

Two variants of the Russian Radical Right: Imperial and social nationalism

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Abstract: The text combines three lines of discussion. First, on the empirical level two Russian political parties – the CPRF and the LDPR – are characterized with regard to their specific profiles of right-wing radicalism. Second, these profiles are attributed to specific variations of the interpretation of the Russian past. Third, the empirical findings are traced for insights into the Leninist legacy concept. The main hypothesis on the empirical level is that Russian ultra-nationalist actors refer to different currents of a common national imagination in order to combine nationalist ideological elements with other programmatic features. On the conceptual level, the legacy concept is able to render systematic insights not into the history of a given state but into varying interpretations of what can be seen as ‘usable pasts’ from the perspective of various intellectual entrepreneurs.

Keywords: Russia, CPRF, LDPR, legacy approach, nationalism, Russia, right-wing radicalism

1. Introduction

The following study seeks to explore the extent to which history may help to explain the strength and the character of party right wing radicalism in Russia.¹ As is the case in other contributions to this volume, it takes up and extends the concept of Leninist legacies (Jowitt, 1992). Other than in its original intent, the legacy framework is not used for an explanation of outcomes of regime transition. Rather, some of the analytic distinctions slumbering in Jowitt's work are resumed in order to illuminate long term effects of historic developments in the guise of Russian ultra-nationalism.

As has been shown on various occasions, a large part of the Russian political elite cultivates a strong nationalism by emphasizing the greatness of the Russian nation, the importance of the Russian state and the uniqueness of Russian culture and history (Laqueur, 1993, Devlin, 1999, Laruelle, 2007). Often, the explanation for the Russian inclination to nationalism consists in the exceptional pace of societal change Russia has gone through several times throughout the last century. Within few decades after the breakdown of socialism, nearly every part of Russian society underwent a dramatic change. The Russian Revolution of 1917 ended an *ancien régime* in the true sense of the word: religion and the state formed a unity, higher nobility exploited the pauperized peasantry, and public administra-

¹ I would like to thank Petra Stykow and Michael Minkenberg to valuable comments on earlier versions of this text. Remaining errors and inconsistencies should be attributed to the author alone.

tion was mainly built on the principle of loyalty. The ‘great transformation’ of the first half of the 20th century consisted of rush electrification, brutal collectivization, and very rapid industrialization. Post-communist transformation and the collapse of the Soviet Union similarly accelerated social change and added exceptional degrees of uncertainty to all facets of society (see White et al., 1993). Ultimately, large parts of society were tired of further experiments and looked for familiar patterns of societal interpretation which could be found in the traditional constructions of family, nation, and – to some extent – orthodox belief.

Against this background, one of the few political strategies to gain visibility involved the extension of nationalism into a radical direction. Such a development has also taken place in Russian party politics after the end of state socialism (Allensworth, 1998). The tendency has been supported by the fact that the increasingly authoritarian regime has suppressed many other political forces which might have become a danger to the course taken by former President Putin and his camp (Fish, 2005, Mommsen and Nußberger, 2007). In this sense, one of the few opportunity structures to be used by non-regime actors consisted in radicalizing those elements in the depth of Russian national self-reconstruction employed by the *nouveau régime* itself, drawing on a broad anti-liberal consensus among the Russian public (Umland, 2007, Gudkov, 2007, Rykhlin, 2006).

Specifically, two radicalizing interpretation figures concerning the Russian nation can be observed in the political sphere. One consists in community-oriented interpretations based on the demand of the social equality of native Russians, the other in idealizing the imperialist tradition of the Russian state which so many times in previous centuries established Russia as the most important hegemonic power of

Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. The first position can be labelled “social nationalist” and is mainly taken by the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF). The second position can be called “imperial nationalist” and is embodied by the Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR). Accordingly, both will in a later section of the paper be discussed as parties with right-wing radicalist elements.

Similar descriptions have been used before (e.g. Williams and Hanson, 1999). What is new in this contribution is the hypothesis that the specific shape of the Russian radical right follows a double pattern. On the one hand, there exists a common denominator to which all ultra-national forces in the country refer to. On the other hand, different wings within the nationalist camp draw on those aspects of a “repertoire of usable past[s]” (Kubik, 2003: 343) that best correspond to other components of their respective political programs. As will be seen with reference to the Russian case, these contingent reference points should only hesitantly be labelled “Leninist”. Indeed most relevant patterns of historic interpretation reach back well before the period preceding Leninism, some of them even before socialism started to exist as an idea. Therefore, the Leninism argument will be used in a more general sense which has been called a perspective on “legacies of the past” (Comisso, 1997), with Leninist elements serving as a set of reference points among others.

The argument will be developed in several steps. In the following section, the relevance of the Leninist legacies concept for the study of the radical right is discussed. The next step then consists in an elaboration on three different legacies to which actors of the Russian radical right regularly refer: the character of the Rus-

sian nation, Russian imperialism, and Russian orthodoxy. The paper then goes on to show that Russian radical forces, specifically the CPRF and the LDPR, compose their programs from different combinations of the way these historic experiences are reconstructed in Russian culture. A conclusion completes the paper.

From a systematic perspective, the three mentioned legacies are heavily interwoven as all three can be subsumed under what some authors conceptualize as one “cultural” legacy (e.g. Crawford and Lijphart, 1997). Still, their distinction seems plausible if the legacy concept is understood as an inductive approach. Imperialism and Russian orthodoxy can be traced as partly isolated reference frames in Russian nationalism. In that sense, national identity forms a core legacy within which “imperialism” and “orthodoxy” represent specific, and sometimes additional, characteristics.

Before we move on to the discussion of the legacy framework, the concept of right-wing radicalism shall be defined. Actors of the Radical Right are bent on a romanticized version of the nation that stands at the centre of promises to undo two developments of modernization: the growing autonomy of the individual vis-à-vis the community and the ongoing functional differentiation of society (Lipset, 1964, Scheuch and Klingemann, 1967, Minkenberg, 1998). Accordingly, right-wing radicalism is based on societal action, and more specifically on a range of counter-positions to rapid economic and cultural change. Ideologically, these counter-positions can be identified by the similarly charged terms of “ultra-nationalism” (Minkenberg, 1998: 33) or “nativism”. The latter is defined as “an ideology which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (‘the nation’) and that non-native elements (persons and ideas)

are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state” (Mudde, 2007: 19). According to Mudde’s definition and the core of Minkenberg’s concept, the notions of ultra-nationalism and nativism will be used interchangeably throughout this text.

2 Usable variations of usable pasts: the legacy approach and the study of right-wing radicalism

In his seminal article which first introduced the term, Jowitt used the “Leninist legacy” argument to give a pessimistic forecast on the outcome of Postcommunist transition. In Jowitt’s view, the region’s history of authoritarian rule and the delegitimation of individual autonomy during Communisms would hinder a quick development of rule of law and entrepreneurship. Jowitt rather expected populist leaders – the often-cited “demagogues, priests, and colonels” – to shape East European politics than democrats or capitalists (Jowitt, 1992: 300). His main argument concerned the “dichotomic antagonism between the official and private realms” (ibid.: 287) during the Communist period. The weak willingness of private individuals to identify with public affairs would lead, according to Jowitt, to “suspicion, division, and fragmentation [rather than] coalition and integration” (ibid.: 298) as predominant factors of political life in Eastern Europe.

To the general study of post-socialist transformation, Jowitt’s work has proved useful on two levels. First, it reminds us of the fact that cultural elements – in a

broad sense of the term “culture” – play a crucial role in the development of post-socialist societies. Indirectly, this elevates the Leninist legacy argument to a conceptual statement which answers the question “under which conditions and by which mechanisms distinctive components of the cultural legacy affect the outcomes of transformation at different levels” (Bönker and Wielgoths, 2003: 65). In short, Jowitt has therefore established a causal link between cultural elements of the past and institutional elements of the present.

From here, the legacy approach proved useful in a second step which systematically distinguished between different types of legacies. Beverly Crawford and Arend Lijphart identified six of them: cultural, social, political, national, institutional, and administrative/economic (Crawford and Lijphart, 1997). These categories may in themselves be debated. For example, many authors would probably merge cultural and national legacies as the development of nationhood is often attributed to cultural factors like language, ethnicity, and identity (Anderson, 1983, Gellner, 1983). Nonetheless, the legacy approach has been regularly used as a reminder that a balanced analysis of transformation processes needs to take into account both cultural and non-cultural factors and that both have to be analyzed in systematic ways (see Kopstein, 2003).

When using the legacy concept in order to better understand characteristics of right-wing radicalism, a further adaptation of the traditional legacy approach is necessary. If the dependent variable switches from the output of transformation to the shape of the radical right, we must examine attitudinal factors and their translation into societal or political action. Right-wing radicalism – if understood as in the definition above – is rooted in an ideology of ultra-nationalism, which means

that values and norms become constitutive elements of the *explanandum*. In the end then, the consideration of the impact of legacies to right-wing radicalism is reduced to establishing a connection between cultural variables of the past with cultural variables of the present.²

At the same time, however, this emphasis on cultural aspects blurs the distinction between independent and dependent variables. Both are composed of similar factors. The Leninist legacies Jowitt referred to have later been enumerated as “intolerance, exclusiveness, rejection of all compromise, extreme personalization of political discourse, and the search for charismatic leadership” (Tismaneanu, 2007: 36). It is not hard to see that these characterizations bear affinity to the radical right. Its actors have been identified “as Nazis, (...) others as conservatives and traditionalists. There are others who are simply occultists and mystics, anti-Masonic and conspiracy theorists, religious fanatics, primitive misanthropists, or clinically disturbed” (Gregor, 1998: 12-13). The close relationship between Leninist legacies and characteristics of the Russian radical right makes it difficult to judge if ultra-nationalism is an effect or a driving force for the post-Leninist value system we find throughout not only in Russia, but in wide parts of post-socialist Europe. What we can identify beyond this question of causality, however, are close interconnections between the ways nation, empire, and orthodoxy have been interpreted in Russia then and now.

² For this reason, this paper focuses on ‘cultural’ legacies and largely ignores other ones, such as social or institutional legacies. Of course, this does not mean that other ways of approaching the topic may identify different types of legacies relevant for the character and scope of Russian nationalism. In relation to the above mentioned distinction by Crawford/Lijphart, my categorization merges national and cultural legacies. This should not be understood as a general critique to the work of Crawford and Lijphart, but is due to the focus on right-wing radicalism which approaches ‘culture’ via the ‘nation’.

Before we get to the substance of those legacies relevant for the Russian radical right, we need to remind ourselves of a few prominent points in the debate of the legacy approach. The strongest criticism against Jowitt's work concerned his allegedly too general approach to Eastern Europe.³ Also Crawford and Lijphart made this point by hinting at the existence of at least two currents within post-socialist Europe, liberalist forces on the one hand and old elites on the other (Crawford and Lijphart, 1997: 8-11). Translated into the geographic dimension, it soon became clear that the different paths of political development in Central and Eastern Europe also need to be attributed to pre-Communist requisites in the field of economic and bureaucratic development (Kitschelt, 2003, Kitschelt et al., 1999, Ash, 1999/2000). Consequently, the explanatory value of Leninism in general remains a matter of debate. If pre-war experiences shape large parts of post-socialist development, one may well put into question the overall-effect of Communist elements (Kopstein, 2003: 239). In fact, I will argue in the following section that Leninist elements are mainly relevant as catalysts for traditions which reach back in the time before the Russian revolution.

In this light, Russia presents a special case within the Leninist legacy framework. The Soviet Union served as the motherland of Communism between 1917 and 1941, and after the war it constituted an anchor for the satellite states of Central and Southeastern Europe. If Leninism, or Communism, does not play a role in the explanation of post-Communist outcomes, where else should that be the case?

³ In fact, Jowitt was well aware of of intra-regional differences in Leninism: As „for the necessary genuflection to national differences: they exist. It is clear that different types of fragmentation will predominate in different countries“ JOWITT, K. (1992) *The Leninist Legacy*. IN JOWITT, K. (Ed.) *New World Disorder: The Leninist Distinction*. Berkeley, University of California Press. p. 299-300.

Studying legacies of the past on the culture of contemporary right wing radicalism reveals the specific significance of Communism for the understanding of contemporary societal developments in what Jowitt called Eastern Europe, namely not as an isolated period but a historic phase to be seen in context of (case-specific) longer historic lines.

3 Ambiguous references to Russian radicalism: nation, empire, orthodoxy

In general, it is possible to identify a wide range of reference points in Russian nationalist past-oriented discourses. “Russia has always had a surfeit of self-images, and has found it difficult to settle fast to one or other of them” (Hosking, 2002: 229). One reason consists in the diversity of cultural entrepreneurs referring to the Russian past: different perspectives, different accesses. Beyond this obvious fact, however, a selective approach to Russian history is fuelled by the particular ambiguity of many historic turning points that affect Russian national self-understanding.

For contemporary legitimization patterns of the radical right, three elements of reference seem to bear special importance – nation, empire, orthodoxy. Before discussing these in detail, a preliminary remark seems necessary that all three of these elements are to a high degree intertwined. The Russian nation rests at the core of nationalist reasoning and should be seen as an embracing mental concept.

Within the nation construct, ‘empire’ and ‘orthodoxy’ introduce major ambiguities.

Specifically, Russia’s status as an empire guarantees visibility and creates a perceived sense of greatness, but at the same time washes foreign elements into Russian nationhood. The ideal of the ‘simple’ Russian people – as embedded in national orthodox discourses – renders Russian society as ‘pure’ in its self-image, which at the same time solidifies its backwardness. Further inconsistencies arise with an eye on the brutal, but partially effective processes of modernization during the first decades of the Soviet Union. The nation could well be assigned a leading role in world history, but it fought mainly against its own people through the use of social hardship and repression. Russia’s orthodox messianism had turned into a pretence that needed to be feared within and outside the country – not exactly an ideal orthodox plea to place Jesus Christ at the centre of morality.

Obviously, these self-ideational inconsistencies should not be attributed to the Russian case alone. In general, nativist references to legacies are from the beginning bent to highlight certain aspects and stifle others. Any investigation into history must take into account these biases. However, the Russian case seems especially instructive because the evident ambiguities serve as an engine for the development of competing images of ultra-nationalism.

3.1 National identity

As one consequence of Russia's enormous geographic size, Russian nationalist entrepreneurs did and do face difficulties to identify the 'natural' boundary of belonging (and non-belonging) to Russian nationhood. Nationalists cannot – as is the case on most Central European states – simply externalize neighbouring cultures and therefore turn them into projection fields for national self-understanding. Instead, in order not to question the oppressive character of Russian geopolitical power, nationalist Russians had and have to lead non-natives, foreigners, barbarians – or however you want to label them – “out of oppression into brotherhood”, as a historicist of the Soviet period put it (Vähä, 2002). Developing an own national identity therefore resembled a “Sisyphean mission”: there was (and is) no separate nation state but rather a “‘core nation’ of the empire” (Piirainen, 2002: 151). National identity construction oscillates between ethnic and civic nationalism. When a civic self-image evolves, it undermines visions of the Russian nation in mono-dimensional cultural terms, and leads nationalists to complain about internal “Russophobia” (Horvath, 2005: 150-184).

As a result, concepts of Russian nationhood during its geographic expansion were varied in nature. In cultural terms, the Russian people (*narod*) shared a sense of cultural belonging that was distant from civic aspects. In a well known essay, the religious philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev characterized Russia as the “most stateless, anarchist country in the world. And the Russian people are the most apolitical people (...). Everything thoroughly Russian, our national writers, thinkers, publicists – all of them were stateless persons” (*bezgosudarstvenniki*, see

Bjerdjajew, 1992 (1915/18): 298).⁴ The different conceptions of the Russian nation come under the name *narodnost'*, which signifies faithfulness to traits of a national culture. The term was contested between two major camps: Slavophiles on one side and Westernizers on the other. Both demanded *narodnost'*, but defined it differently. The former saw “it in Russia’s Orthodox heritage and communal spirit (*sobornost'*), the latter [believed] that the Russian national spirit, having embraced Western civilization, was now in the process of creating its own national version of that civilization” (Oulanoff, 1985: 293).

Accordingly, both *narodnost'* camps conceptualized the Russian people as an organic and natural community. The main difference consisted in the relation to Western values. The Westernizers – among them the writer Turgenev as well as the intellectuals Vissarion Belinsky and Alexander Herzen (see Berlin, 1978 (1948)) – viewed liberal principles like individual autonomy, economic freedom and responsibility as pathways out of the country’s backwardness. In contrast, slavophilism – initiated by intellectuals like Ivan Kireevsky and Aleksei Khomyakov (Gleason, 1985) – formed a multi-faceted intellectual movement that focused around the ‘true’ way of living among ‘simple’ Russian people whose best defence against harmful Western influences was to gather around the churches in Russian villages.⁵

The split between Slavophiles and Westernizers continues far into the 20th century. To mention the best known example, the conservative dissident writer and

⁴ This and all other statements from Russian texts or internet sites have been translated by the author, TB.

⁵ The term *sobornost'* consists of a common radical that simultaneously leads to *sobor'* = cathedral and to *sobranie* = assembly.

Nobel prize winner Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn is cited with “sweeping diatribe[s] against Western decadence and the individualist heritage of Renaissance humanism” (Horvath, 2005: 171). The assaults by Solzhenitsyn and other conservative nationalists indicate a cross-cutting cleavage between ideologies of domestic societal organization and foreign policy orientation. Russian nationalism “was tentatively anti-liberal and anti-Western” (Gregor, 1998: 1); the West turned into something “alien and hostile” (Devlin, 1999: 9).

From a nationalist’s perspective, Perestroika and other reforms of the late 1980s triggered off two contradictory developments. On the one side, the destruction of the ailing Soviet state was largely embraced. Again, Solzhenitsyn serves as a handy example for those conservatives that judged Soviet rule as hypocritical and highly repressive. In their eyes, the Soviet regime completely lacked the spiritual dimension as demanded by the Slavophiles. For nationalists, the state had never been supposed to remain Marxist-Leninist, but expected to become “theocratic” and “sacred” (Gregor, 1998: 1).

On the other side, the results of Gorbachev’s and Eltsin’s reforms were devastating. The great power status was lost, the economic crisis made Russia completely dependent on the West, and inequality rose to unprecedented levels. The break-up not only of the Soviet Union, but of Russia itself turned into a real possibility. None of these developments helped overcome the prejudices many Russians (and all nationalists) cultivated with regard to the West.

Subsequently, a revaluation not only of the Tsarist state, but also of the Soviet regime took place (Devlin, 1999: 89). After all, both systems had been able to hold back Western pressure and influence much more effectively than seemed to

be possible under Gorbachev and Eltsin. During the Tsarist and Soviet past, Russia had to be reckoned with as a great European power. After the breakdown of the Soviet Union, authoritarian nationalists increasingly linked their views of the 'right' traditional order to the Soviet Union as well.

Of course, the differences between Tsarist and Soviet power and their relevance for Russian self-understanding were still heavily discussed (Maslin, 1992, Slater, 1998). After all, the October Revolution had thoroughly and cruelly destroyed traditional Russia after 1917. Yet, in the worldview of Russian nationalists both regimes are much more reconciled than was the case during Soviet times, when Russian nationalists sooner or later belonged to the dissident camp. Where reconciliation was not complete, various elements of the Russian and Soviet past were singled out as points of reference. The Tsarist heritage is constructed as the unity of worldly and religious power, in Tsarism's personification of state authority and in its valuation of the peasant society. In complementary terms, the communist legacy rests on "a principled hostility to political pluralism and private property and markets in the economic sphere, an emphasis on substantive (social) justice as opposed to formal equality before the law, and the glorification of heroic and military achievements of the previous regime" (Vujačić, 2003: 384).

3.2 *Empire*

As already alluded to, a good part of the complexity of Russian nationalism can be bundled in Russia's character as an imperial power.⁶ Expanding the Russian lands to the South and the East – a development which started in the 16th century – brought power and influence, but at the same time required more resources to uphold political control. Most of the time, this was barely managed by the Russians alone, which led to an influx of Western European bureaucrats and military in the 18th and 19th century. On the one hand, state effectiveness and efficiency were achieved at higher levels than could be expected from a peasant society, which Russia was until well into the first decades of the 20th century. On the other hand, a gap of understanding opened up not only between gentry and peasantry, but between state and society in general.

Generally, the Russian state managed its extension to Caucasian and Central Asian territories through the partial cooptation of local elites. The practice culminated in the Soviet Union – a pseudo-federal state dominated by Russia(ns) with a multi-ethnic people and semi-loyal peripheral elites (Carrère d'Encausse, 1978). Throughout history then, representatives of the Russian state could not automatically be ascribed ethnic or cultural Russian identities. The peripheral elites' limited command of Russian language was one problem, rendering regional affairs into incomprehensible black boxes from the perspective of the centre. But also the spirit of Russian power was affected, as populations and elites on the periphery usually did not belong to the Orthodox or even the Christian faith. As a conse-

⁶ „Empire“ being understood as an authoritarian power relationship exercised on peripheries exercised on peripheries by a strong centre BUNCE, V. (2005) *The National Idea: Imperial Legacies and Post-Communist Pathways in Eastern Europe. East European Politics and Society*, 19, 406-442.

quence, the Russian state was Russian and non-Russian at the same time. Not only the Soviet Union had been built on multi-national principles; Russian expansion had already before included many non-Russian territories, and there were only limited efforts of compelled assimilation.

In this guise, Russian expansion accommodated contradictory tendencies for Russian nationalists. The great power status undermined the purity of the nation in racist terms, the binding force of Christian orthodoxy in religious terms, and its independence from the West as well as from the East and South in territorial terms. Unlike in more Western European national traditions, the barbarians did not come from outside; they were considered alien but also had their given place within the state. Thus a major threat to national purity came from within. The ambiguity of Joseph Stalin – who was of Georgian origin – constitutes a paradigmatic object of reference. On the one hand, he defended his home, the ‘Soviet nation’, in World War II. On the other, millions of Russians (and others) became victims under his rule.

In political terms, many of these ambiguous tendencies were and are rooted in Russia’s status as a large-scale empire. Its imperial tradition separates it from all other post-socialist states, with the arguable exception of Serbia (Vujačić, 2003: 361). Whereas nationalism and ultra-nationalism in non-imperial post-socialist countries almost inevitably bear an anti-Russian component, the Russian people and their leader do not have clear options of identifying the ‘other’ which deprives them of an important instrument of self-identification.

3.3 Religion: orthodox Christianity

Alongside the national and imperial elements, orthodoxy should be seen as the third long-term cultural variable that influences contemporary Russian ultranationalism. Its relevance is linked to the claimed attribute of Moscow serving as the Third Rome (Krahn, 1963). After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Moscow considered itself the remaining protector of true Christianity. While church and state went increasingly separate ways in Western Europe, Moscow stood strongly for a unity between the Christian religion and the state. These two elements contributed to Russian self-understanding as a messianic civilization, an interpretation pattern that was encouraged by the fact that Moscow was the only major European capital that had been able to resist Napoleon. In 1848, the writer Fyodor Tyutchev wrote: “Russia is above all the Christian Empire; the Russian people is Christian not only through the orthodoxy of its beliefs but also (...) by that ability of renunciation and sacrifice which forms a basis of its moral nature” (cited from Krahn, 1963: 212).

From here, two rhetorical links can be reconstructed. First, the traditional life of the Russian people, notably their passive faith, became a semi-holy entity which defended the last bastion of true orthodoxy in an otherwise schismatic Europe. Second, orthodoxy turned into a stronghold of anti-liberalism. Defendants of the old regime referred to theocratic reasoning. In other words, there was no serious constitutionalism based on civic principles. The state theory of Tsarist Russia, represented by philosophers like Konstantin Leontiev or high officials like Konstantin P. Pobedonostsev, combined church and state in highly reactionary ways

(see Masaryk, 1992 (1913): section XVII). Its mission consisted in opposing the allegedly catastrophic egalitarian and utilitarian influences from the West, which could only lead to a revolution like the one leading to the Napoleonic wars all over Europe.

When the Russian revolution finally took place in 1917, the Orthodox Church of course lost its status of being synonymous with the Russian state. Under Stalin, attending a church or publicly showing faith constituted a great risk of being identified as counter-revolutionary (which then usually lead to a strong possibility of a fatal prosecution). Later the oppression of churches, monasteries and their abiders loosened somewhat (Dunlop, 1983: 167-200). Still, during Soviet rule, the church almost completely ceded its autonomy to the state by entering into cooperation and collaboration with the KGB (Laqueur, 1993: 231-243). While the official church managed to survive, the consequences for the spread of faith were devastating. By 1991, around only ten percent of the Russian population defined themselves as believers (ibid. 222).

Thus during post-socialist transition the Russian orthodoxy was present mainly as a formal institution, without a strong societal support. Due to its weak basis in the population, the church's claims for public moral principles could only have a limited impact. Instead, political leaders, not only those from the radical right, rediscovered Orthodoxy as a legitimation element (Anderson, 1994, Behrens, 2002). Numerous new cathedrals were built and tax exemptions were granted to the church. Patriarch Alexius II, the Patriarch of Moscow and primate of the Russian Orthodox Church, was until his death in 2008 widely respected as a symbol of Russian unity. In that function, he represented the Orthodox Church as an “em-

pire-saving' institution" (Dunlop, 1995), serving discursive needs of both the political mainstream and extremist segments of society.

4 Anti-modernist radicalism in the contemporary party system: imperial and social nationalism

In this section I try to demonstrate how all major political parties in Russia have indeed employed the three discussed legacies in different ways. As a result, all contemporary political (parliamentary) parties should be labelled nationalist, and several of them even ultra-nationalist (see below). According to the definition used in the introduction, this ultra-nationalism turns them into parties with program elements of the radical right. However, the label does not necessarily apply to the whole range of the political parties concerned. As Mudde suggests, a true party of the radical right should be identified by a programmatic "populist radical right core ideology (...) without any significant alternative faction(s)" (Mudde, 2007: 40). Of course, not all Russian parties can be classified as radical nationalist in the sense of this definition. Still, several authors have concluded that nationalist elements characterize all political parties which have managed to remain relevant despite the growing authoritarianism of the regime (Buhbe and Makarenko, 2007, Glass, 2003, White, 2006).

For the description of the party system, two kinds of data should be taken into consideration. On the one hand, election outcomes and the resulting distribution

of parliamentary seats offer information on the electoral success of parties. This information shows us that Russia has undergone a rather thorough restructuring; from a highly fragmented party system with hardly any structure at all in the 1990s to moderate fragmentation and stability during the rule of President Putin (Gel'man, 2006, Stykow, 2008). Currently, four parties are represented in the Duma, the two regime parties "United Russia" (UR) and "Just Russia" (JR), the Communist Party (CPRF) and the National Liberal Party (LDPR).⁷

Of course, this de-fragmentation and de-polarization has come at the price of re-authorization and a considerable degree of repression to opposition forces in Russian society (Fish, 2005, Remington, 2007). Still, a second kind of data reveals that the concentration to a small N party system corresponds to long term support rates in the electorate. Table 1 reveals that only the different parties of power as well as the CPRF and the LDPR have been able to draw on a more or less stable electoral basis throughout the last 15 years of post-soviet development (see Table 1).

Table 1 about here

In the context of competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky and Way, 2002), non-regime parties have limited opportunities to preserve a position in the party system. First, and as a side-condition of authoritarianism, independent parties are restricted to strategies that will not challenge the parties of power excessively.

⁷ Data is from the Russian Central Electoral Commission, www.izbirkom.ru, downloaded on March 9, 2009.

Accordingly, their programs may only contradict the ideology of the ruling elite to a limited degree. Secondly, within the limits accepted by the regime these parties need to develop strategies of visibility in order to match the many advantages the regime parties enjoy during electoral campaigns. It has long been argued that an articulation of ultra-nationalism represents a plausible agenda of evoking attention in the public debate while not fundamentally challenging the underlying regime (Shlapentokh, 1999).

Therefore, a central element of reference for nationalist parties is the ideology of the party of power. In contemporary Russia, it is represented by the party and the Duma faction of “United Russia” (UR); a party which was founded in 2001 and merged major competing parties of power in a step to signal allegiance to President Putin. In its program for the 2007 Duma election, the party alluded to various nationalist images of the past, for example by the promise to “further develop Russia as a unique civilization”, to defend the “general space of [Russian] culture and language” as well as to “strengthen Russian sovereignty and the capacity to defend the country”.⁸ Some scholars argue that the programmatic profile of UR is rather low while the party’s main function consists in dealing with intra-elite conflicts for the redistribution of national resources (Remington, 2008). While this is certainly true, the party has to compete with other parties during election times in order to keep up the façade of “imitation democracy” (Shevtsova, 2007: 41). Even within the authoritarian regime competing parties therefore have to position themselves vis-à-vis the dominant party of the regime. During the 2007 elections, no-

⁸ The citations are from the party’s homepage, see <http://edinros.er.ru/er/rubr.shtml?110099>, viewed on March 11, 2009.

tably Vladimir Putin – who headed the party list on the ballot – put special emphasis on aggressive messages with strongly nationalist content (White, 2009).

As table 1 demonstrates, the only parties in the Russian system which may claim to be permanent competitors to Russia's various parties of power are the CPRF and the LDPR. Both parties claim to be mass member parties and present membership numbers of about 600.000 each (Glass, 2003: 3, 6). Their character as parties with a countrywide basis is also supported by the fact that their parliamentarians have widely been elected in the party list section of the electoral system (Remington, 2001: 179). A further indicator for the parties' homogeneity is their coherent voting pattern in the State Duma (Bremzen et al., 2006: 20).

To what extent are the two parties nationalist or nativist, and how can their specific profiles be characterized? The LDPR resembles a strong leader party, in which few decisions are made without the approval of its president Vladimir Zhirinovskiy (see Oschlies, 1995). The party never again reached the 23% of the party list vote of the 1993 Duma elections, but managed to stay present beyond electoral thresholds in almost all nationwide elections since.⁹ The LDPR, and with it Zhirinovskiy, is characterized as populist, occasionally anti-Semitic, nativist, and internally autocratic (adaptations from Mudde, 2007). Zhirinovskiy became known in the early 1990s with his extreme great power rhetoric, speculating about the need for Russia to create a counter-balance to the immanently instable regions south of the territory of the former Soviet Union. This position, which is laid out in various versions of his notorious book "The Last Surge to the South" from 1993, remains the cornerstone of Zhirinovskiy's ideology of "revolutionary expansionism"

⁹ Again, see www.izbirkom.ru, downloaded on March 11, 2009.

(Umland, 2006: 387). Its nationalism is merged with strong elements of fascism as the would-be pacification of “the south” by imperial means is not only seen as an extension of Russia’s external power but also as a means of Russian spiritual re-birth (ibid.).

Beyond Zhirinovskiy, the LDPR program has been developed from a tight nationalist agenda and now covers a broad range of political issues. Its core remains radical nationalist when alluding to the “great Russian people, (...) to the re-establishment of the country’s territory and to the defence of compatriots abroad”.¹⁰ Of course, the last two statements aim at blurring the difference between the Russian Federation and the Soviet Union because only the latter underwent territorial change, namely by dissolution in late 1991. Accordingly, the reference to “compatriots abroad” indicates a post-imperial moment by openly approaching all citizens of the former Soviet Union who may feel discontent with the post-soviet political structure. A hint into the same directions constitutes the LDPR’s openness to paganist beliefs (Moroz, 2007: 247) which marks the potential inclusiveness of nationalist imperialism.

Whereas the LDPR thus presents a rather clear case for a right-wing radical populist party, the CPRF’s programmatic emphasis rests on a different mix of socialist and nationalist elements. Even more openly than is the case with regard to the LDPR, the party program calls on a rebirth of a Soviet order which shall be established in a “Fatherland in entirety and independence”.¹¹ According to the pro-

¹⁰ The party program can be approached at <http://www.ldpr.ru/partiya/prog/963/>, downloaded on March 11, 2009.

¹¹ The quotes are taken from the party program, <http://kprf.ru/party/program/>. Download March 11, 2009.

gram, this can only be reached by a re-foundation of a brotherly union of Soviet peoples. Again, the play on words with the term “Soviet” marks an explicit flabbiness concerning the actual borders of the Russian nation.

The CPRF’s heritage – as the successor party of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) – is a direct link to the party’s big power ideology and makes its force in Russian society unsurprising. Since the early 1990s the party’s leadership openly accepted the three Tsarist state principles of ‘autocracy, Orthodoxy, and nationality’:

Russia’s modern communists no longer attempted to justify socialism in terms of historical development as conceived by Marx but were (...) indebted to Marx’s Russian nationalist and religious opponents. Their vocabulary and ideas were derived (...) from nineteenth-century apologists for Russian autocracy and Russian Orthodox nationalism (Devlin, 1999: 168).

Also, the would-be internationalism of the Communist Party has been reinterpreted. Gennadi Zyuganov declared that Russia had a “special historic responsibility’ [of resisting an] ‘immoral and materialistic West’, [which] seeks to extract mineral and cheap labour from the less-developed countries in a process of exploitation” (Gregor, 1998: 10).

Altogether therefore, the nationalist elements of the ideologies of both major nationalist political parties do not differ very much. This does not mean, however, that there are no differences. While the two parties converge in their anti-Western nationalism, their visions of how to embed domestic society into a national vision take different paths. Table 2 presents population views of the three relevant parties in the State Duma after the elections of December 2007 (see Table 2). Given

the poor research situation concerning party action in Russia, such data is preferable to official party programs, which are of limited relevance to the content of political action in parliament and in the public (Remington, 2007).

Table 2 about here

According to the data, voters are aware of ideological differences between the two parties on virtually all domestic issues. The CPRF is seen as a party of social protection: it is judged to favour social equality and state regulation of the economy and it combines societal stability with a preference for independence from the West. The LDPR's profile is less pronounced. A relative majority of the population (39%) sees it as a defender of individual freedom and success, but 24% believe the party prioritizes social equality. 35% of voters consider the LDPR as directed towards a free market economy, conversely, 28% judge it to be a force that supports state regulation of the economy. Moreover, 34% see it as an opposition party, 30% as a supporter of the dominant regime. Symptomatically, in the same survey 15% of the population rate the LDPR as being a leftist party, 22% consider it to be rightist. Interestingly, only 12% think the LDPR is a party that prioritises "Russian patriotism".¹² In contrast, the CPRF is clearly identified as a "leftist" party by 56% of the voters, with a policy prioritising "social justice".

¹² Again see VCIOM: ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ ПАРТИИ: «ИДЕЙНЫЙ ПОРТРЕТ», Пресс-выпуск № 565, 31.10.2006 (source to table 2). A further 16% think that the LDPR could be attributed to all three camps (leftist/rightist/patriot) at the same time, 25% find it hard to answer.

Similar to the image attributed to the LDPR, only a minority of 10% believes the CPRF is mainly a Russian patriotic party.¹³

The unclear image of the LDPR stems partly from the great ambivalence of its actions. In public, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and his allies present themselves as oppositionist forces, usually by populist reasoning (Tolz, 1997, Williams and Hanson, 1999, Oschlies, 1995). In parliament, however, the LDPR is reported to have supported President Putin in more than 85% of the votes in the Russian Duma in 2000, only slightly topped by Unity (Remington, 2006: 18). The CPRF offers a different picture, being non-supportive of the President and his administration most of the time. However, as table 3 shows, even the CPRF offers legislative cooperation occasionally. While it usually opposes the President in social policy and privatization issues, it partly supported Putin's judicial reform, which consisted in re-subordinating the judiciary under central and vertical power (Hendley, 2007).

Table 3 about here

The different degree of oppositionalism can be partially traced back to the crucial juncture of the 1993 founding elections. El'tsin had abolished the CPSU in 1991 and introduced a Voucher privatization (in 1992) against fierce Communist resistance. As a result, he could only be treated with great hostility by the newly

¹³ I attribute these low figures to the general nationalist mainstream as discussed above – since all major parties capitalize on national issues, voters do not see the necessity to notice the feature as a distinguishing marker between party profiles.

founded CPRF. The LDPR, however, possessed and used an – albeit limited – coalition potential.¹⁴ A relatively large and disciplined faction with a blurry program could be used by the Kremlin for temporary coalitions. Zhirinovskiy was able to deliver these votes. It should not be overlooked, however, that Putin's takeover in the year 2000 served quite a few of Zhirinovskiy's long time political aims. Russian military showed toughness in Chechnya, put an end to the deliberately weak position of the centre in comparison to peripheral regions, and foreign policy switched to a more self-assured and aggressive mode when the West did not reply to Putin's signals of cooperation after September 11, 2001 (Shevtsova, 2007).

These different situations reinforced the programmatic division between radical factions in the Duma. The CPRF was locked in an ideological mix that can best be described as socialist nationalism with community oriented elements. In a way, Putin's distinct national profile as well as his rather successful economic policy could have served as a starting point for a less fierce confrontation. However, his authoritarian and bureaucratic style of government meant the oligarchic structure of resource exploitation remained in place, and the resulting extreme societal inequality could not be brought into line with the idea of a social community at the heart of the Russian nation. Consequently, the CPRF stayed on oppositionist course. The party had to take into account that its electorate makes up the lowest income quartiles, with more than two thirds of its supporters evaluating economic reform in negative terms (Rose et al., 2001: 430).

¹⁴ This, of course, is a reference to Sartori's party system approach which measures a party's relevance by its potential to oppose or cooperate with other parties. SARTORI, G. (1976) *Parties and Party Systems*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Zhirinovskiy, on the other hand, had less problems of reconciling contradictory goals. For some years, the LDPR has been able to score on the one issue where it presents a structured position: imperial nationalism. With the party's active support, the Duma voiced its support for boycotts of Moldovan and Georgian products, and for an extremely hostile foreign policy against Estonia and Latvia. Also with regard to Serbia and Kosovo, a traditional sphere-of-influence position is voiced. Concerning internal policy, the LDPR shows another imperial characteristic by favouring the assimilation, rather than the expulsion, of non-Russian migrants.¹⁵ In exchange for the regime's translation of imperial nationalist ideology into real world foreign policy, Zhirinovskiy was able to exercise what is expected from a nationalist politician – to pay homage to an authoritarian leader by supporting him in parliament. In return, Putin acted generously by decorating Zhirinovskiy with two Presidential medals, one as a “Merited Lawmaker of the Russian Federation” (2000), another for “Merits for the Fatherland” (2006).¹⁶

5 Conclusion: the Russian case and the study of “Leninist legacies”

As discussed above, exploring the relevance of legacies for right-wing radicalism means to link a culture of the past to a culture of the present. With our results

¹⁵ This was one of the LDPR's positions in the most recent Duma election campaign of 2007 (see *Vremya Zhirinovskogo Moskva*, p. 2 – the campaign newspaper was widely distributed in Moscow in November 2007).

¹⁶ The information can be found in the Russian version of Wikipedia: Жириновский, Владимир Вольфович, retrieved 12.3.2008.

from the Russian case study, we are now able to further specify the implications of this approach.

First, and most importantly, the different profiles of political actors with an ultra-nationalist agenda have shown that given symbols may be referred to in diverging ways. The way political actors place symbols into their actions and image-making is contingent. While the KPRF and the LDPR – and indeed other parties from the Russian political mainstream – converge in important elements of their ultra-nationalism, they have highlighted different elements of perceived Russian legacies and combined them in original ways. Both parties help themselves by choosing from a “‘tool-kit’ of symbols (...) and world-views”, and they have used them “in varying configurations to solve different kinds of problems” (Kubik, 2003: 343).

Specifically, the Communist camp uses the traditional image of the nation as a socially coherent space. It would be an overstatement to say that something like an industrialized ‘*sobornost*’ serves as the idealized point of reference. Still, Zyuganov and others frequently refer to the Russian *narod* as a non-alienable community (see previous chapter).¹⁷ In turn, the LDPR puts a stronger emphasis on the imperial dimension of the Russian nation, insisting on external ethno-political dominance paired with domestic assimilation. Both the socialist nationalist and the imperial nationalist harmonies are familiar to all Russian conservatives, and indeed also to the small liberal camp that opposes Russian conservatism.

¹⁷ These Russian terms have been defined and explained in section 3.1 of the given text.

Second, however, the investigation has also shown that radical political actors are not completely free in their choice of “pick[ing]-your-past-and-assert[ing]-its-relevance-for-the-present” (Kubik, 2003: 319). Rather, developing a specific profile depends on context conditions and opportunity structures. In order to again pick up an example from the Russian radical right, the appearance of a strong leader in Russia’s “super-presidential regime” (Holmes, 1993/1994) decisively shaped the profile of Vladimir Zhirinovsky’s party. Although itself a leading party, its big power ideology needed to cope with the inauguration of the president as the national political leader, and Zhirinovsky’s rhetoric adapted accordingly.

Hence, the focus on culture inherent to most legacy research needs to be accompanied by a context of non-cultural elements, such as institutions or social developments. The study of post-socialist legacies has shown that innovation has only taken place if a cleared social space has allowed for a change of established pathways (Ekiert and Hanson, 2003: 30). Neither CPRF nor LDPR have the perspective for such an open field of action. They are bent towards conservatism because re-combining patterns of the past with patterns of the present is an option only government forces have. Important actors like Zhirinovsky or Zyuganov are in a position to encourage, influence and shape public discourse. They have managed to extract two distinctive tracks of Russian ultra-nationalism from a broad supply of traditional worldviews. As the situation stands, they will however not be capable of enlarging its supporting camp as long as the regime as a whole reiterates its anti-modernist and anti-Western rhetoric.

Third, it has become clear that dealing with legacies relies on a distinct concept of culture. Culture is neither seen in substantive terms, as is the case in objectivist

approaches, nor does it evolve from an intensive rapprochement of an observer trying to interpret observed facts in an anthropological manner (as, for example, in Benedict, 1934). The legacy approach is closer to the latter variant, but offers a second order view. It is an interpretation of interpretations in the sense that world-views of (political) actors are identified, described, and in the end classified.

The peculiar note of the legacy approach then consists in the difference of intentionality between first order and second order perceptions. While the second order observer's aim is, or should be, to properly make sense of the legacies concerned, the character of the first order observation is characterized by ideological intentions. To state an example of our case, it makes little difference if the perceptions of Russian nationalists concerning Russian imperialism are correct in a historiographic sense. Rather, these and other traditions need to be understood as "symbolic vehicles of meaning" (Swidler, 1986: 273). Within Russian society, reference symbols such as the nation or the orthodox church serve as a "grammatical structure" (Dittmer, 1977: 555) which lends orientation to intra-societal communication.

Fourth, the orientation of Russian nationalists towards their pasts puts into question the frequent use of the legacy approach as "Leninist". Certainly Jowitt also viewed the communist past as only one period with explanatory relevance among many others (see above). One specific hypothesis in Jowitt's work – that characteristics of the Communist phase might endanger democratic and capitalist transformation – has been transformed into an approach of systematically screening political developments of the present to perceptions of the past. The Leninist label has outgrown its original meaning. In our example of the Russian radical right, the

weight of Leninist or Communist elements is indeed rather limited. Most elements of the usable past have their root in pre-socialist times. In that sense, the Leninist period serves as a lens through which even more distant historical periods can be viewed and originally interpreted. In contrast, symbols from the Communist time make little sense to Russian nationalists when taken in an isolated manner. As has been shown, this is largely due to the ambivalent character of many first order interpretations of the Soviet period. Again, Stalin and his ambiguous impact on the morality of the Russian nation can serve as an eminent example.

Do all these explanations lead to a causal link between legacies and right-wing radicalism in Russia? They do, but only in a weak sense (see Kitschelt, 2003). Due to a lack of persistent research, it is not possible to more closely identify the concrete mechanisms that transmit the identified cultural patterns. While it is possible to make plausible assumptions “*why* some cultural patterns are replicated and others are not” (Kubik, 2003: 319), the current state of affairs does not allow for the identification of *how* they are fed into political life. For this, a much more thorough knowledge of Russian political processes would be needed. Concerning the governing actors, the relevant knowledge is restricted for those outside the government, due to the clandestine character of Kremlin politics. With regard to the Duma and its factions, the knowledge gap stems from the almost exclusive focus of pertinent research on institution building (Remington, 2001, Remington, 2007, Bos et al., 2003). This constitutes a further field of investigation into the relationship between legacies and political party actors that goes far beyond the forces of the Radical Right.

6 Annex

Table 1: Party Preferences, 1995-2008

Political Party	1995	1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2008
Communist Party	7	20	18	20	18	8	8
Liberal Democrats	8	6	5	6	8	6	8
Union of Right Forces		1	4	4	3	2	
United Russia			12	13	8	24	58
Women of Russia	5	4	3	4	3		
Yabloko	8	10	5	4	5	2	
Just Russia							3
None/DK	38	38	50	46	48	49	

Source: White (2006: 10). The data for 2008 are taken from VCIOM, a public opinion institute.

Table 2: Images of parties among population; “how do you evaluate the general political and ideological line of party...?” (2006)

Political/ideological aim	United Russia	KPRF	LDPR
A. [Equality versus Freedom]			
Priority of social equality	37	58	24
Priority of individual freedom and personal success	40	14	39
Hard to Answer	23	28	37
B. [Position of State in Economy]			
Orientation at free market economy	44	14	35
Orientation at strong state regulation in economy	33	56	28
Hard to Answer	23	30	37
C. [Openness to societal change]			
Orientation at thorough changes in society	39	22	38
Orientation at stability, refusal at thorough change	36	48	25
Hard to Answer	25	30	37
D. [Position towards regime]			
Rather an opposition party	16	48	34
Rather a party that supports the regime (“партия, поддерживающая власть”)	65	23	30
Hard to Answer	19	29	36
E. [Integration into European structures]			
Integration into European structures and global society	38	13	27
Preservation of Russian independence, its distinct way, independent of the West	40	57	35
Hard to Answer	21	30	38

Source: VCIOM: ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ ПАРТИИ: «ИДЕЙНЫЙ ПОРТРЕТ», Пресс-выпуск № 565, 31.10.2006. See <http://wciom.ru/arkhiv/tematicheskii-arkhiv/item/single/3503.html>.

Table 3: Mean Presidential Support Scores by Faction, by Legislative Issue Category (2000-2001)

	De-Monopolization (n=46)	Judicial Policy (n=33)	Social Policy (n=18)
Unity	92.8	89.8	87.5
LDPR	94.8	81.1	80.3
CPRF	5.8	60.6	21.4

Source: Remington (2006: 19).

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