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The Political Use of Soviet Nostalgia to Develop a Russian National Identity

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Surges of nostalgia, defined as a longing for an unattainable past, have often been linked to periods of transition and crisis in personal or communal life, and can be seen as an attempt to restore a “lost sense of connectedness (..) between the world and oneself” (Pourtova, 2013, 40). On a national level, transition periods can lead to national identity crises, forcing national authorities to scramble for ways to unite the nation state again. Nostalgia, according to Habermas (1975), can in these situations be used to fill the legitimation deficit caused by national identity crises (p.46). This paper will explore such use of nostalgia by Russian national authorities in constructing a new Russian national identity, following the identity vacuum caused by the demise of the Soviet Union. The fall of the USSR led to not only a national identity crisis but was also followed by a decade of chaos and nationwide disillusionment with economic reforms, many people regretting the demise of the USSR altogether. This paper will demonstrate how Russian national authorities have been able to exploit the nostalgic atmosphere towards the Soviet era that reigned in the 1990s and early 2000s in order to create a selective historical narrative, neutralizing the Soviet past and establishing a continuity between past and present. Such a historical narrative is essential to an individual’s personal feeling of belonging to the Russian state and hence Russian national identity. This paper will first discuss the literature on Russian national identity and nostalgia, demonstrating how the latter can help reinforce the former. The next part will then discuss Soviet nostalgia in Russia and its role in the creation of a Russian national identity. Lastly, this paper will explore the ways in which the Russian government has used nostalgia as a political tool to forge a common national identity amongst Russians.

Literature on National Identity

Among the many forms of collective identity, identification with nation state is often considered the most consistent (Triandafyllidou, 1998, 593) and is often assumed to be the natural form of society (Chernilo, 2006, 129). Despite the many other forms of collective identification and belonging that exist, whether that is one’s family, town, tribe or region, the nation state is often seen as the default. National authorities especially play an important role in the reinforcement of this perception, actively seeking citizens to identify with the nation. Since this paper will be focusing on the tools national authorities use to construct shared identities among its citizens, it will also be using the nation state as the default for collective identification. The definition for a nation state used in this paper will be that of Smitt (1991), who defines it as “a named human population sharing a historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members” (p.14). He, furthermore, describes two different types of national identities, civic and ethnic. The former is a Western conception of national identity and emphasises territory and is defined as involving ‘some sense of a political community’ which implies common institutions, common rights and duties and a bounded territory with which citizens identify with and feel they belong to. Citizens are united “by common historical memories, myths, symbols and traditions” (*ibid.*, p.9-10). In contrast, a non-Western, ethnic national identity emphasises common descent (*ibid.*, p.11). Both identities are often mentioned in discussions on Russian national identity. According to Smith, however, most national identities are complex multi-dimensional concepts, which blend both ‘ethnic’ and ‘civic’ identity and are composed of “ethnic, cultural, territorial, economic and legal-political” components (*ibid.*, p.14-15). Literature, moreover, often points to the importance of historical narratives and common imagined pasts to the development of national identities and the role national authorities play in the shaping of these (Liñán, 2010, 167). Miller (2016)

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points out that “the story a nation tells itself about its past is selective one”; it can be altered “depending on the character of contemporary politics, with it our understanding of the substance of national identity” (p.448). Russian national authorities thus, it will be argued, have a key role in consolidating a Russian national identity.

Russian National Identity

The question “who are we?” has preoccupied Russian intellectuals and politicians for centuries (Evans, 2008, 899). Russia is a large country with a huge population, with people from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. The complex nature of the Russian national identity has been a topic of debate, partly due to the contradiction in the notion itself. Russia, the nation state, has officially only existed since the end of the Soviet Union, however, Russian ancestry can be traced back for centuries to the Russian Tsardom and later Empire. The contestation around the topic is, moreover, linked to the fact that Russia has traditionally always had a strong state but a weak society with a badly developed sense of national belonging. Hosking (1997) argued that this stems from imperial Russia, where Russians were encouraged to identify with the empire rather than develop a national solidarity amongst each other (p.xix). According to Duncan (2005), this meant that by 1917 “Russia was neither an ethnic nor a civic nation” (p.283). When it comes to defining their national identity, Russian intellectuals have often resided in two opposite camps. On the one hand, Slavophiles argue that Russians have been able to develop their own type of community, distinct from European nations, due to constant intermingling with other ethnic groups (Tolz, 1998, 994-5). The West is in this sense ‘the other’, which is an essential element in forging a collective identity (Triandafyllidou, 1998, p.593). Westernizers, on the other hand, preferred, and still do, a close relationship with the West, defining Russia as a state with Western origins and culture (Ismailov & Ganieva, 2013, 367-8).

The Russian national identity that will be discussed in this paper, will exclusively focus on the post-Soviet era, demonstrating the close relationship and continuity between Soviet and Russian national identities. Between 1917 and 1989, Soviet citizens were encouraged to identify with the USSR, since its fall replacing the Soviet identity with a one of similar weight has been a difficult task (Liñán, 2010, 167). The decades after that fall were hence characterized by a national crisis of identity (Ismailov & Ganieva, 2013, 366). People were no longer able to identify with the Soviet identity and were now forced to forge a new one, separate from the Soviet Union. This process was, however, complicated by the fact that roughly 17% (25 million) of ethnic Russian now found themselves living outside of the Russian Federation (Ingram, 2001, 201) and many different ethnic communities found themselves to be part of it. The demise of the USSR meant they no longer belonged “to a great multinational empire transcending ethnicity but to a smaller, Russian state” (Kolstø, 2016, 26). A new dilemma thus arose on how to reconcile the civic and ethnic national identities in Russia (Ismailov & Ganieva, 2013, 367). Would ethnic Russians outside the territory of the Russian Federation share the same national identity as those inside, because of a shared common history and ancestry? Exacerbating this problem were tensions between identification with the state and different sub-nationalities, religions, cultures and classes, a problem that was managed and suppressed in the USSR (Sakwa, 2016, 412-6). In order to try to overcome these challenges, Russian presidents Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin attempted to unify all Russian inhabitants under a common civic non-ethnic identity (Breslauer & Dale, 1997, p.315-17). When addressing their fellow Russians both presidents, for example, used “*rossiyane*, a civic, non-ethnic word for Russians” (Duncan, 2005, 283), as opposed to the more ethnic *russkie*. Putin’s government especially has attempted to create a hegemonic cultural system (Liñán, 2010, 168), focusing on restoring Russia’s superpower status, its traditions and values. This paper will demonstrate how nostalgia was one of the tools utilized in this process, unifying a fragmented and diverse nation state under one common national identity.

Literature on Nostalgia

The word nostalgia derives from two Greek roots: *nostos*, which means ‘to return home’, and *algos*, meaning ‘pain’ (Daniels, 1985, 372). It implies homesickness, a yearning for home (Blunt, 2003, 720).

Nostalgia is a complex phenomenon, first used by Johannes Hoffer in 1688 in his medical dissertation as a medical condition of Swiss mercenaries, the only cure being a return to the native land (Hoffer 1688/1934). During the 19th century, the definition of nostalgia shifted from an incurable physical to an incurable psychological condition. It was romanticized as a “melancholic yearning for lost worlds, lost moments, lost ways of life” (Anderson, 2010, 254),

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associated with geographical displacement (Nadkarni & Sevchenko, 2004, 490). Gradually nostalgia started to be viewed as a sociological phenomenon, “a state of mind” (Chase & Shaw, 1989, 1). It transformed from a spatial to a temporal nostalgia and was seen as “suffering of illusions, a searching for what cannot be found” (Daniels, 1985, 379). Nostalgics long for an “imagined unattainable past” (Blunt, 2013, 720), which is remembered as a “safe and familiar world where things are better” (Hytönen, 2013, 9).

Literature on nostalgia often mentions that disruption to an individual's life is needed to occur for nostalgic sentiments to arise (Kalinina, 2014, 43). It is often associated with entering adult life, migration and other major transitions; nostalgia, in this case, is longing for a home (country), one's childhood, or a community. Whatever the object of longing is, it will always refer to an imagined past of perceived stability and normality (Boym, n.d, online) and will be different for each person (Velikonja, 2009, 536). Nostalgia is associated with strong emotions that one experiences when the object of longing is deemed irrevocably lost (Nadkarni & Sevchenko, 2004, 491). Bursts of national nostalgia will occur in societies during transition periods, such as revolutions, “in which old ideologies and value systems” get replaced by new ones (Lee, 2011, 161). During such periods of uncertainty, nostalgia is an attempt “to cling to the alleged certainties of the past” (Chase & Shawm 1989, 8). It, moreover, indirectly speaks of the present, and involves a utopian wish and hope for a society that must be better than the current one (Velikonja, 2009, 535-8). The image of the past that a nostalgic longs for, however, is fragmentary, selective, and idealized, often referring to only a narrow time of relative prosperity (Rekšć, 2015, 107). The hope for progress or a better future is absent from nostalgic sentiments. Nostalgia, however, is not a direct wish to return to the past. A nostalgic knows that the past is unattainable, it is an ‘impossible wish’, and exactly because of this break between past and present, nostalgic longing is so powerful and convincing (Velikonja, 2009, 546). Nostalgia is thus simply a “desire for desire” (Stewart, 1993, 23), a “longing for longing itself” (Nadkarni & Sevchenko, 2004, 491). Boym (2001) calls this nostalgia ‘reflective’ since it is based on longing itself. In reflective nostalgia, it is the “fantasy of returning home, not the actual journey home” that one longs for (Boym, 2001, 307). This type of nostalgia can be triggered by nostalgic stimuli such as objects, art, smell or taste. Cinema and the entertainment industry, in general, play an especially important role in stimulating reflective nostalgia, often even invoking secondhand nostalgia amongst those who did not experience the past directly (Velikonja, 2009, 838). ‘Restorative nostalgia’ is reflective nostalgia's more dangerous counterpart, since it aims to reconstruct the lost home and is often found “at the core of recent national and religious revivals”. It treats its own narrative not as nostalgia but as the absolute truth that needs to be protected (Boym, 2001, xviii). Reflective nostalgia attempts to cherish “shattered fragments of memory and temporize space”, whereas restorative nostalgia reconstructs traditions and rituals of a homeland, attempting to spatialise time (*ibid.*, 49). Nadkarni and Sevchenko (2004), however, have criticized this distinction since many nostalgic practices fall in between the two. This paper argues that nostalgia, in any form, can be used as a political tool by politicians and other holders of symbolic power.

Nostalgia and national identity

It will be argued in this paper that nostalgia can be an important element in the consolidation of a state's national identity, especially in times of transition and crises of identity in a nation state. Nostalgia is in fact seen as a “defence mechanism” and provides an individual with continuity and a stable identity (May, 2017, 402). Since it appeals to an individual's emotions, the longing for an imaginary ‘home’ in fact strengthens one's feeling of belonging to that home. It can, moreover, restore an individual's feeling of commonality with a community, during times of crisis and transition (Daniels, 1984, 82). Narratives of lost community can also help groups and individuals to ““preserve their sense of place” during dramatic changes which threaten their collective memories (Ramsden, 2016, 96). Nostalgia, moreover, strengthens an individual's ties to the past, ensuring historical continuity, which is an important element to national identity. Historical narratives and collectively imagined pasts help individuals to make sense of the place of the nation in the world and establish a continuity between past and present (Bukh, 2007, 687; Kalinina, 2014, 33), which is essential to the (re-)construction of national identities (Liñán, 2010, 167; Kalinina, 2014, 36). Nostalgia is a representation of the past and thus plays an active role in this process. Both nostalgia and national historical narratives depend on collective memory and a process of shared forgetting and remembering (*ibid.*, p.23). Nostalgic longing will be directed towards an imagined past that an individual only remembers or knows about because their society has provided them with material and context for remembering (Kalinina, 2014, 23). Nostalgia, as Boym (2007), argues, is thus about the relationship between personal and collective memory (p.9), a national historical

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narrative of the imagined past can become intertwined with personal identity. One feels personally attached to a glorified past of stability and normality, created through the collective process of forgetting the bad and remembering the good, harmonized and controlled into a specific direction by symbolic powers (Rekšć, 2015, 108). Nostalgia in the case is simply another dimension through which national identity is consolidated, albeit an extremely powerful one, loaded with emotional sentiment.

Since nostalgia is a representation of the past, it can be used as a tool for constructing a shared national sense of belonging and the consolidation of national identities (Kalinina, 2014, 36). Due to its dependence on collective memory, nostalgia can be exploited by those in control of the historical narrative, national authorities and mass media. For national authorities, creating a unified national identity becomes especially important during national identity crises and transition periods. Nostalgia can thus be used as a political tool to create a sense of shared belonging to a nation state due to the powerful emotional sentiments attached to nostalgic longing. National powers can use the imagined past represented in nostalgic longing to establish a continuity between the past and present creating this sense of shared belonging to a nation state (Kalinina, 2014, p.36). The danger lies in this practice turning to 'restorative nostalgia', when reactionary politics actively try to reconstruct the past for present-day purposes, promising to rebuild an ideal home from an imagined past. It can then be exploited ideologically, "tempting people to relinquish critical thinking for emotional bonding". In extreme cases, it can lead to the creation of a 'phantom homeland, for the sake of which one is ready to die or kill' (Boym, 2001 p.xvi).

Soviet Nostalgia in post-Soviet Russia

The first decade of the new nation state of Russia and its entry to the global capitalist system was accompanied by an economic crisis, a worsening of community relations, a rise in crime and overall perception of a decline in moral standards (Nikolayenko, 2008, 250-4). Many of these woes were blamed on the loss of communal values that the Soviet regime promoted. A national public disillusionment and frustration with the new system followed (Lee, 2011, 163), lasting well into the 2000s. This transition and ensuing chaotic decade was accompanied by a surge in nostalgia, "rather than trying to control it all" many started to prefer romantic versions of the past (Merridale, 2003, 13). Regret for the demise of the USSR amongst Russians, consequently, peaked at 85% in 1999 (FOM, 1999, online) and stayed as high as 57% nine years later (White, 2010, 3). Soviet values such as order, social equality, its welfare state, with provisions such as guaranteed employment, and the previous status as a superpower were being cited among the reasons for this regret (*ibid.*, 2010, 1-5). In 2011, moreover, 56% said that if they voted today they would have voted in favour of the preservation of the USSR (FOM, 2011, online). The Brezhnev era, between 1964 and 1982, especially has been prone to nostalgic feelings. It is praised for being an era of stability and has become the symbol of the 'good old days' (Lee, 2011, 163). A survey in 2006 showed that 61% of Russians felt that the Brezhnev era was the happiest period, with this percentage increasing to 75% amongst 36+-year olds (FOM, 2006, online). It is important to note that the percentage of people that believe that it was possible for Russia to return to the Soviet era was only 5% (Levada.ru, 2004, online). This is in line with reflective nostalgia, according to which longing for the past doesn't have to mean a willingness to return to the past system. This nostalgia that reigned through the 1990s and 2000s is thus mostly apolitical, as the past longed for was fragmented, selective and oblivious to the hardships of that time. The Brezhnev era is, for example, mostly described as a period of economic stagnation (Lee, 2011, 163), but to the nostalgics it is seen as a time of ultimate stability. Nostalgics, therefore, rely on collective amnesia, longing for a "common image of that time as an imagined whole" (Dubin, 2003, 26), rather than the true reality of the past.

In practice, this nostalgia was represented in increased popularity for the Soviet way of life (Fitzpatrick, 2007, 62). Nostalgic feelings of the era became a widespread phenomenon, circulated and presented most actively through material and popular culture and entertainment industries (Lee, 2011, p.165). Nadkarni and Shevchenko (2004) describe four different forms of Soviet nostalgia that emerged after the demise of the Soviet Union. The first one is the rapid "commodification" of official symbols of communist ideology that happened in the 1990s and was mostly aimed at foreigners. Through mocking and ridiculing these symbols, people were consciously depriving them of their prior power and meaning. This form of nostalgia continues today with socialist relics being sold as souvenirs around Russia. The second form is 'proustiana', which attaches ironic affection to relics of the Soviet era (p.499-500) and led to, for example, increased popularity of old socialist brands, (Velikonja, 2009, 540). There was, moreover, an

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increase in socialist-themed restaurants and cafes and by the mid-90s Soviet films were over half of the shown films on TV (Lee, 2011, 166). The third form of nostalgia is 'the habitus' which refers to everyday life and habits under socialism. TV programs such as *Starye Pesni o Glavnom* ('Old songs about important things') tried to recreate common singing habits of the era in the hope to help people reconnect with its lost sociability (Nadkarni and Shevchenko, 2004, 500). Both 'proustiana' and 'the habitus' would be incomprehensible to outsiders (*ibid.*, p.502). The last type they discuss refers to the fashionability of the Soviet times amongst younger generations. Since they have no memories of the USSR they do not attach any emotional value to the past and are mostly interested in the aura of "pastness", found in, for example, Soviet-themed cafes (*ibid.*, p.504).

Soviet nostalgia and Russian national identity

Many authors have pointed to the political use of nostalgia for present-day purposes, many, however, disregard its potential use for national identity development, especially in regards to Russian national identity. This paper argues that nostalgia has been important in the development and maintenance of a collective sense of belonging and national identity among Russians. As mentioned before, historical narratives of common imagined pasts, which are integral to national identities, are often shaped by national authorities. Nostalgia can be an important political tool in this process, appealing to an individual's emotional sentiments of belonging to a common national past and hence to Russia as a nation state. Nostalgia for the Soviet era, in this case, is very important as it allows continuity between the idealized glorified Soviet past and Russia's present, creating a common historical narrative.

From the very start of his presidency Putin prioritised restoring Russia's greatness, its national unity and leaving the chaotic transitional years behind. Whereas his predecessor, Yeltsin, sought for a break from the past through anti-communist rhetoric, exacerbating Russia's national identity crisis, Putin began to praise USSR's achievements (Duncan, 2005, 287). Putin's government started to actively use Russia's past, its traditions and values, to unify Russian citizens (ethnic and non-ethnic Russians) under a common civic national identity, building a consensus with both imperial and Soviet traditions (*ibid.*). For this purpose, soon after the start of Putin's presidency, efforts to establish a new interpretation of Russia's past were initiated, through for example harmonizing school textbooks (Liñán, 2010, 168). This new interpretation was meant to reinforce nostalgic sentiments towards a glorified era of order, stability and collective values that was the Soviet Union. Nostalgia was thus effectively used to fill the legitimization deficit, acting as a smokescreen for the lack of a unified national identity (Velikonja, 2009, 547). These efforts were mostly aimed at establishing a continuity between Soviet past and Russian present, creating a positive association with the Soviet past. Nostalgia was therefore used to appeal to an individual's positive emotional attachments to Russia's Soviet past, neutralizing and depoliticizing it. Russian citizens were to feel proud of their history. As Kalinin (2011) argues, by doing so, everything Soviet ceased to be ideological, creating a "Soviet-free Soviet" (p.157-8). The Soviet past was gradually being absorbed into a common Russian past and culture, thus preventing the loss of a collective identity and reinforcing an individual's sense of belonging to a common past. The neutralized Soviet past selectively forgot the atrocities and crimes of the past, focusing instead on the USSR's great achievements. This was done through for example restoring several Soviet monuments, such as *The Worker and the Peasant Woman* in Moscow (Kalinin, 2011, 159), as well as the Soviet national anthem and the Soviet red star as the military's emblem (Nikolayenko, 2008, 245). Many squares, streets and buildings are, moreover, still named after socialist leaders, heroes and events important to the Soviet Union (Velikonja, 2009, 543). Lenin's mausoleum, also, still remains on the Red Square and so do many busts and statues of Marx and Lenin around Russia. These restorations might be classed as more neutral forms of history-making and reflective nostalgia. However, there are also aspects of 'restorative nostalgia' evident in Russia's project. There have for example been attempts to re-establish an atmosphere of greatness, recreating the model of exceptionalism and patriotic pride so commonly used in Soviet times. There is an active need to not only highlight that "all the best features that existed in the Soviet Union have not been lost", but also convince the public that the current government is continuing to complete "the great deeds of our forefathers" (Afanasiev, 2007, online). This is evident in, for example, the continuation of the grand military parades on the Red Squares, complete with socialist iconography, during official celebrations of 9 May, celebrating the victory over the Nazi's by the Soviet army, and simultaneously demonstrating Russia's military might (Velikonja, 2009, 547).

There are also more hidden uses of nostalgia by national authorities, solidifying a national identity among Russians in

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more inconspicuous ways. Nostalgia, in fact, “works as a double-edged sword: it seems to be an emotional antidote to politics, and thus remains the best political tool” (Boym, 2001, 58). Russian national authorities, unknowingly to the public, are appealing to an individual’s emotions to stimulate the establishment of feelings of commonality with the Russian nation state and Russian people more generally. For this reason, Putin’s government has started paying greater attention to the cultural sectors especially (Van Gorp, 2011, 252). Nostalgic sentiments are being invoked through the projection of a selective and glorified past through popular culture, public celebrations and museums. A recently opened museum “Russia – my history” in Moscow, for example, shows expositions on the Rurikovich and Romantic Dynasties as well as the Soviet period, intertwining the Russian and Soviet identities in one large-scale and impressive museum exhibition. A practice that according to Nikolayenko (2008) has been very successful as “even a new generation of citizens finds it difficult to divorce Russia’s identification from the alleged greatness of the Soviet Union” (p.255). The museum’s exhibition of Soviet period, as explained on the official site, is an exhibition on a period of “great hopes, unprecedented enthusiasm (...) outstanding discoveries and achievements in the field of industry, science, education, literature and art” (myhistorypark.ru, 2019, online), which points to the attempt to reinvent the past. Walking through this high-tech museum, a Russian citizen is meant to feel immense pride and a longing for a time of great achievements and heroes.

Nostalgic sentiments are, moreover, invoked through for example public festivals, such as ‘Moscow City Day’ or this year’s ‘Journey to Christmas’ festival in Moscow as well as cinema. For example, during the festival of ‘Journey to Christmas’ in the Winter of 2018-2019, the yearly ice rink on the Red Square as well as the popular shopping centre GUM, located next to it, were decorated with fictional characters from popular Soviet cartoons, accompanied with popular Soviet film theme songs (boscofamily.ru, 2018, online). Since nostalgia often coincides with a longing for a lost childhood, the decision to use old Soviet cartoons is bound to create a positive nostalgic atmosphere amongst visitors. Not only is this an attempt to establish a continuity between the Soviet past and Russian present, but by evoking strong emotional sentiments towards a lost childhood and Soviet past through popular cartoons, people’s sense of belonging to this Soviet past is also reinforced. Moreover, the film industry is often used as a tool to invoke Soviet nostalgia, reinforcing a sense of belonging to a state with a grand history and past. Films are often seen as agents of identity formation and are thus a very effective way of controlling “the creation of a common sense and maintain hegemony” (Van Gorp, 2011, 244-5). From 2001 onwards, constructing a national identity became a policy objective in Russia (*ibid*, 2011, 255), which meant that the Ministry of Culture in Russia was given primary responsibility for cinema. The Russian government was now able to provide funding for films with National Film status (Council of Europe/ERICarts, 2013) and obtaining such a status often depended on how in line the film was with the governing principles (*ibid*, p.252). The Russian government hence was able to actively construct and control collective memory through cinema, by funding nostalgic films and films that painted a positive picture of the Soviet past. An example of government-funded films is the trilogy ‘*Chastnoe Pionerskoe*’ (‘I Give You My Word’). The film follows two young boys in the USSR as they navigate through adolescence and uses popular themes in Soviet film such as friendship, camaraderie and idealism, invoking nostalgic sentiments. The boys are part of the Pioneer organization, as most Soviet children were, which additionally invokes nostalgia for those times amongst adults. Set in summer, the films try to avoid talking about any negative aspects of the socialist system, painting a happy and nostalgic picture of the past. However, not only funded films portrayed an idealized picture of the past. Documentaries, which started to appear in the late 2000s, also seemed to turn more nostalgic and less critical of the Soviet past. Producers were asked by TV channels “to avoid painting a gloomy picture of the past”. Documentaries such as *Nasha Gordost* (‘Our Pride’, NTC 2011) and *legendi SSR* (‘The Legends of the USSR’, REN TV 2012), focused on everyday life and proud achievements of the era (Kalinina, 152-3). Both documentaries were not funded by the government but still aided the government’s attempt to paint a very selective picture of the past, establishing a continuity between the past and present. Nostalgia, in this case, was used as a political tool to attach emotional value to the Soviet past, individuals watching these films and documentaries would feel as if they belong to a great nation with a glorious past, reinforcing their national identity.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated how Russian national authorities have attempted to overcome the national identity deficit that was caused by the demise of the USSR, by using nostalgia as a political tool to construct a unified national identity. Putin’s main challenge was to unite the many ethnic and national communities in Russia under one

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civic national identity. His national project to depoliticize and neutralize the Soviet past, attempted to reinvent the Russian historical narrative, establishing continuity between past and present. Nostalgia was exploited to forge an emotional attachment to a nation state with a common historical narrative. Through the use of public festivals, cinema and museums, Putin's government has given Russian citizens, in spite of their ethnicity, a reason to feel proud of the Soviet past. It must be noted that this process of unifying the state under one national identity is far from complete, many difficulties mentioned at the start of this paper remain. Sub-national and ethnic communities, such as the Tatars and Chechens, continue to identify themselves as separate from the Russian state, threatening disintegration from it (Sakwa, 2016, 416). For future research, it would hence be interesting to explore to what extent nostalgia resonates with non-ethnic Russians living in the Russian Federation.

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