(Re)creating the Soviet Past in Russian Digital Communities. Between Memory and Mythmaking

ELENA MORENKOVA
Université Panthéon Assas – Paris 2

Abstract: Twenty years after the collapse of the Soviet regime, the reactivated identity search in Russian society is focalized on the construction of the new positive identity, taking roots in a mythologized image of Soviet past. Starting from this initial assumption, the article examines different strategies of creation, mediation and protection of mythologized Soviet memory within a sample of Russian-language digital communities. Focalizing on the analysis of diverse online memory practices, the article argues that, while a positive, mythologized memory or a 'patriotic interpretation' of history in digital communities emphasizes an actual requirement of positive re-evaluation of Soviet history in Russian society, it is constructed in opposition to the dominating discourse and state memory politics, bringing out a desire to form a space of counter history and memory. As the openness of internet space and the ease of expressing opinions creates a favorable environment for diversified memories and historic interpretations, the patriotic interpretation finds itself being constantly debated by counter interpretations of various origins (personal memories and judgements), and therefore constrained to adopt various responses to resist those challenges, the age of participants being one of the major factors determining these responses.

Keywords: digital communities, Runet, Soviet past, nostalgia, memory, identity, myth construction.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian population was confronted with a grave identity crisis. The debate over the Soviet past, launched during the period of *glasnost',* was reactivated in the first decade of this millennium. While in both cases the discussion over the past runs parallel with the identity search in Russian society, the vector of this process has changed. In the course of the past decade, scholars have observed a significant turn in the attitude towards Soviet heritage in Russian society. Tired of the sensational historical disclosures that had been in vogue during the 1980s and 1990s (Smith 1996), the Russian population became responsive to the reintegration of a selected glorious part of So-

viet history in a new national patriotic narrative. On the one hand, in current Russia the state mobilizes a number of Soviet myths, particularly the one of the Great Patriotic War, in order to form a base for a new mixed patriotic 'Russian-Soviet identity' (Etkind 2009; Scherrer 2007: 192). At the same time, sociologists observe a simultaneous rise of Soviet nostalgia and the reinforcement of historical components of national identity (Dubin 2009); they claim that the mythology of the Soviet past progressively replaces social memory of the Soviet past (Gudkov 2008: 11).

The current dynamic search for a new interpretation of Soviet history in new media becomes 'pivotal to memory culture' as it has taken shape in the former USSR (Rutten 2010: 172), since the internet offers a relatively free space for unofficial, non-academic, personal and diversified tributes to collective memory. In modern Russia, memory and history work in new media follow two main directions: 1) the search for a new consolatory mythology and 2) a search for a common positive identity. Both reflect a crisis of social connections (Zvereva 2011). This article considers different strategies of creation, mediation and protection of the first direction – that is, a mythologized Soviet memory – in Russian digital communities by putting online memory practices into the context of the current identity search in Russian society.

My argument builds on a long-term study of diverse online memory practices (the creation of and identification with utopias, nostalgia, collective recollections, imitations of academic debates, patriotic reinterpretations of history, clashes of personal memories, clashes of interpretations). The sample of this study constitutes Russian-language digital communities that deal with the Soviet period and that are located on the most popular Russian 2.0 platforms, Livejournal and Vkontakte. General observations in the period April-November 2011 were followed by a qualitative analysis of four communities observed during November 2011 - March 2012. Relying on empirical findings from these communities, I develop a two-fold hypothesis.

First, I argue that, although those communities that mediate a positive, mythologized memory or a 'patriotic interpretation' of history are popular, well mobilized and active on the Runet[1] (they thus emphasize an actual requirement of positive re-evaluations of Soviet history), their interpretations are primarily constructed to oppose the dominant discourse and state memory politics, paradoxically perceived as false. As such, they exemplify a public desire to construct a space of counter history and counter memory. Second, as digital media offer a stimulating environment for the expression of diversified memories and historic interpretations, the patriotic perspective is extensively debated and re-interpretated in contradictory ways by different parties (with interpretations often taking the form of personal memories and judgements). By implication, the patriotic interpretation is constrained to adopting various responses and to resisting the challenges of online communication.

In focusing on these two hypotheses, I devote special attention to the following questions: What are the different strategies of myth construction and myth protection adopted by different communities? What happens in the case of interpretation clashes? And how, if at all, does

---

[1] Composed of 'Russian' and 'internet', this name is commonly attributed by Russian internet users to the Russophone segment of the internet.

the age of the participants and their personal experience of Soviet epoch impact their choice of strategy?

The approach proposed restricted me to a focus on communities mediating a 'patriotic' interpretation of history, inevitably suggesting the classification of communities as 'patriotic' (or mediating a pro-soviet, positive memory) and 'critical' (or mediating an anti-soviet, negative memory). That being said, I am fully aware of the evident disadvantages that this approach implies: indeed, an undiluted sample of 'pro' and 'anti' communities is difficult to obtain, since a part of the debate advocate a much more complicated view on the Soviet epoch and a purely 'positive' or 'negative' vision is quite rare even within radicalising online discourses. Thus the distinction 'pro' / 'anti' does not need to be taken as a rigorous border between two isolated types of communities, but rather as a methodological assumption in order to facilitate the data collection.

Methodology

Initiated and guided by internet users, the discussions over the Soviet past in blogs and digital communities represent an incredibly rich palette of competing visions and voices. To identify our first sample of digital communities, I have examined at length the two most popular platforms of 2.0 applications, the social-media site Vkontakte [In contact] and the blogging service LiveJournal (hereafter referred to as VK and LJ). The choice for VK was justified by its position of Russia's most popular free social networking site, which boasts more than 100 million active users and a daily audience of more than 25 million users (VTSIOM 2010). Our choice for LJ was determined by the leading role that this platform plays in post-Soviet political and social debate.

The difference between the audiences of these two popular 2.0 platforms allows one to classify their users in two different age groups. VK is generally considered to be a social network for teenagers. According to official data posted on the VK's welcome page, 'More than 60% of users are over 25 years old'; however, an extensive alternative independent analysis shows that the majority of the active audience is born between 1985 and 1993 (habrhabr; Vkstat). In spite of contradictory statistical data, the reputation of the source as a principal network of file sharing and communication for schoolchildren is regularly confirmed. VK's repeated involvement in scandals concerning the leakage of versions of the 'Edinyi Gosudarstvennyi Ekzamen' (EGE) / the Unified State Exam, an annual high school diploma examination is illustrative. In 2009, during the exam schoolchildren posted photos of their exam sheets on VK, asking for help in formulating answers (Securitylab.ru 2009). In 2011, the Ministry of Education accused the network of having provided a platform for groups offering 'leaked' variants of EGE (Gazeta.ru 2011).

With its 8.7 million users – a number that boils down to about 27 percent of the total number of Russian internet users (Alexanyan 2009) – LJ carries the reputation of Russia's most politicized platform of blog hosting (Etling et al. 2010). It represents 'the discussion centre of the Runet' and offers a platform for a substantial part of social and political discourse in Russia (*ibid*). A number of authors note the political and social importance of LJ debates in the context of the lack of critical debate in traditional media in today's Russia (Lonkila 2008: 1130; MacLeod 2009: 13; Krasnoboka 2002). Politicians of all ideological

orientations, public personae, civil activists as well as bureaucrats use LJ to express their credos and to share opinions with their readers (Gorman 2011).

In short, while LJ is at the heart of 'adult' political and social communication, VK, privileging interaction and group creation, is a favourite place for chat-like communication of Russian youth. LJ is a privileged tool for young historians and journalists – professional and amateur alike – to comment on one or another point of Soviet history in analytical, elaborated, long texts; VK is more conducive to a permanent circulation of ideas and to their diffusion among a broader audience.
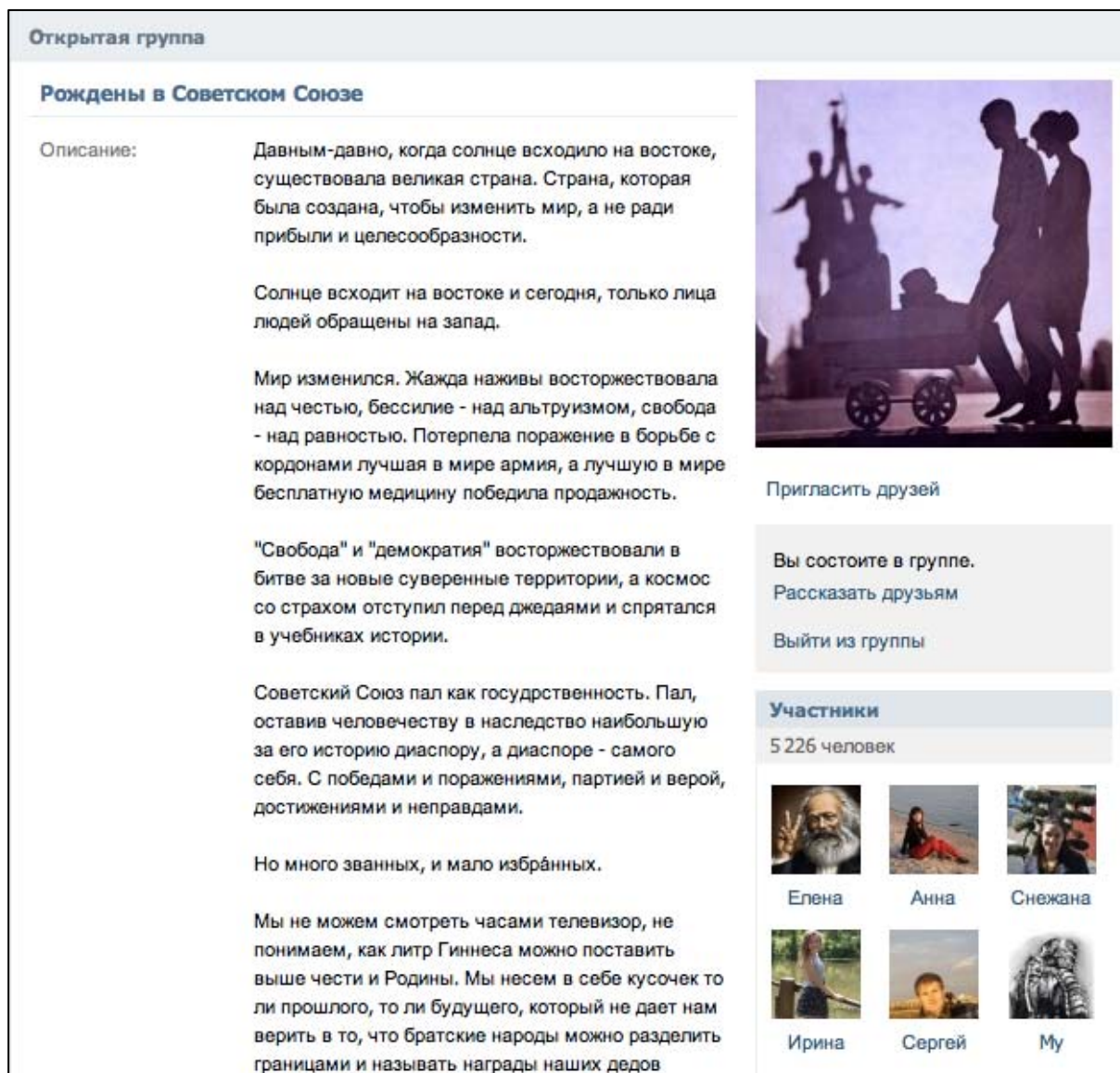
To define our first sample of digital communities, I started by looking for different formations of the key-word 'USSR' ('Soviet Union', 'Soyuz', etc., both in Cyrillic and in English[2]) in the description of communities on VK and LJ, using the built-in web search engines of the two platforms. The first research confirmed that, while community creation is one of the principal functions of VK, LJ is mostly focalized on personal expression. Thus, a search for the word 'USSR' generates 16,914 communities for VK, but only forty-six for LJ; a search for the word 'Soviet Union' results in 780 communities for VK and seventeen for LJ. A manual selection of relevant communities was necessary both to identify popular and active communities (over 500 members for LJ, over 1000 for VK), and to eliminate too specific or marginally relevant communities (for example, philatelists who mentioned 'Soviet stamps' in the description of their LJ community). The snowball method (checking internal and external hyperlinks within each community leading to recommended communities or communities being part of the friendlists, and the manual selection of those relevant for the study) that followed this first selection permitted me to identify relevant sites exterior to these two platforms (Wikisources, standalone blogs). Two main criteria were taken into consideration during the selection: the popularity of a community (numerous, highly frequented, recent updates) and its relevance in terms of a positive memory construction. For these reasons, some communities were considered representative without ranking among the most numerous in the segment of history-related discussions.

The intermediate sample that resulted from the key-word search and that I subjected to an initial quantitative analysis represented more than 350 resources (individual blogs, communities of blogs, SNS communities, standalone blogs, websites), all of them constructing a certain image of the Soviet past. Before moving on to a qualitative analysis of the debate within a small number of the most representative communities, I considered the general representation of the Soviet past in digital communities: to what extent can the search for a 'positive identity' be estimated solely by quantitative methods? A simple look at the communities in the sample indicated that those sharing a positive interpretation of Soviet history, ranging from a warm nostalgic attitude to a militant 'patriotic' representation, predominate on both platforms. Their dominance was confirmed when, by way of example, I measured the attitude of users towards the most controversial person of Soviet history, Joseph Stalin. Searching for the key word 'Stalin' on VK identified 887 related communities: only three of them declared a predominantly critical, anti-stalinist position, and only one of them enjoyed wide popular (the community 'Joseph Stalin burn in hell', 2,101 members). On the other hand, one of the

---

[2] It was found that many users prefer to use English in the naming and description of communities; for example, the use of 'Back in the USSR' instead of 'Obratno v SSSR'.

numerous communities in the glory of Stalin, 'Joseph Vissarionovitch Stalin in our hearts', counted over thirty-two thousand members. The same situation typifies LJ, where the search for the key word 'USSR' allowed us to identify only three relatively large and active communities with an 'anti-Soviet' orientation[3], while the same search revealed thirty-nine 'pro-Soviet' communities (groups devoted to the glorification of Stalin, militant patriotic communities, and a segment of seventeen particularly popular nostalgic communities).

Figure 1: A screenshot of the community 'Born in USSR'

Source: http://vk.com/club38534

---

[3] http://ru-anti-ussr.livejournal.com/profile/, http://svobodu-narodam.livejournal.com/profile, http://antisovetskie.livejournal.com/profile/.

A common point of all those communities is an indulgent, positive attitude to Soviet state and society, a favourable appraisal of the key figures of Soviet history, in particular Joseph Stalin, a deep emotional attachment to Soviet symbols and an unconditional celebration of the victory of the Soviet Union in the Great Patriotic War. At the same time, throughout the different communities neither the discourse constructed nor the strategies adopted to protect this discourse from counter-interpretations are the same. In order to identify the fiercest discussions and the different strategies of discourse construction and protection, I examine four concrete cases. First, I consider a case of myth creation and Soviet nostalgia based on an example of two nostalgic communities within (1) VK and (2) LJ. Then I explore a case of a patriotic interpretation of Soviet history, drawing on (3) a Wikiproject created by a circle of bloggers engaged in a struggle for unearthing 'true' history and (4) the most popular Soviet patriotic community of VK. Where possible, I reveal the age of the participants of the discussions[4]; this way I highlight the impact of the age of users on memory practices in VK and LJ.

Digital Nostalgia

The boom of Soviet nostalgia has become a general phenomenon in Eastern and Central Europe (Todorova 2010; Velikonja 2010). According to the general understanding among a number of scholars, nostalgia appears when certain elements of the present are perceived as defective (Shaw et al. 1989: 9-15), while post-Soviet nostalgia is often associated with social pessimism, the longing for an imaginary past, an aspiration of hope for change (Doerr 2007), a 'nostalgia for dreaming of a better future' (Esche et al. 2009). In the Russian context, scholars note the gap between nostalgic idealised reproductions of the past and actual traumatic history, but also therapeutic and compensatory virtues of the nostalgia: an 'idealistic and romantic' imagery borrowed from the Soviet past provides an 'antidote' to the social and moral despair and helps to fill the expressive deficiency of post-socialist Russia, revealing a desire to inhabit a familiar symbolic environment (Oushakine 2007). The abundance of nostalgic digital communities on the Runet confirms that Russia is no exception to the general rise of Soviet nostalgia in post-Soviet countries. Indeed, nostalgic communities enjoy popularity both in VK and LJ, ranking, in case of the latter, among the most frequented history-related communities. The most popular of all nostalgic communities on VK, 'Born in the USSR' (http://vk.com/club261331), numbers over eighteen thousand members, while fifteen other nostalgic communities enlist at least over one thousand members each. The most popular nostalgic community of LJ with the suggestive name 76_82, - the group is dedicated to memories of 'those who had the luck to be born between 1976 and 1982' – counts over fourteen thousand permanent members and over ten thousand permanent readers. It is important to note that the number of members is decreasing as communities start to deal with more distant periods of history: thus, community 70_75 counts only 550 members; community 62_69, that carries the subtitle 'Only "Old men" are going to battle' enlists 360 members.

Inevitably, the age of the internet users impacts online memory construction and makes the period of the 1970s and 1980s, that is, the Brezhnev one, the most represented on the Ru-

---

[4] All information has been taken from open sources (user profiles), the author being aware that problems with the veritability of this material may exist, as social network communities facilitate the identity theft (Goldman 2004) and identity sharing (Stutzman 2006).

net. By analyzing nostalgic communities on VK and LJ I will show that, while nostalgia is generally closely connected to the life experience of an individual, some digital communities make it possible to observe different manifestations of not personal, but collective nostalgia: many members of society, seeing images and perceiving discourses in the public sphere, can be nostalgic for times of which they have never had any personal experience (Müller 2007). Here we deal not with personal, but with mediated memories engendered by the exposure to constructed public memory in popular culture: mediated by social and technical protocols, these types of memories are erasing boundaries between present and past (van Dijck 2010). Thus, the increased visibility, mobility and access to Soviet or Soviet-stylized imagery on the internet makes it quite easy for a post-Soviet generation of internet users to familiarize itself with 'the Soviet epoch', which is collectively constructed in digital spaces.

The phenomenon of the *postmemory* can also be observed within digital communities: a relationship of the second generation to (often traumatic) experiences that preceded their births but were nevertheless transmitted to them by family frames; while they 'remember' those experiences only by means of the stories, images and behaviours among which they grew up, they have been transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Different practices of 'online nostalgia' emphasize one of the major features of the postmemory: its connection to the past is not actually mediated by recall, but 'by imaginative investment, projection and creation' (Hirsch 2008: 107).

Escape to the Soviet Wonderland

The difference between nostalgic communities on LJ and VK betrays itself immediately from the periodization of the communities. On LJ the most popular nostalgic communities, as their names explicitly indicate, are structured along distinct historical periods and they include specific age groups (the communities 76_82, 70_75, 62_69 mainly unite internet users born in those periods). By contrast, the VK nostalgic communities simply target all those 'born in USSR'. The seven largest nostalgic groups on VK are named straightforwardly 'Born in USSR' – a title which young people born in this period associate with distinctive shared memories of historical events. One might wonder what memory of Soviet life someone born in 1983 – such as, for example, the creator of the group 'Born in USSR' (http://vk.com/club205297), Alexandr Kharvat Habarov – could have preserved. But then it seems that the younger generation does not differentiate between sixties, seventies and eighties; for them, 'USSR' becomes an exhaustive description of the entire period.

A first peculiarity of VK's nostalgic communities is closely related to the young age of the platform's audience. Having no or almost no experience of life in the Soviet Union before the *perestroika*, and, consequently, no personal memories of that period, members of VK communities have adopted a strategy of identification with an abstract glorious past. Thus, their identification is solely based on the date of their birth, which happened to occur before the legal end of USSR in 1991. The discussions in the 'Born in USSR' communities are less devoted to personal memories of the Soviet childhood and are focused instead on glorifying the Soviet Union and Stalin as a symbol of State power. In discussing current politics, community members compare the Soviet Union to contemporary Russia from every conceivable

angle. By implication, the difference between those online nostalgic communities and online patriotic communities sharing a militant positive attitude for the USSR is rather illusory.

To preserve an appearance of the uniqueness of the Soviet Union, users have no choice but to identify themselves with the memories of elders. Most often the discussions about life in USSR imitate and reiterate collective memories, which are based on re-telling real-life personal memories. One example is a discussion entitled 'To all children of the USSR' in the community 'Born in the USSR', which revolves around a popular text that was circulating on the Runet in 2007 ('Detiam SSSR', 2007)[5]. The anonymous author of the text – who obviously experienced life in the USSR in person – appeals to 'children of the 60s, 70s, 80s', and narrates about the cheerful life of Soviet children in spite of (or rather thanks to) the absence of the current infatuation with security. The author describes all kinds of 'insecure' amusements that Soviet children used to enjoy (spending time outdoors until late at night without cell phones, drinking water from the pump, fighting, going fishing without adults, etc.). He concludes by stating that in the Soviet era, children were in fact freer and more responsible than the current overprotected generation.

The comments following the text support the position of the author, though their writing style (grammatical errors, usage of youth slang), their profile photos and the age indicated in the profiles suggest that the majority of participants is substantially younger than him and thus exemplifies the 'overprotected' generation. Even those who admit not having experienced the 'happy childhood' of said text and are unable to share the same sentiment proclaim: 'I was born too late, but I loved this description' (Igor' Nikolskii 24.04.2009). Some users express regret about not being able to integrate their own experience into the depicted framework of memory. Today's generation, claims Iuliana Volchkova, born in 1990, does not have any joyful memory to share:

> I didn't have the luck to be born in those times. I read this text, and I felt sad… It seems that I am a part of the new generation, but I have nothing to remember, nothing to tell…
> (Iuliana Volchkova 15.02.2009)

The fact that personal contributions and eye-witness accounts of life in the USSR are scarce, does not make the participants of the communities less proud to belong, by virtue of their birth date, to the powerful Soviet Union of their dreams – a nation that is constructed and perceived as an imaginary utopian 'great country' where everything was organised for a common wellbeing. The romantic self-description of one of the 'Born in USSR' groups (5,252 members) perfectly captures this shared image:

> Once upon a time, when the Sun rose in the East, there was a great country. A country created to change the world, and not for profit or reasonability.
> Today, the Sun continues to rise in the East, but people's faces are turned to the West.
> The world has changed. The desire for gain has triumphed over honor, weakness over altruism, and liberty over equality. **The best** army in the world has lost in a battle of borders, and **the best** medicine **in the world** has been conquered by corruption. (…)

---

[5] For one among the various online versions of the original text see http://smi2.ru/Wellda/c311236/.

> The Soviet Union fell as a state, having left in heritage to humanity **the biggest** diaspora **ever**, and a piece of itself in this diaspora. (…) We are carrying in ourselves a piece of either past or future, which prevents us from thinking that fraternal peoples can be separated by borders and from calling our granddads' decorations 'antiques'. (…)
> We were born in that country. Our Motherland had **the best** science, education, army, and space technologies **in the world**. Our Motherland acting almost alone triumphed over fascist Germany and after that became one of **the most powerful** countries **in the world**. (…)
> The USSR has disappeared. But we remain. ('Rozhdeny v Sovetskom')

The text is constructed as a fairy tale – one that narrates about a wonderland that enjoys perfect social, economic, legal and political systems, a megalomanic project with a global mission. The obsessive repetition of such superlatives as 'the best in the world', 'the biggest', 'the most powerful' (education, army, science, technologies…) emphasizes the exceptional place of the Soviet Union in the world.

The self-description in question exemplifies what memory-and-media expert Vera Zvereva typifies as social escapism: while the repression of negative memories of Soviet life allows the 'Soviet generation' – that is, people who truly were 'born in USSR' – not to devalue their lives, the 'post-Soviet generation' constructs a consolatory myth of USSR. Indeed, for these young people Soviet imagery fills the ideological vacuum that they experience because of the absence of any collective positive symbolic and system of values in contemporary Russia, apart from individualistic values of the consumption society. Illustrative is the fact that well-educated Russian young people frequently associate the Soviet epoch to a particular 'spirituality' ('*duhovnost'*') specific to Soviet society and Soviet people, and absent in contemporary Russia, associated with 'vulgarity', 'spiritual impoverishment', 'consumerism' (Gluschenko 2011). This myth is all the more utopian since the post-Soviet generation does not possess any substantial memory of it. The sentiment of belonging to 'something great' gives this group a self-perception of being unlike others, of being different from those not born in the USSR. Members of the community proclaim their adherence to 'real' values, as opposed to those of consumer society: 'We cannot watch TV for hours and do not understand how one can place a litre of "Guinness" above the honour and the Motherland (…)' ('Rozhdeny v Sovetskom').

The community discussions also foreground another mechanism of idealisation of the Soviet past; they confirm the relationship between nostalgia and social pessimism. Users seem to be deeply dissatisfied with the political, economic and social situation in contemporary Russia. A large number of discussions revolve around the most acute social problems of modern Russia: members of the community 'Born in USSR' accentuate in their debates the 'demodernisation and alcoholism in Russia' ('Demograficheskaia demodernizatsiia', 2009) and the 'catastrophe' in the domain of higher education provoked by current reforms ('Katastrofa obrazovaniia', 2008). The thread 'Kinutoe pokolenie' / 'Bilked generation' clearly shows the sentiment of having been cheated by elites. They claim that due to fraudulent privatization, the entire generation of their parents was dispossessed of the immense national riches the Soviet people owned ('*narodnoe dostoianie*') by a 'bunch of traitors'; nowadays, those financial and political elites 'consider us a labour force that will multiply their riches' ('Kinutoe pokolenie', 2008).

They juxtapose a joyless reality with a reassuring and comfortable image of the country that is endowed with all the merits and virtues that they currently miss: the status of world superpower, a powerful army, a vast military potential, space-technology leadership, social equality, free public services, social security combined with respect for older generations and, most of all, a clear and comprehensive positive vision of the future. Set against the defects of today's Russia, which are obvious for younger generations, the USSR becomes a perfect utopia, an imaginary country, and an impossible ideal scheme for social improvement. But can one be nostalgic for a future? As Yurchak comments on the example of the new generation of Russian artists, the turn to Soviet topics and aesthetics cannot be reduced to pure nostalgia. It has to do more with the utopian ideals and 'meaningful aspects' associated with the past, the attempts to engage with the present context of Russian life; this nostalgia is a longing, not for the Communist past, but for the 'missed opportunity of creating an alternative world' (Yurchak 2008: 276). On the other hand, Oushakine highlights that the old forms of Soviet imagery and symbolism can be inhabited by new meanings, because of the inability of the existing forms to communicate a relevant content; the digital age facilitates the 'mechanical retrofitting' of the new meanings into the old images (Oushakine 2007: 453). In the context of the search for a lost feeling of collective belonging and of re-establishing cultural connections with the past that would be neither horrifying nor humiliating, appeals to Soviet imaginary reflect a longing for a positive structuring effect of old frames (*ibid*). Thus, an idealized image of certain features of the Soviet past among young Russians might be considered an attempt to build a collective framework of identity based on a selected part of the Soviet past, a yearning for something they have missed and that, in their eyes, could have been an alternative to the modern situation.

'When the grass was greener and the girls were younger'

VK's nostalgic communities practice identification with an abstract great power incarnated by the USSR under the mask of nostalgia. Similar communities within the more 'adult' LJ, where members have concrete memories of the reality of Soviet life, represent a different picture. They act as true popular encyclopaedias - a sort of archive of personal memories of childhood and youth, of a period when, as Russian saying claims, 'the grass was greener and the girls were younger'. Thus, the community 76_82 is explicitly named 'Entsiklopediia nashego detstva'/'The encyclopaedia of our childhood' (http://76-82.livejournal.com/). This and similar 'virtual attics of memory', stocked with authentic personal accounts, revive nostalgic memories of Soviet childhood and youth in a friendly atmosphere. Discussions revolve around Soviet everyday life and social practices, Soviet fashion, Soviet food; members exchange files of Soviet music, films, posters as well as photos of Soviet artefacts that they own – think old tape recorders or newspapers, the 'shifting objects of materiality', important part of non-verbalized memory of childhood and youth (Rasmussen 2012: 114). An especially popular memory practice in those communities is the collective recollection and reconstruction of missing fragments of memory. Users regularly ask their fellow members to help them remember the title of a movie, a book, a street…

Looking for a movie of my childhood.
It seems to me that it was a Scandinavian movie for children, where in one of the episodes there was a battle of snowballs (…). I understand this is little information, but maybe somebody recalls this movie… (Naissuryzark 13.12.2011)

Folks! I cannot remember what we used to draw on gift cards for fathers and grandfathers in primary school (…). I wanted to show it to my son and to please our granddad, but my memory is letting me down. A Saint-George's ribbon, maybe? Or was it for May 9? Please help me remember! (excel' 23.02.2012)

Often a wave of collective recollection is triggered by users' appeal to confirm that one's own memory is a correct reproduction of what took place in reality. A discussion initiated by user 'yana_anders' provides a rich example of a collective reconstruction of a component of an urban landscape. The author asks members of the community to help her to reconstitute an episode of her own childhood and to testify the existence of a chinked fence between a city's garden and an amusement park that she used to climb through in her childhood:

I retain a childhood memory of a chink in a fence between the Park Kultury and Neskuchnyi Sad, where you could wriggle through to pass to Park Kultury without a ticket. Is that true? The friends I say this to tell me that that there never was any fence there (…). I'd like to know who is right. Was there a fence and could one wriggle through a chink without a ticket? (yana_anders 07.12.2011)

Not only do the fifty-nine user responses that follow confirm the existence of a chink – and, by implication, the correctness of memory; they also specify the memory by introducing numerous details. Thus, user 'nastyn' specifies that the fence boasted 'a black grid' (nastyn 07.12.2011), and the author exclaims 'Exactly! It was black indeed!' (yana_anders 07.12. 2011). User 'Ezhik_v_tumane', born in 1979, confirms:

Oh yes, there was one, a chink in a black fence on the side of Oktiabr'skaia. That's how we used to go skating for free ten years ago (Ezhik_v_tumane 07.12.2011)

In this case of collective reconstruction of pieces of personal memory we deal with the classic mechanism of a 'frame' of social memory as described by Maurice Halbwachs. According to Halbwachs, we need others to remember, because we are remembering not only as individuals, but as members of a group. As a result, personal analysis cannot be separated from an appeal to collective memory and to the accounts of others (Halbwachs 1952). From this perspective, the internet provides an extremely favourable environment for a collective recollection – one that facilitates the maintenance of a collective identity of a group based on a shared common memory, but also has an impact on relations between individual and collective memory. Thus, as a number of scholars note, the idea of *collective* memory has become problematic in the age of digital networks modifying the very sense of the relationship between collective and personal. Digital spaces of memory, increasing visibility, mobility and access to personal memory discourses, 'blurs' the dichotomy of personal and public memory

for individuals involved in memory making within mediatised networks, because the formation of memory is structured both *through* and *by* digital networks (Hoskins 2009: 29, 40). In the digital age, the *connective* memory replaces the *collective* one: internet transforms the conditions of cultural remembrance, and the moment of connection becomes the moment of memory (Hoskins 2009, 2011). Van Dijck, developing a concept of mediated memory, also highlights the evolution of our understanding of relations between collective and individual memory in the age of mediated memories: while the notion of collective memory is grounded exclusively in the way individual minds meet, one way or another, networked memory requires a new understanding of agency where minds and technics are intertwined. Social interactions are inseparably enmeshed in technological systems and sociality and technicity are co-evolving (van Dijck 2010). As in the observed case of nostalgic communities, personal memories and accounts are mediated within digital communities, thus reaching wide, often anonymous audience, and becoming part of a global digital culture. The aiding of memory observed among members within the online community 76_82 is illustrative of collective memory in the digital age.

Although the discussion is mostly consensual, the consensus is fragile and based on various strategies of protection. As a rule, one deals with a more or less explicit regulation of standards of expected behaviour. In one community named 'Druzia SSSR' / 'Friends of the USSR', it is clearly indicated in a disclaimer that 'here, it is forbidden to criticize the USSR'. Group moderators aim to prevent clashes of memories as much as possible, in some cases of conflicting interpretations they opt for expulsion or for an avoidance of negative input rather than dialogue. It is not rare that members whose memories do not fit the dominating discourse are chased from communities. In his article 'Sovetskii cherdak rossiiskoi blogosfery' / 'The Soviet Attic of the Russian blogosphere' Russian sociologist Roman Abramov describes how a member of the LJ community *Soviet_life* was banished for expressing an 'anti-Soviet attitude' (Abramov 2011).

Another form of resistance to negative memories of the USSR is the collective exclusion of an author who introduces memories or reflections that undermine the dominant positive image. After having published a text devoted to Soviet women in the community 76_82 user 'mgsupgs' was rapidly excluded from the discussion, not by formal ban, but owing to the attitude of other members. In a provocatively generalizing post, this user described the difficulties that Soviet women faced to obtain cosmetics, perfume and to stylize their looks in an age of an underdeveloped consumer goods industry. Making fun of Soviet female fashion, and undergarments in particular, he concludes, 'it was very difficult for a Soviet woman to stay a woman, but they made an effort…' (mgsupgs 30.08.2011). The riposte of members was immediate: user 'prishvin' assessed that 'the current text characterizes the author as a child of alcoholic parents' (prishvin 30.08.2011); user 'nikerbriker' stated 'don't judge all Soviet women by your own mother' (nikerbriker 30.08.2011); users 'rgkot' (born in 1977) and 'karamergen' both diagnosed serious mental problems, because 'an anti-Soviet attitude is a serious mental disease' (rgkot 30.08.2011). Several other users qualified the author as a 'troll' – that is, a person publishing provocative texts in order to disturb the equilibrium of a community. The community refused to take the text seriously and, as nobody entered into an argument with the author, he was excluded – although never formally banned – from the community.

Digital Spaces of Counter History

Having analysed nostalgic communities, I will now consider an example of patriotic interpretations of Soviet history. This section considers two examples of communities developing patriotic discourse: a Wiki project titled 'Mify SSSR' / 'Soviet Myths'; and a VK group 'USSR in our hearts', which – with more than 208 thousand members – is by far the best-visited among all USSR-related groups. Although strongly differentiated in terms of audience reach, the two communities do share a main point: both claim to be bearers of 'true, patriotic history' as opposed to 'false' or 'falsified' official history.

Antirevisionism: virtual imitation of an academic debate

The community 'USSR myths' is a collective project created by a number of easily recognizable professional and amateur historians and journalists who circulate their vision in different media and use their personal blogs as an extra communication channel. The permanent authors of this collectively built site are part of an 'antirevisionist' wing within LJ, which presents a 'true' interpretation of Soviet history, in opposition to 'revisionist' attempts that are commonly perceived as a parochial, one-sided version of history that emerged in the Soviet glasnost' period. According to the 'anti-revisionists', this period was characterized by Russian elites' servility towards the West and by the unconditional adoption of a Western version of Russian history – one that not only distorted objective historical facts but also impeded national pride. Their main goal is to struggle against the preponderance of this 'Western' interpretation of Russian history – which, in their view, was written and superimposed by the victors of the Cold War – by denouncing it as scientifically unfounded and ideologically tainted.

　　Among the young leaders of this struggle for national history we find, for example,

- Alexander Diukov (LJ nickname 'a_dyukov'), a thirty-three-year-old PhD in history, director of a non-governmental organization called 'Historic Memory', and author of popular history books focusing on the exploits of Soviet people in the Second World War[6];

- Alexey Isaev (LJ 'dr_guillotin'), a thirty-seven-year-old military historian, author of a dozen books against the theory of Viktor Suvorov[7];

- Dmitrii Lyskov (LJ 'lord'), a thirty-two-year-old journalist and author of numerous books and articles on Stalin's repressions[8];

- and a number of other popular bloggers writing on historical topics for large audience[9].

---

[6] 'Za chto srazhalis' sovetskie liudi' / 'What were Soviet people fighting for' (2007), 'Velikaia obolgannaia voina-2. Nam ne za chto kaiatsia!' / 'Great Slandered War – 2. We have nothing to repent' (2008).
[7] The key point of the theory of Viktor Suvorov (Rezun), spread in Russia since the publication of his book 'Icebreaker' in 1992, is an assertion that Stalin was preparing an aggression against Germany in 1941.
[8] '"Stalinskie repressii". Velikaia lozh' dvadtsatogo veka' / 'Stalin's "repressions". The greatest lie of the twentieth century' (2009), '1937. Glavnyj mif XX veka' / '1937. The main myth of the XX century' (2010).

The influence of these commentators on the historical sector of the blogosphere is confirmed by the fact that all of them are so-called 'bloggery-tysiachniki', that is, bloggers whose posts are regularly read by at least one thousand persons. By checking their 'friend' lists (the list of mutual LJ friends), I discovered that they recognize each other, at least virtually, as friends, and that they are creators, moderators or members of related communities promoting a patriotic interpretation of Soviet history[10]. Despite the community's relatively small audience (it rarely yields more than 800 views per day), I consider the site 'Myths of USSR' representative of the patriotic interpretation of Soviet history, since it recapitulates the main ideas of the 'anti-revisionist core' of the Runet.

The Wikiproject 'Myths of USSR' is interconnected with an eponym LJ community and a site titled 'Lost Empire', which hosts an impressive collection of statistics concerning the USSR. The first distinctive feature of this community, which claims to present 'not only the fullest collection of myths of USSR, but also their refutation', is its proclaimed ambition to evoke a high-level debate. The strategy adopted to create a positive image of the USSR is different from the one in use in nostalgic communities. Indeed, instead of claiming 'We remember', the authors have chosen to privilege objectivity and bare facts. The project aims to 'restore historical justice' through an objective, non-ideological, fact-based analysis of Soviet history: the authors emphasize that all their arguments are based strictly on historical documents. Eager to develop an academic-style debate, the project proclaims its openness to every contributor under condition that his or her article is based on serious work with historic sources.

The second distinctive characteristic of this project is its self-positioning in relation to the dominant discourse. The 'anti-revisionist' image of Soviet history is constructed in opposition to this discourse, which is considered to have been falsified and to be ideologically incorrect. The project's prime aim is presented as a response to the dominating interpretations in offline historic research. According to its contributors, existing research provoked 'a vague sentiment of incorrectness, discrepancy and lie' in the project's 'collective of authors' who decided to look into a number of historic questions themselves and to verify dominating interpretations by working directly with historic sources. The very first results of their research, claim the authors, were '…strikingly different from those that others tried to impose'. The authors experienced their fight against 'the obstructions of lies and speculations' as 'quite an interesting and fascinating activity': that was, claim the authors, the beginning of the project 'Myths of USSR' ('Lost Empire'). They thus develop a form of counter history that they broadcast by means of new media.

The 'Myths of USSR' site is structured like an encyclopaedia: the myths and their refutation are classified according to concrete historical periods: the Russian state and society before 1917; the revolution and the civil war (1917-1921); collectivisation and repressions (1921-1941); the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945); and finally, the USSR after the war. Judging by the tags that are attributed to each article as well as the number of articles in each section, the period that is considered to brim most with 'myths' is the Stalinist one: the largest

---

[9] Alexei Markov (LJ _redrat_), Andrei Rakovskii (LJ a_rakovskij), Grigorii Pernavskii (LJ sirjones), Igor Petrov (LJ labas), Nikolai Anichkin (LJ wolfschanze) etc..

[10] actualhistory, 3a_cccp, 1941_45, antirevisionism, back_in_ussr, cccp_foto, glamur_marxism, golodomor 3233, ledo_kol, west_soljenicyn and a considerable number of others.

number of articles concern Stalin, the Great Patriotic war, State terror, and repressions. The site deals not only with the myths of unknown origin that are widespread in collective memory, but also with the concrete persons who are known as the myths' creators. A special section listing 'Fakes and fakers' includes, for example, Sergei Melnikoff – the author of the anti-Soviet site 'S fotokameroi po lageriam' / 'All over the camps with a camera'[11], Viktor Suvorov, the author of controversial works on the role of the Soviet Union in the Second World War and the controversial works of some Western historians such as Antony Sutton and Robert Conquest. A number of movies on historical subjects, for example Andrei Kravchuk's 'Admiral', are also considered as 'falsifying' ('Falshivki i falsifikatory', 2011).

In January 2012, the 'Myths of USSR' site hosted 124 articles on various topics. To illustrate the construction of a positive interpretation of history and its clash with personal memories, I will consider two articles: the first deals with the collectivisation and the period of 'destroying the *kulaks*[12] as a class' ('Kulaki'/ 'Kulaks'), and the second deals with food-supply shortages and standards in the USSR and contemporary Russia ('Pitanie v SSSR' / 'Foodstuffs in the USSR').

In the article 'Kulaks', the authors refute the following formula: 'Millions of strong farm owners, called 'kulaks' by lazy peasants, were deported to a Siberia where they perished'. They open their refutation by considering the social history of this category of farmers, which emphasizes the allegedly unfair, iniquitous way the kulaks enriched themselves: 'Knowing how these peasants have become 'rich proprietors', it's easy to imagine why they were disliked by their fellow villagers'. In this part of the article the author refers to a historical treatise by Sergei Kara-Murza, a Soviet-Russian political philosopher who is reputed for his anti-liberal and anti-western convictions. The second section, which is entitled 'Sabotage' and which describes the subversive activity of the kulaks after the revolution, focuses on theft and the slaughter of draft animals. According to the site contributors, the *kulaks* 'openly terrorized Soviet authorities and their fellow villagers'.

The next two sections provide a statistics of deportations of kulaks (approximately 2 million) and describe the mortality in the places of deportation that, the author claims, was hardly above the general mortality rate in the USSR; the 'insignificant' rise is explained by the context of Civil war. The 'Amnesty' section examines the next historical phase: the reintegration of *kulaks* and their children in the Soviet society. In the conclusion, the author sums up the team's findings:

> The overall number of kulaks and members of their families deported is 2 million […] (which) represented 2,1% of the (Soviet) population. During several decades, these persons (…) robbed their neighbours. After the revolution, they started to steal directly from the kolkhozes, wreck the grain purchase, organize arsons, pogroms, […], and murders. In the 1930s their actions were one of the main reasons of a terrible famine […]. And for all these crimes they were just deported, and more than a third of them within the limits of

---

[11] http://www.gulag.ipvnews.org/, acceded August 2011
[12] Before the October revolution of 1917, the word 'kulak' was employed in the rural world to designate well-to-do peasants, owing land and often using wage labour. The Soviet regime regarded kulaks as 'exploiters' and thus a class enemy; in Soviet dogma, they were opposed to 'bedniaks' (poor peasants) and 'seredniaks' (mid-income peasants). In 1930, the 'liquidation of kulaks as a class' was approved by the Politburo.

their region. […]. The actions of Soviet authority can be characterized as not only dictated by the historical necessity, but also as quite human ('Kulaki', 2011).

Immediately after the article appeared online, a discussion emerged in which a number of users try to oppose this interpretation by narrating the experiences of their grandparents. Some claim to be disappointed by the overall tone of the article. Viacheslav Aksakov notes that the article leaves an impression of a one-sided analysis:

> This site pretends to give bare data without emotions, but it turns out that all Soviets are attaboys and all *kulaks* are scum. That's sad. (Viacheslav Aksakov 24.08.2011)

Another user – with the nickname 'Kievlianin – pravnuk kulaka' / 'Resident of Kiev – kulak's great grandson' – is sceptical about the purportedly disinterested tone of the article, branding it as 'red-brown Kremlin propaganda' (kievlianin – pravnuk kulaka 09.01.2011). Several other users refute the general idea of the article, sometimes quite emotionally, by introducing personal traumatic memories of the collectivization. Thus user Ivan writes:

> Author, you are a bastard! My grandfather was deported because he didn't want to join the kolkhoz, and you say they were saboteurs! Shame on you! (Ivan 08.06.2011)

User Evgenii, who also refers to the collectivization experience of his great grandparents, disputes the article's suggestion that most of kulaks were, one way or another, criminals and exploiters. He asserts that his own ancestors were repressed only because they possessed a prosperous farm:

> My great-grandfather and great-grandmother were peasants in the district of Vologda. In the 30s they were dispossessed by their own street neighbours (…). There were five or six sons in the family, that's why the farm was solid (…). Folks were in different situations, while your article claims that every *kulak* was a criminal. (My grandparents) didn't hire neighbours, didn't burn crops, they weren't involved in any counterrevolution activity, but all that didn't help them. (…) (Evgenii 22.08.2011)

Users who support the initial author's interpretation of collectivization opt to ignore this wave of personal evidence and to shield the original narrative from personal memories that contest it. Their adopted strategy is that of questioning the credibility of personal memories. User Krasnyi Elf / Red Elf joins the discussion and casts doubt on the credibility of narratives of grandfathers:

> What (your grandparents) tell you is not necessarily true (…) they are simply lying, most likely (Krasnyi Elf 22.08.2011)

This battle of contradictory memories continues in the article 'Pitanie v SSSR'/'Foodstuffs in the USSR', whose author seeks to refute the statement 'In Russia we started to eat better than in the USSR'. By relying on Soviet statistics, he tries to prove that in contemporary Russia people's eating habits have taken a turn for the worse. According to him, Soviet-era problems

of deficit were explained by the fact that the population's income surpassed the development rate of the food industry, while in today's Russia people cannot afford to buy goods despite the rich diversity of the assortment: '[this] automatically resolves the problem of deficit, lines and "running for food"'. The author underlines that

> …the standard of food in the USSR was not as bad in relation to international standards, and considerably surpassed modern standards ('Pitanie v SSSR', 2011)

Those users who experienced the 'running for food' that epitomized the Soviet epoch are quick to dispute this vision. User Matvei Gorbach publishes a long comment that describes daily life in a small town near Moscow which he inhabited in the 1970s:

> Two sorts of boiled sausage, two sorts of bloated sausage, two sorts of cheese, butter sold by weight, often spoiled. (…) The meat: only worth giving to dogs. Milk every day (…), but a queue as for a Mausoleum. (…) Bread delivered strictly two times a week, so sometimes you did not get any (…). Sometimes (my dad) managed to buy in Moscow some dumplings or bananas, a real delicacy. I should add that almost all the salesmen were boors and thieves. In our 4-person family of engineers we were spending 70% of salary on food. (…) For twelve years, we were living in a room of three by four meters, in a shared apartment, my mother begged her director on her knees to give us an apartment (…). I thought, with horror, that the same grey hopeless life was waiting for me. (Matvei Gorbach 16.06.2011)

User Stavlennik supports the memory of Matvei, accusing the authors of the article of lying. He claims that today the situation has improved for the majority of the population, comparing the consumption habits of his own family today and those in Soviet Russia:

> You are lying. (…) Talking of the food, today I drink two litres of milk a day, I couldn't have afforded it in any decade of my life in the USSR, my mother would have chopped my head off if I drank milk like that. The salads we make every day today, in the USSR we made them only for holidays. And for all that I'm a simple worker, not an oligarch. Today only parasites don't have a car, and in Soviet times, were there many people with cars? (Stavlennik 16.01.2012)

Other users rapidly mobilize counter-memories to try to block the negative vision: user Sergei, addressing Matvei Gorbach, refutes his evidence, introducing into the debate his own memory of the period:

> Your life was a real horror film. When I got married, I was immediately given a room in a student hostel, and a year later a one-room apartment, then a 2-room, then a 3-room apartment, without any *blat* [system of informal networks], only by dint of honest work. (Sergei 04.12.2011)

As the memory practices within this community demonstrate, users employ pretensions of objective analysis and an imitation of an academic approach to history to show the Soviet epoch in the best possible light, while relying on a biased selection of sources (patriotic au-

thors, Soviet statistics). Their partial approach to history does not go unnoticed by readers who experienced life in the USSR or share family memories. As a result, the attempt to create a positive image of the Soviet past, in order to oppose it to the seemingly 'falsified' vision prevalent in today's memory culture, is challenged by contesting representations of Soviet past and Soviet reality: personal memories never unconditionally match the framework of this 'patriotic' interpretation. The struggle of personal memories is representative of the absence of consensus on Soviet history: instead of admitting that personal experiences of a certain event or period can differ, the opponents in most of the cases prefer to doubt the credibility of personal memory[13].

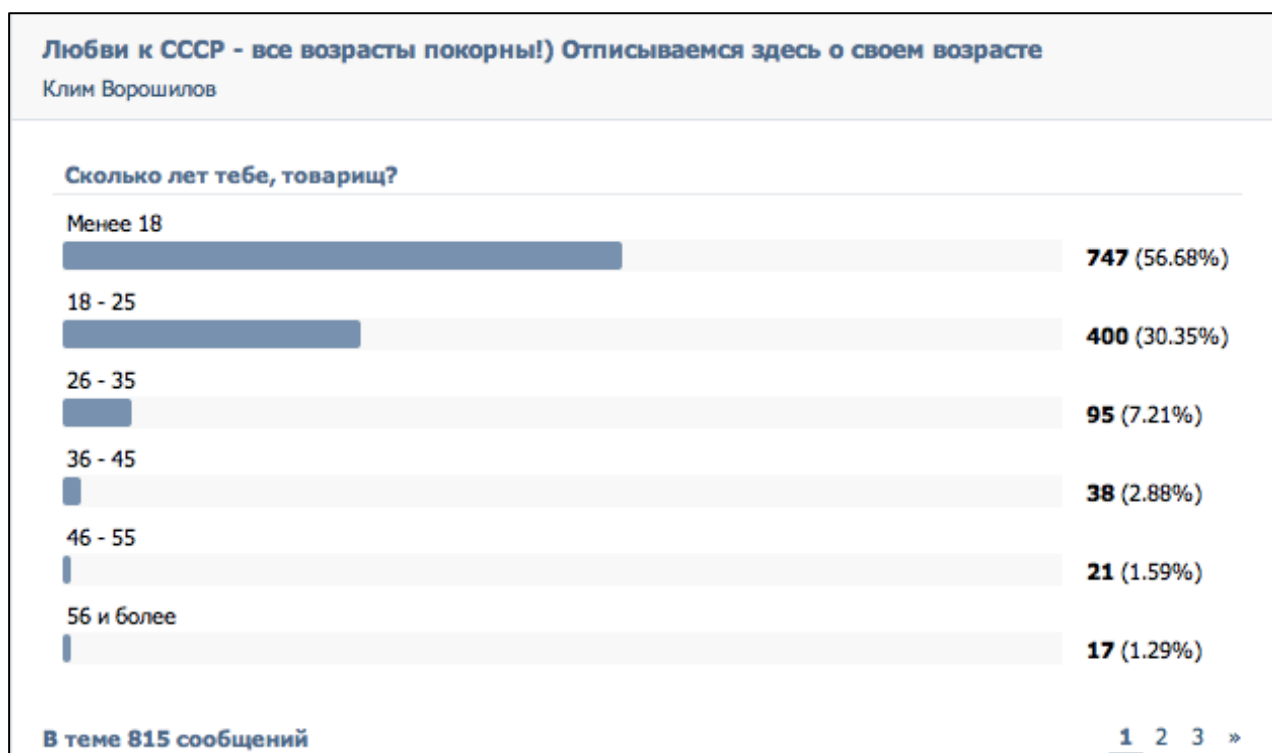*Soviet Union in our hearts: rationalization and dangers of conspiracy theories*

Another example of a community mediating a 'patriotic' vision of Soviet history is the community titled 'The Soviet Union is in our hearts' (http://vk.com/club14407777). By far the best-visited among all USSR-related groups on VK, it counts over 208 000 members and is part of a wider network of related groups that revisit Soviet-style slogans – think 'Joseph Stalin is in our hearts' (32 000 members), 'Vladimir Lenin is in our hearts' (33 000 members), 'The Great Socialistic Revolution of October is in our hearts' (21 811 members), 'Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels are in our hearts' (24 800 members). A simple calculation of the members of those five interconnected groups renders the impressive sum of almost 320 000 members.

Fifteen users centrally manage the network. A verification of the age of those who do not mask their identity (by using such historical names as Joseph Dzhugashvili or Felix Dzerzhinsky, for instance) confirmed that in general, the digital communities on VK are inhabited by youngsters: thus, user Vladimir Vvedenski <http://vk.com/vivvedenskii> is born in 1980; user Andrey Shilov in 1986 <http://vk.com/nkvd_shilov>; and user Nikolai Saloduhin <http://vk.com/revolution2017> in 1990. This is true of a large segment of the group's members: an internal survey entitled 'What is your age, comrade?' of the group 'Soviet Union in our hearts' reveals that 56% of its members are under 18 years old, and 30% between 18-25.

The self-description of the group gives a clear idea not only about the attitude to Soviet past shared by the participants, but also about their vision of the present. They describe the Soviet epoch and the Soviet state as extraordinary examples of economic and social success in extremely inauspicious conditions, and as a peak of development of Russian statehood, economy and society. In a classic binary dichotomy, the lengthy descriptive text opposes a roseate 'then' to a joyless 'now', thus providing a link to the nostalgic communities 'Born in USSR'.

---

[13] In general, a perfect synchronisation between personal and collective memory is hardly possible, as collective memory is always constructed by groups sharing a number of interests and with a certain political agenda.

Fig. 2. Screenshot of the survey 'All age groups have succumbed to a love of the USSR' ('Soviet Union in our hearts', 2010 January 9). The first line 'Under 18' represents 56,68% of answers.

Любви к СССР - все возрасты покорны!) Отписываемся здесь о своем возрасте
Клим Ворошилов

Сколько лет тебе, товарищ?

Менее 18 — **747 (56.68%)**

18 - 25 — **400 (30.35%)**

26 - 35 — **95 (7.21%)**

36 - 45 — **38 (2.88%)**

46 - 55 — **21 (1.59%)**

56 и более — **17 (1.29%)**

В теме 815 сообщений 1 2 3 »

Source: http://vk.com/topic-14407777_22082359

> **In the Soviet Union,** there was **total** literacy of the population, really gratuitous medicine and education, there was confidence in the future, a very high *kul'tura*[14], moral and morality, a generally high (…) standard of living (…). Employment and a stable salary were guaranteed for everybody. Industry, science and techniques were developing rapidly, and the country progressed.
> **Now** we are living on splinters of bygone glory, in countries of **total** misery, unemployment, degradation, lies, slander, carnality, violence, criminality, corruption, fear, depression and stress because of the uncertainty of tomorrow. (…). Now all the greatest achievements (…) of our ancestors (…) are ignominiously lost, infamously betrayed and sold. ('Sovetskii Soyuz v nashem')

The collapse of the USSR and the following period of reforms are explicitly and repeatedly qualified as 'slaughter', 'a bloody divorce', 'a plundering of Russia' and are presented as a national catastrophe, a planned act in order to annihilate Russia and Russians by hostile exterior forces. However, this 'war against Russia' is not only economic and social, it is first of all ideological: the degradation of Russian economy and international status is compared to

---

[14] In the Soviet tradition, the concept of 'kul'tura' was opposed to 'beskul'turie' (backwardness) and embraced a variety of rules about proper social conduct, ranging from intellectual activities (going to theatre, museum, library) to education and erudition, from courtesy and correct speech to hygiene and sobriety. This way, the word 'kul'tura' can be understood as 'culture' but also 'civilization' and 'modernity'.

an 'accumulation of calumnies, lies, juggling and falsification of the history of our Mother-land, in order to eradicate from our consciousness, in particular youth's consciousness, the great and glorious deeds of preceding generations (…)'. Therefore, the main goal of the group is to contest 'the brainwashing by the media' and – by promoting the 'true', glorious history of the Soviet epoch – to rehabilitate the image of the USSR and its leaders. Pretend-ing to talk in the name of 'Russian patriots', this community illustrates another curious phe-nomenon that is becoming more and more widespread on the Runet: the transformation of patriotism into an obligatory positive attitude towards the Soviet past[15].

As in the case of the 'USSR myths' community, the opposition to the dominant discourse is clearly pronounced in the 'USSR is in our hearts' community. A number of discussions spawn violent criticisms of the state's official memory politics. To illustrate this type of reac-tion to top-down memory politics, I consider several debates on a national programme con-cerning 'the immortalization of memory of victims of totalitarianism and national reconcilia-tion'. The programme, facilitated by the State Council for Civil Society and Human Rights together with NGO Memorial, was launched in February 2011 by Russian officials. It is aimed at the opening of the archives of the Second World war, an immortalization of the memory of repression victims, the creation of bipartite commissions of Russia and the Baltic countries to elaborate a common memory politics concerning the question of post-war occu-pation and several other measures pointing towards an overcoming of totalitarian heritage in Russian society.

While the programme was officially announced in February 2011, passions flared up well in advance. In November 2010, while rumors about the programme's preparation had reached public space, the 'USSR is in our hearts' community immediately launched a discus-sion titled 'Destalinization… What for?' ('Destalinizatsiia', 2010). According to the many members who participated in the discussion (415 responses), this program was launched by 'liberasts[16]' in power. User Artem Astapenkov, born in 1987, claims that the real aim of de-stalinization is to deprive the Russian people of strong, inspiring national heroes and to dis-simulate the great achievements of Stalin in order to present the contemporary situation as progress:

> Why do they need a strong, colourful figure in modern Russian history, having repeated incessantly during the meetings and speeches the word 'Russian', having praised the force of the Russian nation? What for? In post-war years the birth rate was higher than now… but no, anyway (they claim there were) repressions, slaughters, (that Stalin was) a cannibal!! There were great victories in every domain which are not there anymore… That's why they don't let the youth know about it… The youth has to consider that the

---

[15] In Russia, the word 'patriotism' can mean quite different things according to the attitude to the Soviet past. While there is a patriotism based on the image of the glory and the power of the Soviet state and the Soviet nation, there is another patriotism that considers October 1917 the end of the 'real' Russia (destruction of national traditions, peasantry, mass murder). The best example of the anti-Soviet patriotism is the late Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

[16] The derogatory moniker 'liberast' and its derivatives ('liberastiia', 'liberastichnyi') are formed of two words, 'liberal' and 'pederast'. It is widely used by 'internet-patriots' to stigmatize 'non-patriotic' users, but also, more broadly, Russian liberals and their point of view.

way we are living now is an ideal of democracy… (…) They want to slander all our glorious history. (Artem Astapenkov 25.11.2010)

Andrei Nosov, born in 1992, echoes Artem Astapenkov, stating that the first attempts to slander the name of Stalin were undertaken under Khrushchev and that they are explained by the desire to distract the public from the political insignificance of his successors. Nowadays, he argues, the distorted image of the Soviet Union and of Stalin are used to deflect people's attention from real-life problems and to make people accept the actual state of affairs:

> … If a new ruler is worse than the former, in order to remain in power, he needs to create the illusion that the former ruler is worse. This scheme is applied nowadays. The democrats are slandering the Soviet Union indiscriminately to create an impression that 'then' was much worse than now. (Andrei Nosov 25.11.2010)

The violent contestations of the programme of destalinization continued in ensuing discussions. Thus, a discussion thread which was titled 'Repent!!!' and was started by Alexandr Zaliotov, born in 1977, is a reaction to the official launch of the programme in March 2011 ('Pokaites'!!!', 2011). The user emotionally accuses the authors of the programme of the intention of 'tearing the country apart' and of 'purposefully destroying and slandering our history'. His complaint reverberates in a chorus of disturbed voices: Elena Zhavoronkova deplores 'the imposing of culpability and a victim complex' (Elena Zhavoronkova 23.03.2011); Marat Zainullin, born in 1986, claims: 'Nobody will kill the truth that resides in our hearts and sooner or later it will burst out' (Marat Zainullin 23.03.2011).

Users from neighbouring countries who share the indignation invoke examples of similar processes. Belarusian user Andrei Krupchinov, born in 1993, deplores the influence of media on youth: according to him, the media are responsible for the construction of a false representation of Soviet history – one that imposes an image of 'cannibal Stalin' upon the majority of Belarussian youth:

> 80-90% of youngsters believe in a sacrosanct democracy and that Stalin was a cannibal. I'm studying at a college and I can see it every day. And it is going on in Belarus! Despite the fact that nothing of the kind (destalinization) is carried out in Belarus. Apparently, the influence of media is enough… (Andrei Krupchinov 23.03.2011)

Ukrainian user Ayan Perepliutia supports Krupchinov's ideas, accusing the Ukrainian system of education of perpetuating versions of military history sympathetic to the Americans.:

> The fact is not only about youth, here in Kiev they started to say at the Universities how Americans in 1945 took Berlin… (Ayan Perepliutia 23.03.2011)

As in the 'USSR Myths' community, the most debated period of Soviet history is undoubtedly the Stalin period, this trend tying in with offline surveys on Stalin. Thus the experts of the sociological Levada centre observe the rise of pro-Stalinist attitudes in Russian society: according to surveys, in modern Russia Stalin is part and parcel of the pantheon of Russian historical heroes, together with Lenin, Gagarin and Marshal Zhukov (Dubin 2011: 13). This

attitude goes parallel with the fact that the Russian society is still divided in its attitude towards Stalin, with half the population hating Stalin and the other half respecting him (Etkind 2009). This split is reproduced within the young generation: the young Russians are as ambivalent about Stalin and indifferent to the question of the dictatorship and mass terror as the older generation (Mendelson et al. 2005-2006).

In the 'USSR in our hearts' community the persona of Stalin is the most venerated historical figure, judging by the number of topics devoted to different periods and from the number of responses in each topic in the section 'Discussions'. Indeed, the discussion about the topic 'What is your attitude to Stalin?' has lasted for almost two years (launched in January 2010, it was still active in January 2012) and has gathered more than three thousand mostly positive responses ('Kak vy otnosites'', 2010). The popularity of Stalin is confirmed by a survey titled 'The most appreciated ruler in the history of the USSR and Russia': he surpasses all other Russian leaders, from Alexander Nevskii to Boris Yeltsin ('Kogo vy schitaete', 2010), with a 31% margin (2,092 voices).

The community members also discuss their attitude towards the USSR, although this discussion thread is primarily consensual, as the very heading of the topic suggests: 'Were there any disadvantages in Soviet Union?' ('Byli li minusy', 2011). In a long discussion with 1236 responses, members echo the utopian vision on the Soviet Union of pseudo-nostalgic communities: they present the USSR as a great power, or a welfare state of general abundance and happiness. Did this state have any defects? Yes, claim the participants, enumerating the strictness of Soviet censorship, a lag in the domain of high technology, the iron curtain and the imbalance of the light and the heavy industry, thus showing their attachment to the current liberties of travelling and communication and to a consumption society. However, all these defects could have been solved, users state, without destroying the essence of the Soviet state: its role of superpower and welfare-provider.

In this type of community there is no place for true discussion and opinion exchange. The politics of moderation is quite severe and users who express negative opinions on the USSR are often expelled. Thus, when user Nikita Vasil'ev (born in 1994) writes that 'the communists are monsters, that's all I have to say', he is instantly banned from the community by a moderator who ironically declares: 'We have lost Nikita in Stalin's meat chopper'.

Another strategy that members adopt in the face of undesirable interpretations is a rationalization and justification of elements that do not match the positive image of the Soviet past. Due to their age – most of them often lack concrete historic knowledge and the personal experience of having lived in the USSR – most members cannot juxtapose their own positive personal memories against the negative interpretations. Thus, negative associations of the USSR that cannot be erased and simply exempted from the discussion (food shortages, or mass repressions, for instance) are either justified or attributed to external factors. For example, food deficits are sometimes said to have arisen due to the efforts of external and internal enemies who sought to destroy the Soviet state: in user Arina Sivenkova's (born in 1994) words, 'the deficit in the USSR was simulated by Jews' (Arina Sivenkova 22.03.2011).

One more reversal strategy consists in declaring the negative elements of Soviet reality positive. User Evgenii Tokar' asserts that the absence of the liberty of choice is not a defect, but in the contrary, an advantage of the Soviet system: 'No diversity of journals – no slander and lies' (Evgenii Tokar' 24.03.2011). The poor state of light industry is presented as a rea-

sonable alternative to frenetic consumption: some users state that 'one doesn't need hundred kinds of sausage, two are quite enough'. When it comes to the question of mass repressions, it is important to note that, with some rare exceptions, most participants do not mention state terror and repressions amongst USSR's defects. The memory of the terror seems to be not absent but rather re-evaluated: although the very historical fact of repressions is not denied, participants refute their illegal character. The repressions, according to them, were justified by extenuating circumstances (war menace, domestic enemies) and cannot be attributed to the nature of the Soviet state. At the same time, they are explained as just punishment for real enemies of the Soviet state. In order to preserve a generally glorious picture, users attempt to rationalize and to justify 'the dark side of Soviet reality' – attempts that often lead to the trap of conspiracy theories and to contradictory assessments.

This way of rationalization is illustrative of a general state of collective memory of Soviet past in contemporary Russia, 'possessed by the unquiet ghosts of the Soviet era' (Etkind 2009: 183). According to Alexander Etkind, the past in modern Russia is misrepresentated: the cultural practices of memory are inadequate to the millions of victims of the Soviet period. This particular situation poses a problem of *making sense from the past*, resolved by what Etkind typifies as 'a sacrificial interpretation' of a traumatic experience of Soviet State terror, 'which presents victims as sacrifices and suicidal perpetrators as cruel but sensible strategists' (*ibid*: 193). Etkind illustrates with the example of Fillipov's history textbook (2007) and its radical recasting of the Great Terror: it is presented as 'the price of the great achievements of the Soviet Union'. There is no doubt, states Etkind, that many Russians share this drive to find a rationale for the Great Terror, explaining it as an 'exaggerated but rational response to actual problems which confronted the country' (*ibidem*).

Conclusion

This analysis of online post-Soviet memory practices implies that the contemporary Russian search for (social and national) identity focuses on mythmaking, often pretending to be a critical reconsideration of the Soviet history. Communities devoted to a positive mythology, patriotic interpretations and nostalgic moods enjoy tangibly greater success on the Runet than those that criticize the Soviet past and that debate the pages of Soviet history perceived as humiliating or horrifying.

This article has revolved around two arguments. The first concerns the practise of positive collective identity construction, based on a Soviet mythology. Using the example of digital nostalgic communities, I illustrated different strategies of construction and protection of USSR-focused mythology. I also explored different strategies of identification ('Soviet Wonderland', 'Encyclopaedia of Our Childhood'), which showed that a major factor influencing the adoption of a concrete strategy is the age of community members. Those who lived through Soviet times and are thus aware of Soviet reality are most commonly involved in collective recollections and the battle of personal memories. By contrast, the '*perestroika* generation' chooses to escape into an entirely constructed mythological-utopian reality. While for the 'Soviet generation' the common memory of the Soviet past serves as a framework of collective memory that assures their collective identification, youngsters are visibly eager to link their identity to a glorious Soviet past, thus creating a simulacrum of common

memory. The fact that 'the USSR' becomes a reference point for many young Russians in their identity quest underlines the absence of positive shared symbols of national identity in contemporary Russian society.

The second argument concerns the struggle for a 'true history' or an 'antirevisionist' movement that is developing rapidly on the internet. The discourse constructed by a number of engaged bloggers seems to contest official interpretations of Soviet history and to instead defend a true, patriotic history. While the 'patriotic renaissance' is a general characteristic of Russian state politics of the 2000s (CERI 2010), the patriotic bloggers and communities emphasize their opposition to the dominant discourse and to top-down memory projects and historiographical exercises. The popularity of anti-revisionist ideas on the Runet brings to light a growing rupture between state politics and the development of a parallel, counter history in new media. This counterhistory focuses on the positive features of Soviet history and evacuates negative elements or justifies 'sensible' questions, such as collectivisation or mass repressions.

In short, the internet provides a favourable environment for the promotion of widely diverging historical visions, whose popularity and efficacy relies less on their scientific validity than on the ability of authors to make them more audible in the immense space of the internet. In the context of the lack of consensus in the Russian society on the key questions of Soviet history (according to Nikita Sokolov, all Russians have two main occasions to celebrate, one on 21 December (Stalin's birthday) and another on 5 March (the day of his death) (Sokolov 2011)), digital communities become a space of what Alexander Etkind typifies as a 'multi-history'. Absence of reference points or a collective framework of interpretation suppresses diverse manifestations of the collective memory of the 'dark side of Soviet reality', but can intensify manifestations of this memory among the 'remembering minority' (Etkind 2009: 184). Those minorities can find, in Russian digital communities, a stimulating environment for debates in history.

References

Abramov, Roman (2011). 'Sovetskii cherdak rossiiskoi blogosfery' / 'The Soviet Attic of the Russian blogosphere'. *INTER*, 6: 88-102.

Alexanyan, Karina (2009). 'Social Networking on Runet: The View from a Moving Train'. *Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media,* 2: 1-12. <http://www.digitalicons.org/issue02/karina-alexanyan/> (accessed 2 Mars 2011)

Bogdanov, Vladimir (2008, 5 February). 'KATASTROFA obrazovaniia!!!' / 'CATASTROPHE in the Education!!!', *Vkontakte.* <http://vk.com/topic-38534_1854736> (accessed 11 March 2012).

Diukov, Aleksandr [a_dyukov]. Various posts, *Livejournal.* <http://a-dyukov.livejournal.com/> (accessed 7 September 2011).

'Druzia SSSR' / 'Friends of the USSR'. Various posts, *Livejournal.* <http://friends-cccp.livejournal.com/profile> (acceded 13 August 2011).

Dubin, Boris (2009). 'Vektori i urovni kollektivnoi identifikatsii v segodnyachnei Rossii'. *Vestnik obshchestvennogo mneniya,* 2: 55-65.

Dubin, Boris (2011). 'Simvoly vozvrata vmesto simvolov peremen' / 'Symbols of Return instead of Symbols of Change'. *Pro et Contra*, 5 (53): 6-22.

Doerr, Nicole (2007). 'What Can You be Nostalgic for in a Post-Socialist World?'. *Nosztalgia Project.* <http://www.nosztalgia.net/cms/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=16&Itemid=38> (accessed 14 April 2012).

Esche et al. (2009). 'Lost and Found: Communism Nostalgia and Communist Chic Among Poland's Old and Young Generations'. *Humanity in Action Project.* <http://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledgebase/62-lost-and-found-communism-nostalgia-and-communist-chic-among-polands-old-and-young-generations> (accessed 14 April 2012).

Etling, Bruce, Karina Alexanyan, John Kelly, Robert Faris, John Palfrey and Urs Gasser (2010). *Public Discourse in the Russian Blogopshere: Mapping Runet Politics and Mobilization.* Harvard University: Berkman Center Research Publication.

Etkind, Alexander (2009, 15 September). 'Putin's History Lessons', *Project Syndicate.* <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/etkind7/English> (accessed 2 March 2012).

excel_ (2012, 23 February), '23 fevralia. Otkrytki na urokah truda' / '23 February. Gift cards on labour lessons', *Livejournal.* <http://76-82.livejournal.com/5253302.html> (accessed 10 March 2012).

'Falshivki i falsifikatory' / 'Fakes and Fakers', *Wikisource*. <http://wiki.redrat.ru/#фальшивки_и_фальсификаторы> (accessed 15 October 2011).

Gluschenko, Irina (2011, 9 Mars). 'Gordye chetyre bukvy' / 'Four Proud Letters'. *Russkii Zhurnal / Russian Journal.* <http://russ.ru/Mirovaya-povestka/Gordye-chetyre-bukvy> (accessed 15 April 2012).

Goldman, Elisabeth (2004). 'The Growing Threat of Identity Theft'. *Educause Review*, 4: 66-67. <http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ERM0448.pdf> (accessed 10 March 2011).

Gorman, Michael (2011). 'Medvedev's Blogging Bureaucrates: Official Models of Identity and Community in the New Media Age' [Conference Paper]. Virtual Russia: Digital Space and Post-Soviet political culture, October 19-22. Norwegian University Center, Saint-Petersburg (Russia).

Gudkov, Lev, Dubin, Boris et al. (2008). *Postsovetskii chelovek i grazhdanskoe obschestvo / Post-Soviet Man and Civil Society.* Moskva: Moskovskaia shkola politicheskih issledovanii.

Halbwachs, Maurice (1952). *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire.* Paris: Les Presses universitaires de France.

Hirsch, Marianne (2008). 'The generation of Postmemory'. *Poetics Today*, 29 (1): 103-127.

Hoskins, Andrew (2009). 'The Mediatization of Memory' in *Save As…Digital memories,* edited by Joanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins and Anna Reading. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 27-43.

Hoskins, Andrew (2011). '7/7 and connective memory: Interactional trajectories of remembering in post-scarcity culture'. *Memory Studies,* 4 (3): 269-280.

Isaev, Aleksei [dr-guillotin]. Various posts, *Livejournal*. <http://dr-guillotin.livejournal.com/> (accessed 11 October 2011).

Kalinina, Alena (2007, 6 September). 'Detiam SSSR' / 'To kids of the USSR', *Vkontakte.* <http://vk.com/topic-38534_290579> (accessed 10 March 2012).

Kargin, Viacheslav (2009, 22 November).'Demograficheskaia demodernizatsiia i alkogoli-zatsiia Rossii' / 'Demographical Demodernisation and Depopulation of Russia', *Vkon-takte*. <http://vk.com/topic-38534_21692020> (accessed 11 March 2012).

Kondzhariia, Georgii (2010, 25 November), 'Destalinizatsiia… Zachem eto nado?'/ 'Desta-nilization… What for?', *Vkontakte*. <http://vk.com/topic-14407777_23660909> (ac-cessed 11 Mars 2011).

Krasnoboka, Natalya (2002). 'Real Journalism Goes Underground: the Internet Under-ground'. *The International Journal for Communication Studies,* 64 (5): 479-499

'Kulaki' / 'Kulaks', *Wikisource*. <http://wiki.redrat.ru/миф:кулаки> (accessed 15 March 2011).

Lonkila, Markku (2008). 'The Internet and Anti-military Activism in Russia'. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 60 (7): 1125-1149.

Lyskov, Dmitrii [_lord_]. Various posts, *Livejournal*. <http://_lord_.livejournal.com/> (ac-cessed 3 October 2011).

MacLeod, Heather (2009). 'Examining Political Group Membership on Livejournal'. *Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media*, 1 (1): 13-26.

'Medvedev poruchil razobrat'sia so skandalom vokrug EGE po matematike' (2011, 6 June), Gazeta.ru. <http://www.gazeta.ru/social/2011/06/14/3661765.shtml> (accessed 5 March 2012).

Mendelson, Sarah, Gerber, Theodore P. (2005-2006). 'Soviet Nostalgia: An Impediment to Russian Democratization'. *The Washington Quarterly,* 29: 83-96.

'Mify o SSSR' / 'Soviet Myths'. Various entries, *Wikisource*. <http://wiki.redrat.ru/> (ac-cessed 8 July 2011).

mgsupgs (2011, 30 August), 'Sovetskaia zhenschina' / 'Soviet Woman', *Livejournal*. <http://76-82.livejournal.com/5138897.html#comments> (accessed 10 March 2012).

Müller, Fruzsina (2007). 'Retro fashion, Nostalgia and National Consciousness. Success of the Revived Shoe Brand From Social Hungary'. *Nosztalgia Project*. <http://www.nosztalgia.net/cms/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=38&Itemid=83> (acces-sed 20 April 2012).

Naissurizark (2011, 13 December), 'Razyskivaetsia film iz detstva' / 'Looking for a film of childhood', *Livejournal*. <http://76-82.livejournal.com/5207475.html> (accessed 10 March 2012).

Oushakine, Serguei (2007). '"We're nostalgic but we're not crazy": Retrofitting the Past in Russia'. *The Russian Review,* 66: 451-482.

Ovakimian, Dmitrii (2011, 13 February), 'Byli li minusi v Sovetskom Soiuze?' / 'Were there any disadvantages in Soviet Union?', *Vkontakte*. <http://vk.com/topic-14407777_24110800> (accessed 17 Mars 2011).

'Pitanie v SSSR i Rossii', *Wikisource*. <http://wiki.redrat.ru/миф:питание_в_ссср_и_россии?s[]=питание> (accessed 15 March 2011).

Rasmussen, Lisa Rosén (2012). 'Touching materiality: Presenting the past of everyday school life'. *Memory Studies,* 5 (2): 114-130.

'Rozhdeny v Sovetskom Soiuze' / 'Born in the Soviet Union', *Vkontakte*. <http://vk.com/club38534> (accessed 1 March 2012).

Rutten, Ellen (2010). 'Web Wars: Digital Diasporas and the Language of Memory (An Announcement of the HERA Research Project, University of Bergen)'. *Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media,* 4: 171-176.

'Samye populiarnye mify o SSSR'/ 'The most popular myths about the USSR'. Various posts, *Livejournal*. <http://mifussr.livejournal.com/profile> (accessed 8 July 2011).

Scherrer, Jutta (2007). 'Anciens/Nouveaux lieux de mémoire en Russie'. *Outre-terre,* 19: 187-194.

Shaw, Christopher, Chase, Malcolm (1989). *The Imagined Past-History and Nostalgia*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

'Shkol'niki poluchali podskazki po EGE cherez set' "Vkontakte"' (2009, 16 June), Securitylab. <http://www.securitylab.ru/news/381483.php> (accessed 5 March 2012).

Smith, Kathleen (1996). *Remembering Stalin's Victims. Popular Memory and the End of the USSR.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Sokolov, Nikita (2011). 'Soviet History in School Textbooks'. Rossiiskaia shkola, tserkov', media i problema prorabotki proshlogo / Russian School, Church, Media and the Problem of Memory Work [Conference Paper]. December 22. International Memorial Centre. Author's personal archive.

'Sovetskii Soiuz v nashem serdtce' / 'Soviet Union in our hearts'. Various entries, *Vkontakte*. <http://vk.com/club14407777> (accessed 1 March 2012).

Stutzman, Frederic (2006). 'An Evaluation of Identity-Sharing Behaviour in Social Network Communities'. *International Digital and Media Arts Journal,* 3 (1): 10-18

'Statistika po profiliam pol'zovatelei Vkontakte'/ 'Statistics relatives to Vkontakte users' profiles' (2011), *Habrahabr*. <http://habrahabr.ru/post/123856/> (accessed 5 March 2012).

'Statistika Vkontakte.ru' / 'Statistics of Vkontakte.ru' <http://vkstat.com/> (accessed 5 March 2012).

Todorova, Maria, Zsuzsa, Gille (2010). *Post-Soviet Nostalgia,* New York: Berghahn books.

Tsagov, Amir (2008, 29 July). 'Kinutoe pokolenie' / 'Bilked Generation', *Vkontakte*. <http://vk.com/topic-38534_6439857> (accessed 11 March 2012).

'Uteriannaia Imperiia' / 'Lost Empire'. <http://lost-empire.ru/> (accessed 12 March 2012).

Van Dijck, José (2007). *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age,* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Van Dijck, José (2010). 'Flickr and the culture of connectivity: Sharing views, experiences, memories'. *Memory Studies,* 4: 401-415.

Velikonja, Mitja (2009). 'Lost in transition. Nostalgia for Socialism in Post-socialist Countries'. *East European Politics and Societies,* 4: 535-551.

Voroshilov, Klim (2010, 10 January), 'Kak vy otnosites' k Stalinu?' / 'What is your attitude to Stalin?', *Vkontakte*. <http://vk.com/topic-14407777_22085075> (accessed 11 Mars 2011).

Voroshilov, Klim (2010, 12 January), 'Kogo vy schitaete samim luchchim rukovoditelem SSSR i Rossii?' / 'Who you consider the best leader of USSR and Russia?', *Vkontakte*. <http://vk.com/topic-14407777_22096568> (accessed 11 March 2011).

VTSIOM (2010), 'Reiting populiarnosti sotsialnyh internet-setei' / 'Popularity rating of so-
    cial networks'. <http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=459&uid=13526> (accessed 1 August
    2011).

yana_anders (2011, 7 December), 'Vopros k tem, kto zhil v Moskve' / 'Question to those
    who lived in Moscow', *Livejournal.* <http://76-82.livejournal.com/5203168.html #com-
    ments> (accessed 10 March 2012).

Yurchak, Alexei (2008). 'Post-Post-Soviet Sincerity: Young pioneers, Cosmonauts and other
    Soviet heroes born today' in *What is Soviet Now?*, edited by Thomas Lahusen and Peter
    H. Solomon, Munster: LIT Verlag, 257-276.

Zaliotov Aleksandr (2011, 23 Mars), 'Pokaites'!!!' / 'Repent!!!', *Vkontakte.* <http://vk.com/
    topic-14407777_24309928?post=40897> (accessed 11 March 2011).

Zvereva, Vera (2011). 'Autoidentification and memory work in the new media'. Rossiiskaia
    shkola, cerkov', media i problema prorabotki proshlogo / Russian School, Church, Media
    and the Problem of Memory Work, December 22. International Memorial Centre. Au-
    thor's personal archive.

ELENA MORENKOVA – is a post-graduate student in political science at the Panthéon-Assas
University (Paris 2). Her PhD thesis is devoted to representations of Soviet past in modern
Russia, in particular of those of the 'Putin generation'. Therefore, the research emphasises the
role of the new media (blogosphere, social network sites), where the activity of young Rus-
sians in the domain of memory work is easily observed. The actual phase of research con-
cerns the degree of conformity or rupture of new practices of memory and history bottom up
to official interpretations of Soviet past (textbooks, political discourse) and to traditional in-
stitutionalised historical discourse (lieux de mémoire, cultural vectors of memory).
[Elena.morenkova@gmail.com]