



SCIENTIFIC FINAL REPORT

Two- and three-year projects and postdoctoral projects

Regnr Östersjöstiftelsen: 2019-0053

Project manager: Nadezda Petrusenko

Project title: Narratives of Revolutionary Struggle and Construction of Post-Soviet Identities in Russia (1991-2018)

1. The three most important results of the project and what conclusions can be drawn from them

First of all, the results of the project show that although the narratives of revolutionary struggle are not the most popular historical narratives in contemporary Russia, they were still important for articulations of different political identities varying from the conservative to the anarchist ones at least until 2012. This finding distinguishes itself from the findings of previous research, according to which narratives of revolutionary history have been important mostly for articulations of different Communist identities during the post-Soviet period.¹ The results of the project have shown that non-Communist left-wing mnemonic actors, who have used narratives of revolutionary history to articulate their political identities, have employed particular strategies to distance themselves from the Communist cultural legacy that the above-mentioned narratives belong to. Regardless of their political views, most of the time these mnemonic actors constructed narratives that stripped Bolshevik revolutionaries from their ideological make-up in order to be able to present them as political activists and freedom fighters inspiring for contemporary activists. This reminds of the strategy that, according to historian Nikolai Kaposov, has been employed in the official historical narrative promoted by the Russian state, where ideological beliefs of different statesmen of the Soviet period have been ignored with the purpose of introducing them merely as state servants.² This finding, thus, shows similarities in memory work of the official Russia and the opposition.

For the second, it has been discovered that political uses of narratives of revolutionary struggle as well as narratives of (non-revolutionary) Soviet dissents by the opposition during the mass protests of 2011-2012 show the existence of a common historical consciousness. That common historical consciousness could unify different groups of otherwise fragmented Russian opposition. That historical consciousness was manifested through the historical thought patterns that considered Russian history as a history of struggle between the authoritarian government and the civil society. Besides that, that common historical consciousness was based on a particular set of values. These values

¹ See for example Ėrlikh, Sergeĭ. 2008. *Metafora miatezha: Dekabristy v politicheskoi ritorike putinskoĭ Rossii* [The metaphor of rebellion: the Decembrists in the political rhetoric of Putin's Russia]. St. Petersburg: Nestor-Istoriia, 120; Malinova, Olga. 2015. *Aktualnoe proshloe: simvolicheskaia politika vlastvuiushcheĭ elity i dilemmy rossiiskoi identichnosti* [The Current Past: The Symbolic Politics of the Ruling Elite and the Dilemmas of Russian Identity]. Moscow: Politicheskaiia ěnsiklopediia, 53.

² See Kaposov, Nikolaj. 2011. *Pamiat strogogo rezhima. Istoriia i politika Rossii* [The Memory of the Harsh Regime. History and Politics of Russia]. Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 149.



included rejection of the “strong state”, promoted by the ruling regime as a part of Russian national identity, and endorsement of political protest against the state.

For the third, the results of the project have confirmed the finding of previous researchers that narratives of revolutionary history that were promoted in the Soviet state have been rarely used by non-Communist political activists due to the negative connotations that these narratives acquired in the post-Soviet context.³ The new insight provided by the project deals with different strategies used by non-Communist mnemonic actors to avoid these connotations while using narratives of revolutionary struggle to articulate their identities: *steb*⁴ and other types of alterations of the Soviet historical narratives as well as search for historical narratives that could help promote their oppositional identities without associating them with the Soviet Communism.

2. The project’s contribution to the international research frontline

Four of the texts written within the project approach works of street art as historical sources. To my knowledge, this type of sources is not commonly used in historical research.⁵ In each of the above-mentioned texts I discuss different aspects of using street art works in historical research. I hope that my discussions can help other historians realize the value of street artworks as source material and encourage them to tap the potentials of these sources, but also make them aware of the likely challenges of using works of street art in the historical research. I presented a summary of this line of reasoning in the public lecture I gave at ABF House in Stockholm in October 2022.

Three of the texts written as a part of the project approach memory as an entangled phenomenon. Such an approach to memory has become recently widespread in memory studies worldwide. The contribution of the project to that area lies in a historical approach to the entanglements of different acts of remembering based on the theoretical ideas of historian Gregor Feindt and his co-authors.⁶ That approach helps identify entanglements of past and contemporary mnemonic patterns within acts of remembering, thus, uncovering new discursive dimensions of memory work.

One of the papers written within the project deals with the questions connected to feminist counter-memory. Research of this kind, especially with a historical perspective, is very

³ See for example Rozhanskij, Mikhail. 2014. “Bez-miatezhnaia pamiat. Postsovetskaia sudba dekabristskogo mifa. Chast vtoraiia. Naznacheny otvetstvennymi” [Non-Rebellious Memory. Post-Soviet Fate of the Decembrist Myth. Part Two. Appointed as Responsible]. *Gefter*. Accessed April 16, 2021. <http://gefeter.ru/archive/11214>

⁴ Anthropologist Alexei Yurchak has defined *steb* as “differed from sarcasm, cynicism, derision or any of the more familiar genres of absurd humour” since it “required such a degree of *overidentification* with the object, person or an idea at which [it] was directed that it was often impossible to tell whether it was a form of sincere support, subtle ridicule, or a peculiar mixture of the two” (Yurchak, Alexei. 2006. *Everything was forever, until it was no more*. Princeton University Press, 250).

⁵ Such materials have been used by art historians, political scientists and specialists in other areas. According to J.I. Ross and his co-authors, historians have been mostly preoccupied with classical and early modern graffiti (Ross, J. I., Bengtsen, P., Lennon, J. F., Phillips, S., & Wilson, J. Z. (2017). In search of academic legitimacy: The current state of scholarship on graffiti and street art. *The Social Science Journal*, 54(4), 412). The only research known to me that uses street art and graffiti in their contemporary form as historical sources written by a historian is Bushnell, John. 1990. *Moscow Graffiti. Language and Subculture*. Boston; London; Sydney; Wellington: UNWIN HYMAN.

⁶ Feindt, Gregor et al., “Entangled memory: toward a third wave in memory studies,” *History and Theory* 53, no.1 (2014): 24-44.



scarce not only in the field of Baltic and East European studies, but also globally.⁷ Therefore the project can hopefully provide insights for scholars interested in feminists as mnemonic actors.

3. The contribution of the research to the knowledge of the Baltic Sea Region and Eastern Europe

The project deals with narratives of revolutionary history, especially the narratives that emerged during the Soviet period and have been recently used by mnemonic actors with different political ideologies in Russia. This means that the project provides new knowledge about the significance of the Communist legacy (in this case – narratives of revolutionary history, a part of the Soviet cultural legacy), in the Baltic Sea Region and Eastern Europe during the post-Communist period. Different papers written as parts of the project study the way mnemonic actors have used these narratives to articulate their political identities. The finding regarding the continued importance of the above-mentioned part of the Soviet Communist legacy gives rise to similar questions for scholars of other countries of the region, who could study whether the historical cultural legacy of Communism is still equally relevant there.

The project has contributed to the research on conservatism in contemporary Eastern Europe. The conservative trend has a long history in the region and is prevailing in current political and cultural lives of different countries.⁸ A book chapter published as a part of the project (“A Conservative Turn in a Patriarchal Society? The Entangled Memory of Female Political Activism in Post-Soviet Russia”) deals with the conservative turn in contemporary Russia and touches upon, among other things, the differences among the contemporary conservatism and its Soviet and pre-revolutionary versions regarding views on female political agency. The results have shown that while patriarchal views on female political agency were previously characteristic only for conservatives, such attitudes are currently also present in liberal and even feminist discourses produced in Russia. This shows how much the conservative patriarchal views have become rooted in the society. The question is whether similar development can be observed even in other parts of the region with predominant conservative tendencies.

The project can also provide some insights into the opposition in contemporary Russia, a highly relevant issue given the contemporary political situation in Eastern Europe. The research results show that the highly fragmented Russian opposition, among other things, was united by its common historical consciousness during the period between 2008 and 2012. These results can provide a historical perspective to scholars interested in the current situation with the Russian opposition.

⁷ Some examples of such research include Bold, Christine, Knowles, Ric, & Leach, Belinda. (2002). Feminist memorializing and cultural countermemory: The case of Marianne’s Park. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28(1), 125-148; Chidgey, Red. (2018). *Feminist afterlives: assemblage memory in activist times*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan;

⁸ See more about it in Miklossy, Katalin and Markku Kangaspuro (eds.). 2022. *Conservatism and Memory Politics in Russia and Eastern Europe* (Routledge).



The project has also contributed to otherwise rather scarce research on memory work of political and social organizations in Russia.⁹ This is also a topic of relevance for the contemporary political situation in the region.

4. New research questions that the project has led to

Besides the questions that could be relevant for scholars interested in other countries of the region (see above), the project has led to new questions that I hope to address in my future research.

First of all, my work with feminist counter-memory, which has taken place in the field of public history, made me interested in studying feminist public history as an arena where feminist identity has been articulated and the way such identity articulations have contributed to mobilization of support to grassroots feminist groups in contemporary Russia.

For the second, due to all the practical difficulties imposed on my research by the pandemics and Russia's war with Ukraine, I was not able to travel to Russia and collect materials that could help me address the role of the narratives of revolutionary struggle in construction of the contemporary Russian national identity. The results of the research that I have conducted have shown the importance of these narratives to mnemonic actors with different political affiliations. Therefore, the intended research on the role of these narratives in construction of the Russian national identity seems to be quite important. My initial intention was to address this question by studying secondary school textbooks in history. In the course of my work with the project I discovered the possibilities that uses of oral history methods can give and think that it would be interesting to address the above-mentioned question not only by studying history textbooks, but also by conducting interviews with teachers who use these books in their teaching as well as with students, who use these books in their studies.

5. Dissemination of the results of the project within and outside the research community

Also include a list of publications (divided into different categories such as monographs, articles, textbooks, debates, popular science publications, etc.) and the five most important conferences (organized and papers presented).

Mark open access publications and include links to these publications. See [the Foundation's open access policy](#). (Monographs published with support from the Foundation must be sent to the Foundation in one copy.)

Academic Presentations

Conference Papers

“A Conservative Turn in a Patriarchal Society? The Entangled Memory of Female Political Activism in Post-Soviet Russia”. The 25th Annual Association for the Study of Nationalities World Convention, hosted by the Harriman Institute, New York, USA, on May 5-8, 2021.

⁹ The few examples of such works include Kalashnikov, Antony. 2017. “Strength in diversity: multiple memories of the Soviet past in the Russian Communist Party (CPRF), 1993–2004.” *Nationalities Papers* 45 (3): 370-392; Linchenko, Andrei and Daniil Anikin. 2020. “The political uses of the past in modern Russia: the images of the October revolution 1917 in the politics of memory of Russian parties.” *European Politics and Society* 21 (3): 356-370.



"A Mind-Liberating Soviet Legacy? Uses of Revolutionary Myths in Russian Protest Art" 2021 CBEES Annual Conference, "With and After Empire: Enduring Pasts Across the Local and the Global", Södertörn University, Sweden, November 25-26, 2021.

"Revolutionary Narratives in Feminist Counter-Memory of Contemporary Russia: Resistance or Nostalgia?" The Annual Conference of the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies, Cambridge University, UK, March 31-April 2, 2022.

"Revolutionary Narratives in Feminist Counter-Memory of Contemporary Russia: Resistance or Nostalgia?" MSA Nordic 2022 Conference, "Explorations in Counter-Memory", University of Iceland, Reykjavik, October 13-14, 2022.

Presentations at Workshops, Round Tables, Research Seminars

"Narratives of Revolutionary Struggle in Street Art of Post-Soviet Russia: Legitimization of Political Identities", Higher Seminar at Center for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES) (Södertörn University) on February 15, 2021.

Round Table "Gender, Art and Protest" organized by CBEES, Södertörn University, in the series "1991-2021 - Thirty years after", August 26, 2021.

"Back to the Future? A Virtual Exhibition in Commemoration of V.I. Lenin and the Quest for National Identity in Russia", Workshop on Exhibition Studies, organized by Art History and Media and Communication Studies at Södertörn University, April 5, 2022.

Lectures

"A Conservative Turn in a Patriarchal Society? The Entangled Memory of Female Political Activism in Post-Soviet Russia". Guest lecture within the course *Culture and Identity*, The Master's Programme in Russian, Eurasian and East European Studies (MAREES), University of Helsinki, Finland, September 29, 2022.

Presentations for General Public

"Street Art i historia, historia genom Street Art" (In English: "Street Art in History, History through Street Art"). Public lecture at ABF house in Stockholm, October 4, 2022.

Publications

Peer-Review Book Chapters:

"A Conservative Turn in a Patriarchal Society? The Entangled Memory of Female Political Activism in Post-Soviet Russia". In Katalin Miklossy & Markku Kangaspuro (ed.), *Conservatism and Memory Politics in Russia and Eastern Europe*, p. 25-44. (London & New York: Routledge, 2022).

"Historia som makt underifrån: Narrativ av revolution i protestkonst och konsolidering av politisk opposition i Ryssland (2008-2012)", work in progress.



Peer-Review Articles:

“Historical Consciousness and Consolidation of the Opposition: Uses of Revolutionary History in Russian Protest Art (2008-2012)”, under review with *Post-Soviet Affairs*.

“Uses of the Soviet Revolutionary History in Russian Protest Art (2008-2012)”, under review with *Scando-Slavica*.

“Revolutionary Narratives in Feminist Counter-Memory of Contemporary Russia: Resistance or Nostalgia?”, work in progress.