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# Exogenous Factors of Memory Formation about the Great Soviet Era in Contemporary Russia

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**Abstract**--This article is devoted to the analysis of exogenous factors in the formation of the historical memory of Russian society about the Soviet era. The author refers to those components of the Russian information and cultural space that are created and broadcast into the consciousness of Russian society with direct influence and interest of foreign entities external to Russia. On the basis of facts and texts, conclusions are made about the systematic and consistent nature of attempts to influence the historical memory of Russian society in order to radically transform Russian national-historical consciousness and a sense of historical identity. The diversity of such effects is also noted. Despite the long and cumulative nature of attempts at external influence on the Russian memorial culture and social memory, a high degree of stability of the collective memory of Russian society should be stated. Not least, this is achieved thanks to the thoughtful historical policy of the Russian state over the past 15-20 years.

**Keywords**--exogenous factors, historical memory, images, soviet era, wars memory.

**Introduction**

The importance of national memory for the preservation of the identity of the country and the people is fully realized by the Russian state authorities and the

constructively thinking part of society. As confirmation, we can refer to state initiatives to combat the falsification of history, the creation of an appropriate regulatory framework (we will not go into analyzing the quality of specific acts here), a number of interesting works by prominent scientists. The role of the Soviet era in the formation of the modern Russian national-state identity cannot be overestimated. At the same time, in the study of this cognitive triad, “the history of the Soviet era - the collective memory of the Soviet era - the historical identity of modern Russia”, not all issues are covered. The key problem is the creation of a holistic model of the dynamics and transformation of the Russian collective memory of the era of the USSR in the totality of factors, causal relationships and trends. In my opinion, the collective historical memory of Russian society can be described as a system with all the relevant signs. It is formed under the influence of a number of factors (Scheme 1) that need to be adequately described and analyzed. Only in this case do we have a chance to get closer not only to understanding the current facts, but also to the constructive use of the obtained scientific knowledge in the planning and implementation of state historical and memory policies. Thus, the problem of this article can be defined as the unexplored complex of exogenous (external factors) of the formation of memorial ideas of Russian society about the Soviet past (Lee et al., 2006; Kanematsu et al., 2004).

### **Literature review**

Research of social memory (memory studies) is an urgent direction of interdisciplinary discourse in historical science, especially within the framework of the so-called "intellectual history". Nguyen et al. (2021), in Russian humanities, the legitimization of this direction occurred quite organically, the evidence of which is a large number of quite representative publications in scientific periodicals and monographs Baibarin et al. (2016), as well as the active publication of works by leading foreign authors. Proof can be found in the works of Bordyugov (2010), “October. Stalin. Victory. The cult of jubilees in memory” and “Wars of memory in the post-Soviet space” Bordyugov (2011); Kuposov (2017), “Maximum security memory”, “The Legacy of Empires and the Future of Russia” Miller (2008), etc. Works by Assmann (2019), “Oblivion of History - Obsession with History”, “The connection of the times has broken down. Take-off and drop of modern tempo mode” Assmann (2017), Reinhart Koselleck’s works studied with interest and actively mastered by the Russian scientific and historical community.

It is very indicative and symptomatic that the focus of the research attention of domestic authors is often the issues of collective memorial representations of Russian society about the Soviet era and, in particular, about the Great Patriotic War as the most important event of Soviet history, except for the Great October Socialist Revolution. Note in passing that only two of these events were awarded in official Soviet historiography and ideology the excellent title “Great”! It is equally remarkable that in the official propaganda of modern Russia and in the consciousness of Russian society, the epithet “Great” has been preserved and even intensified in relation to the events of the war of 1941-1945 (Edwards, 2007; Liu et al., 2021).

Based on this, the purpose of the article is to comprehensively characterize the exogenous factors of the formation of the image of the Soviet past in the collective memory of Russian society. The tasks of the article include: a primary description of the collective memory of Russian society about the Soviet past; identification in the information and cultural space of external factors of commemoration of the Soviet era; classification of identified factors; analysis of the specifics of their impact on the processes of formation of social memory and memorialization of the recent history of the country; determining the role of external factors in the formation of a collective memorial image of the Soviet era; Formulation of practical recommendations on the development of a strategy for a memory policy in Russia (Studholme et al., 1996; McCabe et al., 2008).

The hypothesis of the study is the heuristic statement about the existence of a complex of factors external to the Russian social and commemorative space, which, thereby, claim to form a memorial image of the Soviet era to the collective memory of Russian society. At the same time, a priori, influence can be both positive and negative in relation to the problems of the existence of Russia as a subject of world history in the current historical time. The main methods of research can be indicated historical-comparative, historical-psychological and problem-historical, used in conjunction with a factor approach to the analysis of historical phenomena and processes (Romanenkov et al., 2020; Hölzel et al., 2002).

## **Result and Discussion**

### **The soviet era as a “living past” in the social memory of the people of Russia**

By historical standards, the USSR as a state entity ceased to exist very recently. The 30th anniversary of its collapse comes at the end of this year. Someone will write and talk about it with joy, others with a greater or lesser degree of regret. An unconditional fact: throughout the space of the former Soviet Union, an insignificant minority will take an indifferent position. Already this self-evident fact is enough to state the fact of the second order - from the field of intellectual history: the memory of the Soviet past in the post-Soviet space, and, therefore, in Russia, ambivalent, multivariable. This moment alone is enough to understand the inevitability of the notorious "wars of memory" in Russia itself and in the former Union republics. Moreover, variability is added by the spatial length, multi-ethnic and multi-confessional nature of Russia (and other countries of the Near Abroad). Different age, local, professional, ethnic, religious groups have their own modes of memory of the USSR. Mosaic should be recognized as the most important characteristic of the social memory of Russian society about the USSR. And this mosaic is constantly manifested outward - in the space of social communication. Since most of the population of Russia is still made up of people born in the USSR, so far as for them estimates of the Soviet past inevitably affect their lives, positive and negative memories, emotions. There can be no impartial attitude in this case in principle! Therefore, the USSR for a long time is doomed to remain a “living past”. Moreover, with such a past, where many paintings/interpretations of the same facts, events, and persons coexist (Roediger III & Abel, 2015; Alzoubi et al., 2018).

Moreover, in support of their own views, individual and group subjects actively polemicizing in the information space tend not only to interpret the same facts differently, but also to build their own concepts on the basis of specific selection of some facts and ignoring others. There are also cases of direct historical forgeries, falsifications, when in the interests of advancing their point of view and overthrowing opponents, facts can be directly invented. A characteristic example of direct falsifications is the statement from the publication about tens of millions of victims of repression over the period 1922-1953. This is an example of anti-Soviet mythology, rooted not even in the writing work of [Solzhenitsyn \(1997\)](#), but in the propaganda. But examples of forgeries can be found from the apologists of the USSR. For example, “excerpts” from the diary of [Kollontai \(2001\)](#), walking on the Internet, in which Stalin is presented as a certain prophet who allegedly possessed incredible anticipation of the future. However, the appeal to the original text of the Diplomatic Diaries by [Kollontai \(2001\)](#), draws a different picture: the entry of November 22, 1939, which details the short-term visit of a diplomat to Moscow, refers only to a meeting with Molotov, at the end of its author writes: “Never saw Stalin. Annoying! It's easy and easy to talk to him” ([Kollontai, 2001](#)). There is no more mention of the conversation with Stalin in the original source in this context ([Malevanov et al., 2016](#); [Pevtsova et al., 2016](#)).

Such “arguments”, in addition to constructing a picture of the past that seems correct and beneficial to the creators (regardless of motives), only provoke further conflicts in the field of social memory, contributing not to consolidation, but to the further division of society. At the same time, the "invention of historical facts" suggests that the Soviet past really concerns our contemporaries so much that they are ready for any costs for the sake of its actualization in the present and legitimization of the latter with the help of engineered historical memory ([Vressick-Chilborn & Rachman, 2020](#); [Widana et al., 2020](#)).

### **External information influences on the historical memory of the USSR in Russian society**

The reference to [Solzhenitsyn \(1997\)](#), in the preceding section of the article is not accidental. The figure of [Solzhenitsyn \(1997\)](#), is symbolic for the processes of forming the collective memory of Russian society about its own recent history. Objectively, [Solzhenitsyn \(1997\)](#), was an actor external to Russian society. The popularization of which was carried out with the active assistance of the main geopolitical opponent of the USSR/Russia - the United States. And it is very significant that this external influence was obstructionist in relation to the history of the USSR. The negative narrative of the recent history of our country at the time of historical scrapping was formed with active external influence, albeit by the hands of ethnic Russian. In the case of [Solzhenitsyn \(1997\)](#), we are dealing with the phenomenon of “memorial intervention”, carried out indirectly and in a veiled form - under the guise of a struggle for historical truth and for the interests of the state-forming people ([Sayitqulova, 2021](#); [Srivastava, 2016](#)).

Another example of this kind, but more aggressive and shameless, can be the books of a traitor from military intelligence - the notorious Viktor Rezun (Suvorov), who devoted a series of books to proving the thesis that it was the USSR that was the true and much more dangerous aggressor in World War II

than Nazi Germany. The tasks of this article do not include refuting at least the main provisions of these publications. We are interested in the symbolic meaning that flowed from the books of Rezun and was uncritically perceived by a certain part of Russian citizens. It can be reduced to a fairly simple statement: the USSR, as a historical subject of illegitimacy and crime, is no less evil than III Reich. Given the fact that V. Rezun himself was not just a non-returnee, but now an employee of the British special services, his texts on the topics of Soviet history can rightly be considered as an external influence on the collective memory of Russian society about the Soviet era. Thus, at the time of the beginning of the formation of a new Russian identity, external influences on the historical consciousness of society were carried out according to a specific scenario: former compatriots who tried on the role of prophets and owners of secret truth acted as actors-designers of the new modality of social memory. But in reality, voicing the thoughts of those who pursued quite utilitarian goals of establishing their own control over Russia. In the conditions of delegitimation of communism as an ideology and social project, a lacuna arose in the mass consciousness, which these actors tried to fill in quickly enough (Fatubun, 2021; Shumilin et al., 2021).

In view of the fact that the effect of any sensation on consciousness is inversely proportional to the time since its promulgation, sensational and scandalous messages need to be constantly updated. Over time, the power of influence on the minds of the Gulag Archipelago and the Icebreaker has faded greatly. This probably explains the new modifications of the "memorial interventions" to the historical memory of Russian society. In particular, in the online space you can easily and publicly find the book of the German author Hoffmann (2006), "Stalin War on Destruction". Its cardinal difference from previously considered publications is that it not only disavows the USSR from the 1930-1940s, but through simple manipulations literally demonizes both the state and its leaders, as well as the people (if we take as a given that the army is an integral part of the people). Even the title of the book itself is a provocation, since instead of the established phrases-markers "World War II" or "Great Patriotic War" turns the largest armed conflict of the twentieth century into a kind of subjectively imposed tragedy. As if we are not talking about the aggressive and hateful aspirations of National Socialism, generated, no matter what they say, by German culture. Not even about the struggle of ideologies and states. But exclusively about the manic aspirations of one leader. And since he represents the people and the state on the historical scene, therefore, they also bear a share of the blame for the leader (if they agreed with him and recognized the power as legitimate).

As in the case of two earlier works, the main communication channel is a book here, which, in accordance with the theory of the means of communication of Marshall McLuhan, refers to "cold means of communication", that is, involves the recipient in dialogue. The reader seems to be immersed in the space of author's discourse. However, in this case, we are dealing with a manipulative technique: the author's emotional remarks and the shocking nature of the facts cited (or speculations given as facts) are designed to turn off rational-critical perception, replacing it with figurative-emotional, that is, uncritical a priori. However, the difference with the first experiments of "memorial interventions" is that the representative of an entirely external information and cultural environment acts as an actor without any veils. Both ethnically and by nationality. Given the

relatively small circulation of J. Hoffman's book, published in 2006 in 5,000 copies, a fairly selective readership, it could be assumed that it does not have a significant role in the formation of an all-Russian memorial culture. However, the matter seems somewhat more complicated: one cannot discount the phenomenon of the Internet, in which on many sites you can get open access to the text of the book. In addition, [Hoffman \(2006\)](#), book acquires the status of a source of information with pseudo-documentary foundations. Finally, even if the audience of adherents of the book who share its statements is relatively small, then they themselves act as guides and interpreters of similar ideas - which begin to spread exponentially. It's a real information virus. Also, within the framework of the Russian memorial space, an enclave of "dedicated" isolated by its axiological installations is formed, which separate themselves from those memorial images and installations that determine the identity of Russian society in historical times and in respectful relation to the Soviet past. Thus, there is a stealthy at first glance, but significant split in society according to the criterion of perception of one's own past. Not the first or the last. But symptomatic and indicative from the point of view of studying exogenous effects on Russian memory culture. The author's completely foreign affiliation in the eyes of the Russian reader removes the accusation of betrayal and work for foreign customers, as is observed in the cases with Solzhenitsyn and Rezun.

These are examples of attempts at direct, rather gross external influence on the formation of Russian social memory about the recent history of their own country. In my opinion, although such actions pose a certain threat to the constructive and positive memorial images of our compatriots about the Soviet era, it is precisely because of their straightforwardness that they are easily marked and can be neutralized quite easily. History itself turns out to be a very resilient material resistant to attempts at falsification, and Russian national historical memory demonstrates at long distances a high degree of stability and ability to reject such gross attempts on identity and a sense of historical correctness. However, over the past 30 years, more refined examples of external influences on the modality of Russian historical memory in relation to the USSR can be found. Influences aimed at the future and using soft power strategies. A characteristic example is the attempts of external actors to connect to the formation of historical consciousness through the influence on the minds of the younger generation. In the 1990s, a whole "line" of textbooks created by the Russian branch of the Soros Foundation and its affiliated structures came to Russian schools. In particular, the textbook edited by I. Dolutsky for grades 10-11 was, by the author's own admission, directly aimed at radical changes in the consciousness of the younger generation: "We conceived our project not quite as a state, and even as a non-state. I mean, we just wanted to start from below... we wanted to break, destroy, or at least shake the myths of imperial consciousness that sit in Russian people, in Russian heads.

## **Conclusion**

As we see, attempts to influence the historical consciousness of Russian society from the outside have a systematic character and species diversity. In addition, they do not have a single-issue action, but a decades-long directed process that has its initiators, actors and beneficiaries. From the analysis of the narrative over

several decades, it becomes clear that the main substantive task in this case is to delegitimize the image of the Soviet era in the historical memory of Russian society. While the goal of such a “memorial intervention” should be considered the transformation of the consciousness of society as a whole. Since, if society changes its attitude to the most important and recent period of its own history, this automatically provokes an inversion of the categories of good and evil, awareness of its own mission and role in history. However, as far as can be judged by the data of sociological surveys [Baghdasaryan et al. \(2021\)](#), the real influence of such exogenous factors on Russian historical consciousness in relation to the USSR has so far been small. What makes it possible to talk about the high degree of resistance of the Russian collective historical memory and the high potential of the Russian civilization to preserve itself as a subject of world history in the coming millennium.

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