty/soglasny-ili-ne-soglasny-s-temi-kto-govorit-chto-i-stalina-sleduet-schitat-go>).

3. Re-Stalinization is neo-medievalism

3.1. *Wotans of Eurasianism: Ivan the Terrible and Stalin*

While all these facts about re-Stalinization have been the subject of debates among democratic Russian intellectuals and leaders of the opposition, the fact that re-Stalinization goes hand in hand with the neo-medievalism that has started taking over Russian political and social life has not been accounted for. Stalinism, and Soviet rule in general, has never been contrasted with the notion of normality. This explains the subsequent distortions of the idea of social and moral norms in contemporary Russia. Eurasianism plays an important role in promoting such attitude.

Eurasianism, a Kremlin-sponsored ideology that aims to reconstruct a pseudo-medieval society of orders and lead Russia into the new Middle Ages, has been instrumental in solidifying popular support for Putinism. The term “Eurasianism” originated in the late 19th-early 20th century debates about the particularities of the Russian history, state and culture. Petr Savitsky, Nikolay Trubetskoi, Lev Karsavin, among others, explained these particularities by Russia’s geographical position in between Europe and Asia, and emphasized the importance of Asia, not Europe, for the Russian history. Pavel Milukov and Petr Struve, the leading Russian historians, opposed their ideas.⁹ However, apart from its name, the 19th century Eurasianism has little to do with its contemporary namesake.

Post-Soviet Eurasianism combines Soviet denial of individuality with the idea of a state-dependent patriarchal society and Russian historical messianism (Khapaeva, 2010). It glorifies the reign of Ivan the Terrible and Stalin as the best incarnation of an “authentic Russian tradition of authoritarian monarchy”. Alexander Dugin¹⁰, its porte-parole, known for being influential on Putin, served as an adviser to State Duma chairman Sergei Naryshkin, and Ivan Demidov, his supporter, served on the Ideology Directorate of United Russia party. Dugin runs his Eurasia Party and the Eurasia Youth Union, an Internet news agency, which broadcasts in Russian, English, Romanian, Serbian, and Ukrainian. The Eurasian Economic Union (Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan) was informed by Eurasians ideas. Dugin insists that: “Stalin expresses the spirit of Soviet society and the Soviet people” because he was “the Soviet Russian Tsar, an absolute monarch” and represented the “greatest personality in the Russian history.” As Ivan the Terrible, who had built the Muscovite-Russian state, “Stalin created the Soviet Empire” and, therefore, “there could be no doubts about the greatness of Stalin as a historical leader.” Dugin praises Stalin for having built a victorious country that won the Great Patriotic War. Moreover, because “all great historical achievements are built on blood,” the fact that Stalin was a brutal tyrant does not diminish his significance for Dugin (<http://www.odnako.org/blogs/vzvat-stalina-po-modulyu-ocenka-lidera-bez-ucheta-polyarnosti/>).

These statements about Stalin correlate to those from Filippov’s textbook that we discussed earlier. The textbook incorporated the most important ideological statements of Eurasian doctrine. It represents a fervently written historical narrative that proposes a consistent version of historical re-Stalinization and outlines imperialistic goals for Russia’s messianic future.¹¹ The author of textbook that created such a scandal was completely unknown: Filippov is not a professional historian and not a public intellectual. He has never published any articles or books prior to the appearance under his name of this textbook. After he co-authored two more textbooks e sequels to the first one e he disappeared from the Russian public space. Although he published some articles responding to his critics, he rarely appeared on radio or TV in person. Why was Filippov who had not professional credentials, chosen to write this important tool of Putin’s propaganda? The answer may be found in the article from the newspaper *Kommersant* that reported, back in 2007, that from among several history textbooks proposed to Putin in 2007 one was commissioned by Putin’s presidential administration to Dugin (Kochurovskaya, 2007). There is yet another important document, the project of “Foundations of Cultural Politics” – a programmatic document of new cultural politics in Russia, published in April 2014 (<http://izvestia.ru/news/569016>) that also reiterates the main ideas of Eurasianism. This document proclaimed Russians “state-founding nation,” called for “preservation of Russian national cultural and civilizational code,” glorified Russian and Soviet history and affirmed: “Russia is not Europe” (Khapaeva, 2014). This document has also been published quasi-anonymously, signed by a “group of experts” none of whom is mentioned by name: it bears only the name of Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinsky under whose auspices the cultural politics falls by definition. The reason why the authorship of these important documents remained so obscure could be that they actually had a well-known author but not the one whom Putin could have presented to the world as Russia’s state ideologist.¹²

⁹ On the origins of the 19th century Eurasianism see: (Bogdanov, 2014). Laqueur (2015, 11, 88, 96) traces the roots of Neo-Eurasianism to mid-nineteenth century mystics, including Helena Blavatskaya, and believes that Eurasianism is used to entertain the fancy of the Russian audience and has nothing to do with geopolitics.

¹⁰ Alexander Dugin personally participated in the preparations for Russia’s intervention into Ukraine, and advocated the occupation of the Crimea. He has recently been included in the list of those sanctioned by the West for supporting Russia’s hybrid war in Ukraine. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jP0yebodIM&feature=youtu.be>, <http://news.bigmir.net/world/829853-Aleksandr-Dygin-o-Rysskoi-vesne-i-kolebaniyah-Pytina>; Alexander Dugin, 2013 on division of Ukraine: “Eurasian Project and Its Ukrainian Problem”, *Odnako*, 06/14/2013. <http://www.odnako.org/magazine/material/evraziyskiy-proekt-i-ego-ukrainskaya-problema/> On Dugin’s political profile see also (Tolstoy and McCaffray, 2015).

¹¹ Graduate of the history department of the State University of Saratov, he is known for working closely with Gleb Pavlovsky, one of Putin’s former political technologists, and for his participation in promoting Putin’s 2007 election (Razuvaev, 2007) <http://www.newsru.com/russia/25dec2007/uchebnik.html#4>.

¹² There are strong indications that the author was Dugin whose fascist views (Umland, 2006, 486–494; Ingram, 2001, 1029–1051) are well known. In May 2014, the project was re-edited after a public outcry (<http://www.interfax.ru/culture/376513>). On Eurasianism’s ideology see also: (Marlène Laruelle, 2008) *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Press, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008). See also (Heiser, 2014).

Post-Soviet Eurasianism in general and Dugin in particular have been long regarded as a joke of Russian politics, a marginal movement without any political influence whose leader was not to be taken seriously. It is time to admit that this view is unjustified.

3.2. Eurasian “society of orders”: from Indian castes to Russian serfs

The glorification of Ivan the Terrible and Stalin as his successor is not coincidental, as Dugin and his followers claim that the “crowds are to be dominated” and advocate Russia’s future transition into a “society of orders” (Dugin, 2014) (<http://www.odnako.org/blogs/o-pogrome-evraziystva-v-mire/>).

Strong social hierarchy that would reconstruct the feudal society of Ancient Rus’ should do away with the Westernized Russia created by the reforms of Peter the Great and his successors (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YMAI5yYKZZ0>; <http://www.anti-glob.ru/st/novosredn.htm>). More precisely, Eurasianism elaborates on the societal importance of castes and estates (Dugin, 2012). According to Dugin, the Indian caste principle reflects very well the human nature and it was unduly replaced by estates and then by classes during the historical development of the West. Dugin believes that “people are born different because their souls are intrinsically different. Caste reflects this deep nature of a soul that people cannot change during their lifetime. Normal society should be built in such a way as to have people of godlike nature on top (the elite) and people of animalistic or demonic nature at the bottom. (...) Estates also presupposed that people differ by nature, hence there are high and low estates. But one can change his social status if the representative of the lower estate performs a heroic deed.” In particular, Dugin claims that the transition from castes to estates and from estates to classes as happened in Europe is not a universal law and other non-European societies such as Russia may skip this process. Rejecting the whole notion of a middle class as a liberal, capitalist concept that is alien to Russia is also part of this Eurasianist ideology: “The middle class has no ontological ground for its existence, and even if it does, it should be at the bottom of the social hierarchy, dominated by tsars-philosophers and heroes-warriors.” (<http://www.odnako.org/almanac/material/sredniy-klass-i-drugie-ideologiiya-semantika-ekzistenciya/>). Dugin calls for the New Middle Ages to replace capitalism in Russia¹³ and the Eurasianist discourse has been openly proclaimed by Russia’s official news agency RIA-Novosti a “new ideology ... representing Russia as a country-civilization” (Lepekhin, 2012).

The ideas contained within Eurasianism about the social order resonate within Russian society. For example, over the past decade the medieval word ‘kholop’ (serf) has resurfaced in contemporary Russian to designate ordinary people or citizens and has become prolific.¹⁴ Significantly, not only those who feel oppressed by the post-Soviet regime are using the words ‘kholop’ or ‘kholopstvo’ to denounce social injustice (Krechevsky, 2010; Gorodentzev, 2011). There are also those who are happy to identify themselves with the ‘barin,’ the owner of serfs. A recent interview with Nikita Mikhalkov, Putin’s favorite media producer, shows how deeply ingrained these designations are: “Those who imply a negative meaning in the word ‘barin,’ reveal themselves to be ‘kholopy,’ to be serfs (Mikhalkov, 2011).¹⁵

Not by chance has the Chair of the Constitutional Court, Valery Zorkin (2014) recently stated, on the pages of *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, the official newspaper of the Russian government, that serfdom served as ‘social glue’ for Russian society and expressed his nostalgia for this form of social organization

Despite all the disadvantages of slavery, it served as a bridge that held the nation together. It is not coincidental that peasant slaves used to tell their former seniors after the abolishment of slavery in Russia: ‘We were yours, and yours were ours.’ This means that the most important social tension between Tsarists’ authorities and the peasants had lost, due to the reforms, the most important go-between, namely, the landlords. And this leads to the development of peasant uprisings and eventually brought about a revolution.

It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss in any detail the newly emerging social structure of post-Soviet Russia that is governed, according to political analysts and opposition leaders, by fifty families within Putin’s circle (<http://www.inopressa.ru/article/20may2011/businessweek/russia.html>). For our purpose it is enough to emphasize that the police have been declared, on a number of the lawsuits, a ‘social class’ or a ‘social order’, and this claim is certainly indicative of these transformations. The chronicle of conflicts between the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), the police, and the army over privileges that are also described as conflicts between ‘social orders’ feature heavily in the Russian news. Notably, the protest against Putin’s regime in 2012 is often described as a protest against a ‘society of orders’ (Belanovsky and Dmitriev, 2011).¹⁶

Eurasianism reflects well the *Zeitgeist* in Russia, and the Middle Ages have proven to be a prolific metaphor for Putinism. In contemporary political discourse, fiction and film, Putinism is constantly referred to as feudal society (<http://news.bcm.ru/>

¹³ In his writing, Dugin references *Novoye Srednevekov’e* (1924) by Nikolay Berdyaev, a Russian religious philosopher. Written in a forced immigration, this text offered Berdyaev’s views on how to purify Russia from the Bolsheviks and make its people return to the ideals of Christianity.

¹⁴ ‘Kholop’ is a social term dating back to the tenth century when it was used to designate a serf who could be killed at will by his master, who had no rights and who could possess no property.

¹⁵ While in Russian the word ‘gospodin’ operates as a term of formal address equivalent to ‘Sir’ in English or ‘Monsieur’ in French, the word ‘barin’ exists only in opposition to ‘kholop’.

¹⁶ Therefore, the attempts to contest re-Stalinization and the importance of neo-medievalism as Walter Laqueur does by arguing that the new Russian ideology amounts to “a return to the status quo ante the revolution of 1917,” (Laqueur, 2015, 5) misses important components in this newly emerging ideology.

doc/84291; [Rossia is plunging into new medieval times, 2015](#)). In fiction, the best example is Vladimir Sorokin's novel *Day of the Oprichnik* (Sorokin, 2006), which describes the new Middle Ages of Putin's Russia as enduring well into the future. In Sorokin's dystopia, Russia has become a monarchy and a society of orders, its population lives in the state of terror executed by the oprichniki – a mixture of Ivan the Terrible's personal guards and Stalin's secret police.

The oprichnina was the first attempt in Russian history to institute state terror as the main principle of a domestic policy. The terror that lasted from 1565 until 1584 was conducted by the oprichniki who were accountable exclusively to Ivan the Terrible. They were granted the property of the victims of terror, primarily the Russian aristocracy. The reign of Ivan the Terrible cost thousands of lives and the abandonment of several Russian lands and ended in social unrest that lasted for more than twenty years.

In post-Soviet films, the oprichnina is also used as a metaphor for the Russian state. The film *Tsar by Ivan Lungin* (2009) depicts the horrors of the oprichnina, while *Boris Godunov by Vladimir Mirzoev* (2011), places the action of Pushkin's drama *Boris Godunov* in contemporary Moscow. Here the boyars, Russian contemporary aristocrats, are driving Mercedes, the chronicler Pimen is writing his chronicle of Rus' on a MacBook, and the Tsar's orders are delivered by TV. Critics attributed the success of this film to the extraordinary feeling of authenticity produced by the fusion of medieval allusions with post-Soviet realities.

The oprichnina is such a popular metaphor for Putinism because it points, through Russian history and imagination, at a historical precedent of a state of political violence, legal anarchy and injustice, which is characteristic of Putin's Russia and is called '*bespredel*' ('without limits' 'out of norms', mayhem) in colloquial Russian.

3.3. Post-Soviet Gothic

Allusions to Russian Middle Ages that are so dear to Eurasianism are not the only manner in which neo-medievalism is expressed in Putin's Russia. Gothic monsters, werewolves, witches, and vampires serve as a perfect metaphor for a Gothic society that is taking shape in Russia. Often, these idealized monsters demonstrate undeniable resemblance with the KGB or the mafia. The way humans are treated by vampires in the post-Soviet vampire sagas reflects, in a disturbing way, a perverted post-Soviet historical memory of the Soviet terror ([Khapaeva, 2007, 2009a, 2009b](#)). In post-Soviet novels and films, vampires rule over humans and people are deprived of the very possibility of politics, respect for their rights and dignity. People are completely instrumentalized and their only role in these stories is to serve as domestics or food for monsters. Despite the fact that direct allusions to Stalinism and the Gulag are almost entirely absent from these novels, the social organization described in them is unequivocally reminiscent of the 'zona', where criminal norms govern every aspect of life of the inmates.

Social relations between monsters and human society depicted by post-Soviet novels and films are also reminiscent of pre-modern laws, customs, and ideas of the state.¹⁷

Gothic monsters reveal the changing concept of citizenship in post-Soviet Gothic society, the emergence of a quasi-feudal social dependence as a basis for personal relations, paralleled by a rapid dehumanization of those who are losing their autonomy. These social relations occur in response to an organization of society where the conditional nature of property and a total absence of an independent legal system make '*bespredel*' a governing principle of the ruling clique. Under these conditions, personal ties and personal relations become the main source of privileges and the only source of protection. Gothic monsters issued from the Western tradition as well as allusions to the bloody episodes of the Russian Middle Ages provide imagery and a vocabulary to conceptualize these changes that are rooted in the unprocessed memory of the Soviet history.

The 'neo-medievalist' discourse of Eurasianist ideologists, which advocates a return to the medieval society of orders, on the one hand, and the Gothic monsters that deny humanistic values, on the other, have an important common message. They create a political language to express prevailing attitudes to people and ideas about citizenship in post-Soviet Russia.

A new vocabulary that designates citizens as prey enters thinking of Russian high officials, reflecting on the current situation in Russia. It reverberates with the kinds of expressions that the growing subculture, which imitates vampires, uses on their websites, as well as with mafia slang. One telling example is the speech by mentioned above [Zorkin \(2010\)](#), who describes the situation in contemporary Russia by saying that "... our citizens would be divided into predators who feel at home in the criminal jungles, and an inferior caste, who would see no other role for themselves than that of food and prey for these predators. The predators will form a closed social elite while the walking beefsteaks will form the major part of society. The gap separating them will be constantly growing."

The fact that the Chair of the Constitutional Court cannot conceptualize contemporary Russia without calling his fellow-citizens "walking beefsteaks", indicates how widespread and deep-rooted these metaphors are that show an utter contempt for Russia's peoples. He certainly is in the best position to observe what is happening in Putin's Russia. There are numerous examples when the courts, the FSB and the police have treated citizens as subjects deprived of any legal rights. Undoubtedly, Putin's regime has produced the unique circumstances for the conversion of an esthetic formula into political discourse, launching Gothic conditions into contemporary Russia.

¹⁷ The similarities between the social organization of criminal milieu and primitive tribes in general, and between the Soviet zona and the social structure of the Germanic tribes as described by Tacitus in particular, was discussed by Lev Klein, who experienced the Soviet zona first hand as a prisoner of consciousness in 1982 ([Samoilov, 1993](#)).

3.4. Conclusions

Re-Stalinization and Russian neo-medievalism represent two interrelated trends of a complex ideological process. At the core of this process, which depends on aesthetics for its expression, is the reconsideration of the concept of citizenship and of the social contract between the authorities and the majority of post-Soviet society. That consensus is thoroughly grounded in the unprocessed memory of the Soviet crimes and collective denial of historical responsibility. Gothic Society, a new social contract is based on neo-medieval attitudes toward citizens, which creates a wide social basis for the criminalization of Russian society and militarization of its public opinion.

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