

## Victory Day Celebrations: Memory and Validation

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The Soviet Union was characterized by an array of holidays related to socialist ideology and nation building, including May Day and Victory Day in May, Women's Day in March and Revolution Day in November [Lane 1981; Serbyn in press]. While the effects of the fall of the Soviet Union on daily life have been extensively documented, folklorists have yet to examine its concomitant effects on these socialist holidays. This paper, which examines the evolution of one of these holidays, is based on data collected at the fifty-sixth celebration of Victory Day (May 9, 2001) in Novosibirsk and in interviews with five Novosibirsk residents, all ethnic Russians. My informants, all residents of Novosibirsk ranging in age from 27 to 65, were raised with these holidays. For these people, they constitute a tradition akin to calendar rituals in the Russian village. The Soviet national holidays, primarily an urban phenomenon, united city residents and celebrated seasonal change (e.g. May Day was not only a celebration of the worker, but also of the coming of spring) as well as furthered political aims. At the present time, Labor Day and Revolution Day are almost exclusively Communist celebrations, despite the fact that they remain national holidays. However, Victory Day is celebrated by a large proportion of the population in the Russian territory of the former Soviet Union. (1) Here I examine why celebration of this holiday has survived nearly intact when other Soviet holidays are much more restricted in practice. In addition, I shall discuss whether the Soviet functions of the holiday have still been preserved or whether the holiday serves other purposes in the post-Soviet world.

### Victory Day Celebrations in the Soviet Period

Victory Day (*Den' pobedy*) marks the day of Germany's surrender in 1945 and the victory by Allied forces over Hitler's army. While nearly all the European Allies have celebrated or do celebrate some version of Victory Day, this day was of particular importance to the Soviet Union. Politically, the victory over Germany demonstrated the might of a socialist army in the face of western imperial and capitalist attacks on its native soil and communist way of life. While Russia was aligned with other "imperialist" countries as part of the struggle, its resolve in the face of German incursions on its soil was crucial to the defeat of the Germans. Although Western democratic powers such as France and Austria fell, Russia managed to withstand the assault and drive the Germans back. This demonstration of political and military might was particularly apt at that time in Soviet history. Russia was suffering from economic depression brought on by Stalin's industrial shock therapy. Doubt at the effectiveness of these measures was assuaged by the victory of the Soviet military-industrial complex over the technologically advanced Germans. Thus, defeat of the enemy was a vindication of socialist ideals and a means of instilling national unity into a multi-ethnic population.

However, victories were not limited to those in the political venue. There were socio-cultural triumphs as well. As early as the late 1920s, Stalin was attempting to use holidays to foster good will. The Soviet cycle of ritual observances promoted celebration and release among a people hard hit by his restructuring of a largely

rural country into an industrial powerhouse [Petrone 2000: 14-16]. His draconian measures had resulted in a social crisis of epic proportions. As the ranks of the disappeared swelled, the Soviet people endured repression, daily deprivation and many went in fear of their lives. In recognition of the ongoing crisis and need to keep utopian ideals alive, in November 1935 Stalin announced to the Stakhanovites, “Life has become better, comrades, life has become more joyous, and when you are living joyously, work turns out well.” [Petrone 2000: 6]. In her study of Soviet holidays of the 1920s and 1930s, Petrone [2000: 6] notes that Stalin not only backed participation in festivals in general, but also during the thirties created or reinstated many holidays in order to offset the stark rigor of the period.

A similar situation arose in the aftermath of World War II. The Soviet citizenry was faced with another period of severe hardship in a recurring cycle of deprivation. The institution of Victory Day as a national holiday was an attempt not only to honor the fallen and their families, but also to help mitigate resentment and anger among the general populace. With such a goal in mind, the German army became the perfect scapegoat for the weary Soviet citizen. It represented a nation that had betrayed the Soviet Union by attacking the country after Stalin and Hitler had signed a non-aggression pact. In addition, it stood for Western democracy and industrial might, and as such was in essence an enemy. The war had allowed all Soviets to unite behind a common standard regardless of socio-economic background or political affiliation. In the aftermath of a devastating war, this type of unity was particularly important for the society to heal and regain balance.

The first Victory Day celebration was held in 1945, the day after the war had ended and that year it was officially proclaimed a national holiday [Lane 1981: 145]. As a result, it is celebrated throughout the former Soviet Union on May 9 and not on Armistice Day, May 8. In 1965 under Brezhnev it was designated an official holiday [Lane 1981: 145], meaning that now no one worked or attended school on that day, whereas previously celebrations had taken place after work. Soviet Victory Day celebrations served multiple purposes. Serbyn [in press: 5], Boym [2001: 60], Lane [1981: 142] and Merridale [2000: 227] write that World War II served as a means of uniting a multi-ethnic country that before the war had experienced little authentic sense of national unity or patriotism. In addition, Merridale [2000: 273] and Lane [1981: 147] discuss the function of Victory Day as commemoration. Merridale argues that the holiday on the official level commemorated not the dead, but the victory, while Lane views individual practices as a means of commemorating war victims as well. During the Soviet period, the celebration of this holiday had three phases: a parade through the center of the city featuring the surviving veterans; commemoration of the war dead at the city World War II memorial; and a meal with family and friends [Lane 1981: 145-47]. It was thus structurally similar to Soviet May Day celebrations, which featured a parade, official recognition of international labor and a meal at home. However, Victory Day focussed not on workers but on Soviet military might, the people’s victory over their enemies and the commemoration of the victims of war.

The parades of the Soviet era not only required the attendance of every important political figure on a raised dais on the main city street or square, but also of all members of the community fit enough to attend. They watched as current members of the military marched to honor the veterans as well as the fallen. The Soviet Union used this particular holiday as a way of demonstrating its military might. Between the companies and

units rolled tanks, airplanes and various types of weaponry. The parades, in this sense, served as a warning to the West of the foolishness of entering into armed conflict with the Soviet Union. They provided reassurance for those who had lived through industrialization and the war that their sacrifices were not in vain. The military industrial complex for which they had worked so hard and had sacrificed so much to create would keep them and their children safe in the event of another war. Similarly, because its people had persevered in their struggle against Germany, the USSR was now able to pursue technological achievement to create the military apparatus required for the protection of its sovereignty.

Most importantly, the veterans themselves marched in the parades. Those who had fought at the front donned uniforms, medals and badges. They were garnering recognition of their sacrifices for the nation and for fellow citizens. Non-combatants who had contributed to the war effort (for example, doctors, medical personnel and air raid wardens) or those who had suffered the extremes of war (for example, survivors of the siege of Leningrad) likewise marked their status, by wearing uniforms or pinning on *znachki* (badges) or medals. Such people fell into the category between the civilian and the military; they offered the veterans the honor they so richly deserved, but at the same time themselves received the thanks of fellow citizens who had played lesser roles in the war.

Once the morning parades were over, in each city the community gathered at the local war memorial. Political speeches and remembrance of the wartime sacrifice of veterans and the fallen for their country formed the focal point of these gatherings. They permitted the various constituents of the crowd to merge into a body of Soviet citizens. With honor paid to them in the parades, now the veterans were united with their families and those they had struggled to save. These commemorative gatherings served a dual function. The Soviet government used the Victory Day gatherings both to reinforce its political and ideological agenda as a socialist state as well as to foster feelings of national unity [Serbyn in press]. At the same time the tributes to the veterans also served to reinforce the pride of the common citizen in their country and belief in the strength of its representatives. Here was a people with the ability to withstand an enormous threat to their homeland despite outrageous casualties and severe deprivation and who achieved victory where others would have or did fail. Victory Day, therefore, reinforced essentially mythic beliefs about their national character.

In addition the war memorial was the locus of personal remembrance of the dead. My informants Oleg and Marina K. told me how people who had lost loved ones during the war (and nearly everyone had) brought flowers to lay on the tomb of the unknown soldier, near the eternal flame or on similar war memorials dedicated to local victims. Public acknowledgement of how members of one's family had died not only assuaged grief, but allowed each person to experience the sense of sacrifice that the veterans had earlier claimed for themselves alone. In other words, it showed that veterans were not the only members of society to have suffered for this victory. Everyone who had been touched by the war through loss or deprivation deserved to be acknowledged on this day.

Finally, both couples I interviewed (Oleg and Marina K. and Valentin and Nadezhda P.) stated that the holiday ended with a dinner for friends and family at home. This celebration among intimates was the culmination in a day of national solidarity. In the public celebrations, the Soviet people came together to honor

those among them who had served, sacrificed or died during the war. They then united as families to celebrate their love for one another and commemorate personal familial sacrifice. They would tell stories of the wartime period, drink toasts to those who had passed on and to those still living and celebrate their endurance in the face of hardship, past and present.

#### Victory Day Celebration in Novosibirsk, 2001

The celebration observed in 2001 in Novosibirsk, ten years into the post-Soviet period, retained the same essential form as the Soviet celebration. It consisted of an early morning parade down the central avenue of the city and past the main square; commemoration and a *miting* in the afternoon at the World War II memorial; and a meal at home. The parade began at 10 a.m. The south side of the street, bordering Lenin Square on *Krasnii Prospekt* (Red Avenue) in Novosibirsk, was reserved for civilian spectators. The north side of the street was reserved for military units; Novosibirsk is home to a military academy as well as to various active military units. Both the cadets and soldiers were assembled when we arrived. The parade began when the local commanding officer, an army general, rode past the troops in an ancient black Volga convertible. As he passed, each company saluted him. At the dais occupied by the mayor and other city dignitaries, the car stopped. The general saluted and announced that the parade in honor of Victory Day would commence. As each company marched by, a military band played traditional Soviet marches and war songs. When all the cadets and active duty soldiers had passed the crowd of onlookers, a largish group of veterans of the Afghan war in uniforms of the time proceeded to march by. They were followed by a small group of twelve World War II veterans, also in their uniforms. The band marched to the center of the street, played several more Soviet era tunes and then moved off down the road. Their departure signalled the end of the parade. The parade did not include any display of weaponry or military equipment. While the crowd enjoyed the performance of the band and each of the companies of soldiers, they were clearly most taken with the World War II veterans themselves. The most frequent comment was how few were left and how sad that was.

While we were waiting for the parade to begin, more and more people, many with young children, arrived. The crowd was blocking their access to the parade route. Parents approached the barriers along the street, where survivors of World War II (overwhelmingly women) were standing. Each one asked if his/her children could stand near the barricade where they would be able to see. When an elderly gentleman wearing non-combat World War II badges complained, one elderly woman asserted, “*Oni zhe deti. Eto ved’ ikh istoriia, dolzhny znat*” (They are just children. It is their history after all, they should know it). Strangers, primarily the elderly women, took it upon themselves not only to ensure that the children could see, but to explain the significance of the veterans and the parade to them.

After the parade ended, we adjourned to the World War II memorial for the *miting*. A dais had been erected in front of the huge statue of soldiers that marks the entrance into the park. Behind the statue are the eternal flame and a memorial wall, similar to the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial Wall in Washington, listing the name of every soldier from the region who had died in the war. Representatives from various political organizations, primarily communist in orientation, lined the paths leading to the dais. However, there was also a

group demanding peace in Chechnia. Alongside them flower sellers were doing a thriving business. On the dais itself were a group of military cadets and various military commanders alongside the assembled war veterans. In front of the dais stood not only various military officers and non-combat veterans, but also a huge group of civilians. The crowd was so large that the raised dais was not visible to the majority. When we arrived, the director of the Novosibirsk military academy was introducing a cadet from the academy. The cadet proceeded to deliver a tribute to the World War II veterans and to explain the significance of their actions for the country and all its citizens. His brief speech focussed on the sacrifice of that generation for the country as a whole. He emphasized their victory over fascism and their defense of their country from invaders. The cadets saluted the veterans, and the formal *miting* ended. The crowd then entered the park itself after passing by the commemorative statue.

People had brought flowers with them, or had bought them from vendors nearby to lay: 1) at the foot of the statue; 2) near the eternal flame; and 3) in or near the memorial wall of the fallen. Families found their loved one's name and inserted a flower into the raised brass letters on the wall. The civilian community gathered with surviving veterans near the memorials and renewed acquaintances with friends. One interesting ritual involved the eternal flame. The Novosibirsk flame is set in a brass bowl that is sunk into a granite block wide enough to stand or sit upon. Children threw coins into the flame as though it were a wishing well. This may be seen as an entertaining way of teaching children to place something near the flame on Victory Day. Some mothers, as my Russian friend did, also purchased flowers for their children to place on one of the memorial places mentioned above.

The final ritual in the memorial section of the park involved finding the names of deceased relatives on the memorial wall. Families stood and searched, pointing out to their children (or to visiting American guests), the names of grandfathers, uncles and cousins who had died in the war. Thereafter, people moved further into the park grounds, where World War II military equipment, tanks, airplanes and jeeps, are located alongside the various paths. The veterans and their families had their pictures taken with this equipment. Parents also photographed their children as they climbed up and into them. Basically, the battle equipment of World War II had been turned into a giant playground, indicating that this was a celebration as much as a remembrance. Parents strolled along enjoying the beautiful weather, as their children moved from vehicle to vehicle. The two main paths in the park parallel each other and are joined by several bisecting paths. Generally, each family walked to the end of the right-hand path and then up the left-hand path back toward the memorial wall. At the end of the left path, a veterans' organization was giving out bowls of *grechka* [buckwheat kasha] to all comers.

After about an hour of family fun, people began to disperse to their homes. I had been invited back to my friends' home for a meal. Since it was a holiday, we stopped and bought a cake and champagne. The meal was not markedly different from most meals I had shared with this family (with the exception of the special holiday provisions). They did not gather with their extended family (although that was a common practice for them on holidays). It seemed that the fact that the holiday was on a Wednesday, with the next day a work day, prompted a change in their typical behavior. Had the holiday been on a Friday or Saturday, they would have

likely gathered at one of the parents' homes to celebrate. In sum, the general structure of this holiday did not differ markedly from celebrations of Victory Day during the Soviet period.

### The Functions of Victory Day in the Post-Soviet Era

I propose now to address the question why this holiday has been preserved nearly intact, while other Soviet holidays are now much more limited in scope and appeal. During the Soviet period, as noted above, Victory Day served a multitude of purposes including fostering Soviet unity, demonstrating the superiority of socialism, celebrating victory and heroism, providing healing from the psychological trauma of the war, demonstrating the endurance of the Soviet (Russian) people in the face of adversity and commemorating the fallen. At different points in Soviet history, one or more of these functions were emphasized more strongly than the others. This is not surprising, as rituals serve multiple purposes, as Turner has shown in The Ritual Process. One commonality is the creation of *communitas* among people from all walks of life:

We are presented, in such rites, with a 'moment' ... in and out of secular social structure, which reveals ... some recognition ... of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be .... It is as though there are here two major 'models' for human interrelatedness .... The first is of society as a structure, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions .... The second, which emerges recognizably in a liminal period, is of society as an unstructured ... relatively undifferentiated *comitatus* ... who submit together to the general authority of ritual elders [1969: 96].

The end result of *communitas* is a feeling of unity and coherence among those who pass through the ritual together and with it the dissolution of social distinctions and resentments. What particular social tension must be released varies from year to year or even from person to person, such that Victory Day might affect a war veteran in a manner quite different from its impact on his or her child or grandchild. Similarly, as a society changes, the rituals and their purposes alter with it. As a result, Victory Day, like any calendar ritual, has evolved through the years not only in form, but also in function.

As one would expect, the political and military functions of this holiday have declined in the post-Soviet era. No longer can Victory Day serve to illustrate the superiority of the Soviet system and its military forces or to promote Soviet unity. As a result, the emphasis has shifted to people and community, away from ideology. Social change may therefore help to explain why May Day and Revolution Day are no longer widely celebrated among the general populace. While I have not conducted research specifically on these holidays, it would seem likely that they were so closely identified with political ideology, that they serve no purpose for the average person today. The government has not abolished them, and they remain part of the Russian annual cycle, but they have evolved from celebration of Soviet ideals into merely an additional day of vacation. Naturally, Communists still mark the holidays with political gatherings and small parades. We may conclude then that the preservation of Victory Day in the post-Soviet era is due to other factors.

Certainly commemoration of the dead was one of the primary functions of Victory Day in the Soviet period. The visits to the eternal flame and World War II memorials testify to this. The rituals conducted there are also connected with funeral practices and commemoration. People laid flowers at the memorial as is

customary at gravesides in urban and secular funerary tradition and memorialized their deceased loved ones at the meal, just as they do at traditional Russian *pominki* (wakes).(2) In recognition of these traditions, in 1994 the Russian Orthodox Church established Victory Day as a religious holiday, *Pominovanie usopshikh voinov* (Remembrance of Fallen Warriors). Not all those who participate in the holiday are Orthodox, but it does seem that Russians, regardless of their personal religious beliefs, choose to remember the victims of war on this day, suggesting that the impulse behind the holiday is not primarily a religious one.

The Novosibirsk celebration, importantly, retained the Soviet commemorative practices. Russians commemorate their dead yearly on the anniversary of their deaths as well as on *Roditel'skie subboty* (Parents' Saturdays) and around the time of Easter and Trinity Sunday. These practices continued through the Soviet period [Paxson 1998]. Remembrance on Victory Day is particularly important since the nature of war and the length of time that has passed may both mean that descendants do not remember or even know exactly when a family member died. Thus, commemoration with a wake on the correct date is unfeasible, but this holiday allows people to fulfill their responsibilities to remember the dead yearly.

In this respect on Victory Day the park itself becomes a sacred space akin to a cemetery. In a gesture taken from modern secular funeral and commemorative practices, families place an even number of flowers near the eternal flame or at the memorial wall.(3) That wall, engraved with the names of the dead, serves as a huge gravestone. Through annually repeated commemorative and funerary acts people pay homage to the fallen, just as they do to the dead at the graves of family members at a burial or commemorative occasion.

Victory Day as celebrated in Novosibirsk includes two other practices that might also be associated with the traditional funeral: the tossing of coins and eating of *kasha*. Coin throwing is part of the traditional funeral; coins are thrown before the casket when it is carried out of the home or also into the grave itself. Warner notes that her informants expressed varied reasons for this practice: "some... said the money is for the journey to the 'other world,' others that the money is to 'buy a place' in the cemetery" [2000: 264]. While this act is a funeral practice rather than being related specifically to commemoration, it might seem to support my claim that the memorial space functions as symbolic graveyard. However, it appears that this interpretation may be imposing a folkloric reading on this ritual. When in the summer of 2003 I interviewed sixteen residents of Novosibirsk about funerary practices, not a single one mentioned this custom. This does not necessarily indicate that the tradition was not originally connected to funerary customs, but does reflect the fact that the contemporary urban funeral in this area has not retained this custom. It is of course possible that the tradition was initiated by a sector of the population that remembered the rite and began to perform it at the eternal flame, with it subsequently spreading to the population at large. Interestingly, coin tossing at the World War II monument is not limited to Victory Day. According to Liuba S., whenever people visit, be they newlyweds or simply visitors to the park, they throw coins into the bowl. The money is used for the upkeep of the statues and surrounding park. This custom honors the dead by ensuring the proper upkeep of their memorial space. Thus it may not be consciously connected to the funeral, but it does recognize the importance of the sacred space of these particular ancestors to the city and community.

The other act with possible connections with funerary customs is the grain (buckwheat) served by soldiers in the park. Natalie Kononenko has suggested in a personal communication that it may be connected to the ritual use of grain, particularly *kut'ia*, the grain dish traditionally served at wakes. *Kut'ia* was originally made from wheat and honey but is now typically rice with honey and dried fruit such as raisins. The Siberians I interviewed all serve the latter type of *kut'ia* at both the wake and at commemorative meals on the ninth and fortieth days after death as well as on the anniversary of the death. Buckwheat is not a traditional funeral dish in Novosibirsk, though the European Russians (from Moscow and Vladimir) I interviewed do serve it in lieu of *kut'ia*.<sup>(4)</sup> Thus the connection of this particular type of grain to the funeral rite would not be obvious to Siberian Russians. In addition, on July 7 2003, Novosibirsk City Day, a day not associated with commemoration of the dead, soldiers were once again serving buckwheat *kasha*. While buckwheat is therefore not seen in Siberian Russia as connected with the dead through funeral customs, it does seem to be associated with wartime hunger and deprivation and is thus linked to the suffering of war victims. Eating buckwheat, particularly buckwheat prepared by soldiers, I would suggest, brings the community closer to their ancestors; they remember them by eating the same simple food they ate.

The commemoration of ancestors then is one significant reason why Russians have preserved this holiday, while the popularity of other celebrations of the Soviet era have waned. However, this celebration performs an additional important social function for post-Soviet Russians. During the Soviet period, as noted above, Victory Day reinforced pride in the country as a whole and the belief that sacrifices before and during the war had not been in vain. In fact, World War II established the USSR as a major player in world politics and, in its view, the savior of Western democratic, industrialized nations in the face of fascism. Soviet Russian citizens knew (or believed they knew) that they were instrumental in the victory. Without their contribution to the effort the Western powers would have been lost and overrun by an evil force. This attitude allowed the average Soviet Russian citizen to come to terms with daily hardship. Their outlook can be summarized as follows: while there might be more material goods in the West, they would not exist without us. We know that our sacrifices have allowed the West to survive and as a result, we have been rewarded in more important ways than with money, but with national pride and international power instead. The durability of this attitude toward the war was illustrated at a recent gathering of Americans and Russians in Versailles, Kentucky. One of those present, a Russian emigrée, informed the group that without the Americans, the war would have been lost. While none of the Russians present agreed with her opinion, two men from Volgograd were particularly outraged. That city (along with Leningrad) represents most graphically the sacrifices Soviet citizens underwent and the fortitude they displayed during the war. To denigrate Russia's role in the war, especially to Volgograd residents, is to threaten an entire world view.

One of the primary effects of the fall of the Soviet Union has been an identity crisis for the average Russian. The traditional Soviet Russian view of their nation no longer applies. The country went from superpower to afterthought in history, a minor player on the world stage. Economic shock therapy, which produced a social crisis remarkably similar to Stalin's industrial shock therapy, accompanied radical political upheaval. The country was overrun by representatives of an ideology previously regarded variously as evil,



decadent and corrupt, albeit enticing and desirable. The end result was unemployment (and a rise in alcoholism), rising crime and increased poverty, particularly for those on fixed incomes. For the “new” Russians, outcomes were more positive, since they adjusted remarkably well to economic change. These different responses within the post-Soviet system have set up a crisis in the social fabric and a severe rift between socio-economic classes. The typical citizen has borne a huge burden, while others have succeeded beyond measure. When faced with hardships during the Soviet period, there was at least community in the illusion that everyone suffered equally. In the post-Soviet world, the average person has had to cope with daily attacks on his or her core beliefs and with a rich élite seemingly indifferent to their plight. In this context, one can see another reason why the popularity of communist holidays such as May Day and Revolution Day in November might wane. Without the support of a communist government, and with the growing perception that the communists had either failed or betrayed the country, those holidays now serve little or no purpose for the average person. Victory Day, however, survives because it glorifies the time when the Soviet Union was at its most powerful today when the population feels particularly vulnerable.

Sabonis-Chafee [1999: 368] argues that the endurance of Soviet-era celebrations is related to the desire for a return to greatness. She bases her claims on Boym’s [1994] theory of nostalgia in the post-Soviet world. Boym proposes that there are two kinds of nostalgia at work: utopian and ironic. Utopian nostalgia “puts the emphasis on the return to that mythical place on the island of Utopia where the ‘greater patria’ has to be rebuilt, according to ‘its original authentic design.’ Ironic nostalgia ... acknowledges the displacement of the mythical place without trying to rebuild it” [Boym 1994: 284]. Victory Day allows Russians to restore their pride as a people and as a nation, to revel in nostalgia for a time of greatness. At a time when the country seems weak and unstable, the people can reassert their faith in the nation and themselves. Notably, Merridale [2000: 214] states that for pensioners and veterans Victory Day provides them with the feeling of certainty that they felt during the war years, especially in view of the current chaos in their lives. Similarly, Boym notes that the Soviet world view was “extremely powerful and intoxicating; and its loss is greatly missed in the post-Communist world” [Boym 2001: 59]. Victory Day provides an annual opportunity to renew that sense of security, and to indulge the nostalgia for Soviet power; in essence not only to commemorate the fallen soldiers, but also mourn a fallen nation.

Children therefore must take an active part in this ritual in all its stages. The older celebrants ensure that they are at the forefront of the parade line. At the memorial park, they lay flowers and toss coins into the eternal flame and climb into the vintage tanks and planes. Certainly, they hear the stories about the dead, both at the park and at the meal that is the culminating point of the day. They commemorate the dead in the sacred space of the memorial park and thereby ensure that the important folk remembrance of the ancestors continues. The cadet who honored the veterans in his speech symbolizes the significant part that the young play in commemoration. They must additionally understand the essential role their nation played in world history. When they sit in the tanks and hear the stories about their forebears’ sacrifices, they begin to grasp the might of their nation and its major role in history. If this generation of children is not inculcated with patriotic feelings, Russia, it is felt,

might slip even further from the international stage. Children must inherit these beliefs in order to ensure that the country retains a modicum of power and pride.

Like the traditional calendar rituals of the village, both Soviet and post-Soviet Victory Day were multifaceted rites. Throughout Soviet Russian history they have evolved to serve a variety of significant purposes for the nation and its citizens. Even ten years into the post-Soviet world, at a time when most of the people who remember the war years are gone, people still actively celebrate this holiday. Clearly, the commemorative aspects of the rite tie this celebration to the Russian folk tradition of days of remembrance and *pominki*. However, Victory Day in post-Soviet Russia remains so active in the peoples' imagination because of its additional functions of celebrating the greatness of Soviet Russia and its people, educating its children about their country's glorious past and repairing a nation's damaged psyche. Once again this rite offers the country healing, not from the aftermath of a war, but from the consequences of the fall of the Soviet Union.

#### NOTES

1 While Victory Day is celebrated non-Russian regions of the former USSR, I make no claims as to the popularity of the holiday or the attitudes toward the holiday in those areas. My research concerns only Russians in the former RFSSR.

2 For a more detailed discussion of traditional funerary and commemorative practices, see Baiburin and Levinton [1990]; Firsov and Kiselova [1993: 287-88]; Mahler [1935]; Shapovalova [1998: 197-201] and Worobec [1994]. Both Lane [1981: 82-86 and Merridale [2000: 341-42] discuss urban Soviet-era funerals, while Warner [2000] describes contemporary village funerals.

3 In popular tradition even numbers of flowers are used only in funeral bouquets or to place on graves during *pominki* and on other days of remembrance. Uneven numbers are used for weddings, birthdays and on other happy celebrations. Thus, the fact that even numbered bouquets were placed indicates the connection between the events of Victory Day and commemoration of the dead.

4 Faith Wigzell (personal communication) notes that *kut'ia* is still served at funeral and commemorative meals in European Russian villages as well as among devout Orthodox believers in cities. My informants in European Russia included atheists and Jews as well as Orthodox, but none were strict observers of Orthodox traditions.

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## INTERVIEWS

- Interview with Nadezhda P. (mathematician-programmer, 58) and Valentin P. (mathematician-programmer, 60), summer 2001
- Interview with Oleg K (engineer, 32) and Marina K (secretary, 27), summer 2001, summer 2003.
- Interview with Liubov' S. (art teacher, 47), summer 2003.