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INSIDE VIEW ON POLITICAL HISTORY OF RUSSIA IN THE 1990s AS A TOOL OF DEMYTHOLOGIZATION

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<p>Article history:</p> <p><i>Received:</i> 10.08.2019</p> <p><i>Accepted:</i> 10.01.2020</p>	<p>Abstract: The purpose of the present research is to explore nature and degree of the subjectivity of the constellation of stereotypes, myths united by the “dashing nineties” cliché that surround the period of 1990s of the Russian history.</p> <p>The first part of the article is devoted to the literature review on the ontology of social “mythologization” of historical events. It reveals that subjective interpretation of the past (“construction of history”) is significant as a tool for legitimizing the present, primarily the political. In addition, review reveals a number of persistent historical narratives, associated with the 1990s, that have been circulating in Russian political discourse.</p> <p>The methodological basis of the work are in-depth interviews with people who held positions in Russian official bodies throughout the 1990s. Informants disclosed that life difficulties that the majority of citizens had faced during the 1990s, coupled with the usage of the negative ideological stamp of “dashing 90s” by the contemporary Russian political regime are the main causes of mythologization. In turn, respondents pointed out that each particular mythology mentioned are the simplified derivatives of the reception of events by ordinary people suffering from a flawed and incomplete understanding of what was happening.</p> <p>In conclusion, it is inferred that the presence of a quasi-official state position that reinforces the philistine view of the 1990s imposes certain restrictions on the scope and intensity of public discussion about the role of the 1990s in the history of the Russian state, which definitely hinders the demythologization of this period in the mass consciousness.</p>
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The contemporary political history remained a taboo subject in Russia for nearly a century. While being unequivocally recognized by such historians as Vladimir Sogrin,¹ the origin of the problem does not have a singular identified source, at least in the academic literature. A few proposed occurrences that contributed to

the prolongation of the issue in question could be mentioned. The first one – the abundance of transparent and public discussion on actions of previous rulers – did become a tradition during the Soviet regime, with some exceptions including the destalinization process during the late 1950s. This occurrence is broadly discussed in the monographic work “*Political Censorship in USSR 1917-1991*” by Tatyana Goryaeva, focusing on methods and impact of the Soviet

¹ Sogrin, V.V. *Political History of Modern Russia. 1985-2001: From Gorbachev to Putin*. 4 ed. Moscow: Ves' Mir, 2001

censors.² Among the prominent features of political censorship in the USSR she cites “effective mechanism of large-scale exposure on mass consciousness” – a quality which directly refers to the historical disposition.³ The second occurrence, ensuing from the first, is the reluctance of speaking against the popular viewpoint, or discuss the contestable subject in general. The evidence of that, mostly overt, is thoroughly presented in the collective paper of NGU professors, “*Actual Problems of History Education in Schooling Institutions of Various Types*”.⁴ The paper, among the multiple theses, is built upon the idea of dissolution of newly drawn historical memory, “representing the aspects of historical information that are relevant for modernity”, through the lack of academic historical activities aimed at recent events, treated by scholars as being “too hot”.⁵ In both occurrences, the factor of recency plays a major role, attributed by the cognitive perception of masses unwilling to speak deeply about the established opinion, supported by its contemporaries. For the present time, the period of Russian history which satisfies the condition of recency and has been particularly vulnerable to the circumscribed “taboo-ness”⁶ is the interval between the dissolution of the Soviet Union (1991) and the beginning of the first presidency of Vladimir Putin (2000), popularly called the “90s” (*devyanostyie*). The result stemming from that imposition is the unilateral misrepresentation (usually referred to as “mythologization”) of the period, reflected in the popular opinion as well as single cases of authoritative statements. Here, we cite three illustrative examples: WCIOM (Russian Public Opinion Research Center) and Levada Centre

survey data (as formally recognized sources of Russian public opinion), anti-1990s Russian TV programs and politicians’ statements. WCIOM and Levada surveys from 2010 to 2017 show that most of the Russian population hold a universally negative assessment of such political attributes of 1990s as privatization,⁷ Eltsin’s governance⁸ and Chechen Wars.⁹ Brief overlook of historically-oriented programs on federal channels such as *Pervyi*, *NTV* and *Russia-1* gives out a list of programs frequently condemning the period, mostly for its criminal character, which in this context has an indispensably political disposition. The programs include “*Istoricheskiy Process*”, “*Dikie Den’gi*” and other less eminent programs. Among the negative quotes of Russian politicians those that obtain the most impact and coverage are the ones coming from Vladimir Putin: from his statement on how Russia “was close to going the Yugoslavian way in the end of the 1990s”¹⁰ to expressive mentioning how he had to “sleep with a gun”¹¹ during the period. At the same time, a powerful source of influence which presents the period in the positive light, or at least provides a different argument on the topic, is close to impossible to find among the commonly available information channels.

Subsequently, we derive two main implications from the introductory part. The first one is the existence of deficiency of coverage and perspective regarding the

² Goryeva, T.M. *Political Censorship in the USSR: 1917-1991*. 2 ed. Moscow: Russian Political Encyclopedia (ROSSPEN), 2009.

³ *Ibid.* P. 10.

⁴ *Actual Problems of Teaching History and Social Science in Schooling Institutions of Various Types: Collective Monography*. P. 3 / Ed. by L.V. Alekseeva. Nizhnevartovsk: Nizhnevartovck State University, 2016. 196 p.

⁵ *Ibid.* P. 9.

⁶ In the context of this paper, the term “taboo-ness” is used not in a sense of cultural prohibition, but rather as a definition of tremulous regard towards a specific topic by a group of people.

⁷ Russians about Governmental Property and Industry. Levada-Center. Update date: 30.11.2011. Mode of access: <https://www.levada.ru/2011/11/30/rossiyane-o-gosudarstvennoj-sobstvennosti-i-promyshlennosti/>

⁸ WCIOM. Mode of access: https://wciom.ru/zh/print_q.php?s_id=1066&q_id=73926&date=24.01.20164608474

⁹ To the Anniversary of the Beginning of the Second Chechen War // Levada-Center. Update date: 15.08.2010. Mode of access: <https://www.levada.ru/2010/08/15/k-godovshhine-nachalavtoroj-chechenskoj-vojny/>

¹⁰ Putin: In the end of the 1990s Russia was close to going the Yugoslavian way // TASS, 28.04.2015. Mode of access: <https://tass.ru/politika/1937192>

¹¹ Putin Recalled Sleeping with a Gun during the 1990s // Gazeta.ru. Update date: 15.03.2018. URL: https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2018/03/15/n_11286979.shtml?updated

Russian contemporary political history. The second one is the exceptional susceptibility of the 1990s era to that deficiency that results in the irreciprocal one-sided representation and consequent mythologization of the period in which the lack of perspective plays a significant part. Keeping in mind those implications, in this paper we challenge such representation by exploring *how the inside view on politics can contribute to the process of demythologization of the 1990s period*. To achieve that goal, we strive to complete a number of objectives. The first objective is to collect a sufficient number of interviews with 1990s government officials using ethical methodology. The second objective is to identify patterns in narratives about the period from the respondents in question. The third and final objective is to analyze those patterns in the reference to the demythologization process.

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To achieve a sufficient understanding of historical misrepresentation of any given period, we must first take a look on what research has been done in the broader view of the subject. That would allow for selection of related inferences on representation and mythologization that pertinently overlap with the current research and for screening of those that are not applicable or incomplete. The ideas that will later be deployed in the course of this paper are, by most part, the products of the seeds planted by Paul Ricoeur, found in two major anthologies of his essays. The first one, "History and Truth",¹² relates more to the epistemological side of historical knowledge. In four out of seventeen essays the problem of historical truth is discussed, more so in the way of dichotomic disposition. For Ricoeur, as pointed out by George Iggers, the historical conflict lies between the grounds of "abstract, anonymous, typical, impersonal and rational" understanding on one side and "living, singular, subjective, mythical" on the other.¹³ By this phrasing, we can already point out the use of

term "mythical" in relation to the historical viewpoint and confront it with the "rational", as in the demythologization process. However, the nature of *representation* of history in Ricoeur's description is different from that of historical understanding and is faced with the problem of relativism. He presents two instances of "history of the historian" and "history of the sociologist", in which both eliminate a "living reality" of the mankind historical process – one by emphasizing singular decisions and the other by emphasizing structures.¹⁴ The recognition of man and his values, Ricoeur argues, is necessary for not falling into the trap of "false objectivity" – an artificial judgement of forces, structures and institutions.¹⁵ This theoretical framework fits the mission of the current research quite precisely with one specific distinction – Ricoeur allowed no room for adrift subjectivity of observers, only highlighting a scholar's subjectivity. In the present case, the adrift subjectivity of an observer is one of the key research components, as the factor of recency once again requires the application of the first-hand experience and narrative. The second anthology, "Memory, History, Forgetting", being released much later, contains a more mature and focused thought of Ricoeur.¹⁶ Dividing three levels of historical memory fallacies – pathological, practical and ethical-political – he goes on to explore to what extent the history depends on human memory and, more importantly, individual's memory, which can be blocked, manipulated or commanded.¹⁷ For the current case, evidently, the ethical-political level presents a more relevant insight. The main cause of "forgetting" at this level is, accordingly, command – the use of tools like censorship and deterrence. The consequences of such employment were described already in the previous anthology, which Ricoeur synthesized in the form of political *deus ex machina*.¹⁸ This is a creation of political technology, emerging from the strong necessity of state to legitimize

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid. P. 120.

¹⁶ Ricoeur, P. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. University of Chicago Press, 2004.

¹⁷ Ibid. P. 141.

¹⁸ Timofeeva, O. *History and Truth Review // Neprikosnovennyi Zapas*, 2005, No. 2-3.

¹² Ricoeur, P. *History and Truth*. Northwestern University Press, 1965.

¹³ Iggers, G. *Review of History and Truth*. In: *The American Political Science Review*. New York: State University of New York, 1966. P. 118.

its governance by commanding the memory of the past – the term that conveniently appeals to the present research. Thus, there is an adequate amount of grounded theory theses in Ricoeur's work that complement the theoretical foundation of (de)mythologization.

The second author deserving the major reference, before deepening of the inquiry, is Edward Carr. While Carr's academic work bares more of an epistemological character, rather than empirically historical (apart from his grand volumes of ethnographical descriptions), there is a reason for including certain ideas from passages of his "What Is History?" to this work.¹⁹ It is the particular contribution that Carr made to the discourse on subjectivity and generalization, already tackled but not completely unfolded by Ricoeur. Of special interest to us are the chapters "History, Science and Morality" and "History as Progress" which contain a detailed dissection of how the mass of historical facts is translated into the science of history and how one should refer to it in the form of interpretation.²⁰ In the former, Carr admits that one of the instruments used for the creation of academically processed history is generalization but, he warns: "do not suppose that generalization permits us to construct some vast scheme of history into which specific events must be fitted".²¹ We note here that while Carr talks about the generalization as a scholarly adopted phenomenon, he applies it to the cases of a trivial observation, like diplomatic dispute or even his childhood experience.²² His emanating approach to the cognitive awareness of human nature to the historical fact and inevitable subjectivity of the observer is close to Ricoeur's inferences in the causal sense, but what is more relevant is his citing of Frederick Powicke: "The craving for an interpretation of history is so deep-rooted that, unless we have a constructive outlook over the past, we are drawn either to mysticism or to cynicism".²³ Afterwards, Carr assuredly accepts the term "mysticism" as a form of elastic meaning of history, which further converges his argument

¹⁹ Carr, E.H. *What is History?* Penguin UK, 2018.

²⁰ *Ibid.* PP. 56-109.

²¹ *Ibid.* P. 62.

²² *Ibid.* P. 60.

²³ *Ibid.* P. 108.

with the theoretical foundation for the mythologization process, given the semantic affinity.

Several authors have studied falsification or Russian history in particular. Among them, Alexander Lukin and Pavel Lukin, who covered the myths about Russia's political affiliation towards authoritarian regime and Russia's "special place" in the world throughout history, take a principal spot. They point out that there have been two conflicting approaches among theorists: to believe that Russia has always had a tendency towards authoritarianism or to use "antihistoric methodology"²⁴ and search for examples of democratic political culture in ancient Russian history.²⁵ Their work illustrates the problem of mythologization of history by scholars, which we mentioned in the very beginning of this paper, however the perspective of Lukins' does not touch upon the issue of scholar abstention.

A particular case of mythologization as a systematic occurrence – falsification of history by authors of school books and teachers at schools – is investigated by Yevgeniy Vyazemskiy, who states that historical education plays the crucial role in socialization and shapes national identity.²⁶ Therefore, in his view, school education is a fruitful field for falsification of history.²⁷ Another effective medium of falsification identified by Ye.Vyazemskiy is mass media.²⁸ Among authors who develop this point are Marina Corn, Natalia Gorbatova and Zoya Rudenko, all of which agree that modern mass media and culture play a crucial role in spreading political myths.²⁹ Corn argues that

²⁴ Lukin, A.V.; Lukin, P.V. *Myths of Russia's Political Culture and Russian History // Polis. Political research*, 2009, No. 2, pp. 147-162.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Vyazemskiy, Y. *Problem of Falsification of Russian History and the General Historical Education: Theoretical and Practical Aspects // Problemy sovremennogo obrazovaniya*, 2012, No. 1, pp. 28-43.

²⁷ *Ibid.* P. 35.

²⁸ *Ibid.* P. 31.

²⁹ Corn, M.G. *Russian Political Myths as Mythologizing of the Past // Vestnik of Moscow State Art and Cultural University*, 2011, No. 5, pp. 117-122; Gorbatova, N.V. *Phenomenon of Mythology in Russia's Political Scene: the 90s:*

visual information, which has become most accessible with the proliferation of television and internet, is the most powerful tool in dissemination of myths.³⁰ Consequently, as successively noted by Rudenko, technological advancement accelerates and changes the nature of mythologization.³¹ Moreover, since the end of the twentieth century myths have been spread by the intellectual elites, who first absorb them and then translate through mass media and culture.³² We have to note here that the elites in question rarely themselves participate in the part of political process that becomes the subject of mythologization, which furthers the relevance of the methods employed in the current research. Nonetheless, Corn points out that in modern Russia the use of culture is relatively inefficient in this sense, because western culture has been more popular recently especially among the younger generation.³³

The myths themselves are still influential in Russian political culture. In her description of this effect Gorbatova argues that they blend in with reality so that the two cannot be separated and shape the relations between political structures; they also help to understand or rationalize political reality.³⁴ She adds that ideologies become mythologized in the age of technology.³⁵ Indeed, Osipov, Rudenko and

Vyazemskiy agree that since the late twentieth century nationalists began to falsify the history of their ethnos in order to achieve political goals.³⁶ According to Rudenko, in modern Russia “nation building” goes alongside globalization, which is only possible due to the existence of myths.³⁷ Another important role of myths is legitimation of authorities as stated by Gorbatova, Rudenko and Vyazemskiy.³⁸

Osipov builds his report around political, economic and social situation as well as myths in the 1990s in Russia surrounding them.³⁹ He concludes that the reforms were disconnected from the needs of the society and only served the highest level of elites.⁴⁰ Moreover, all the authors highlight the political crisis of the 1990s as a turning point in the history of political myths. First, according to Gorbatova and Corn, myths of the Soviet Union, ironically emerging from the early-on censorship implementation, had to be removed and then the new ones legitimizing the newly established authorities were to be imposed.⁴¹ Some of the reinforced myths were the

No. 3, pp. 265-268.

Thesis: cand. of political science: 23.00.02 / Natalia Valentinovna Gorbatova; RANEPa. Saint Petersburg, 2004. 160 p.; Rudenko, Z.Y. Stereotypes of Political Power in Russia // *Vestnik of Astrakhan State Technical University*, 2007, No. 3, pp. 265-268.

³⁰ Corn, M.G. Russian Political Myths as Mythologizing of the Past // *Vestnik of Moscow State Art and Cultural University*, 2011, No. 5, pp. 117-122.

³¹ Rudenko, Z.Y. Stereotypes of Political Power in Russia // *Vestnik of Astrakhan State Technical University*, 2007, No. 3, P. 265.

³² Gorbatova, N.V. Phenomenon of Mythology in Russia's Political Scene: the 90s: Thesis: cand. of political science: 23.00.02 / Natalia Valentinovna Gorbatova; RANEPa. Saint Petersburg, 2004. 160 p.

³³ Corn, M.G. Russian Political Myths as Mythologizing of the Past // *Vestnik of Moscow State Art and Cultural University*, 2011, No. 5, pp. 117-122.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Gorbatova, N. V. OP. Cit.; Rudenko, Z.Y. Stereotypes of Political Power in Russia // *Vestnik of Astrakhan State Technical University*, 2007,

³⁶ A Period of Reforms in Russia – Myths and Reality / Ed. by G.V. Osipov. Moscow: ISPR RAS, 2014. 510 p.; Rudenko, Z.Y. Stereotypes of Political Power in Russia // *Vestnik of Astrakhan State Technical University*, 2007, No. 3, pp. 265-268; Vyazemskiy, Y. Problem of Falsification of Russian History and the General Historical Education: Theoretical and Practical Aspects // *Problemy sovremennogo obrazovaniya*, 2012, No. 1, pp. 28-43.

³⁷ Rudenko, Z.Y. Stereotypes of Political Power in Russia // *Vestnik of Astrakhan State Technical University*, 2007, No. 3, P. 267.

³⁸ Gorbatova, N.V. OP. Cit.; Rudenko, Z.Y. Stereotypes of Political Power in Russia // *Vestnik of Astrakhan State Technical University*, 2007, No. 3, pp. 265-268; Rudenko, Z.Y. Stereotypes of Political Power in Russia // *Vestnik of Astrakhan State Technical University*, 2007, No. 3, pp. 265-268; Vyazemskiy, Y. Problem of Falsification of Russian History and the General Historical Education: Theoretical and Practical Aspects // *Problemy sovremennogo obrazovaniya*, 2012, No. 1, pp. 28-43.

³⁹ A Period of Reforms in Russia – Myths and Reality / Ed. by G.V. Osipov. Moscow: ISPR RAS, 2014. 510

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid; Corn, M.G. Russian Political Myths as Mythologizing of the Past // *Vestnik of Moscow State Art and Cultural University*, 2011, No. 5,

ones present throughout all Russian history, such as the myth of Russia's "own way" or the myth stating that the sovereign must be authoritarian, which made these myths especially powerful and easy to internalize.⁴² All in all, as Lukin observes, the farther the historical period flows from the current one, the more distant ideologically and culturally it becomes.⁴³ In addition to that, as argued by Vyazemskiy, history is largely based upon subjective sources and interpretations of the events.⁴⁴ The past is therefore usually mercilessly falsified, and the more distant past is from the contemporary era – the more this statement holds true.⁴⁵

Overall, Russian scholars tend to base their research on mythologization upon statistical data from official sources, discourse analysis and the established body of academic literature whilst neglecting the possibility of an empirical study that would consider the direct perspective on the events in question. Establishing the connection and distinction between the inside view and the myth itself for this relatively recent time period is achievable through accommodation of group of narratives and it would contribute to the development of the field.

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In the following section, the methodology of the present research will be examined, explaining the choices in method selection and implementation, as well as the theoretical background in which it rests.

The major source of method adoption and correction in this work has become the paper by Hamza Alshenqeti "Interviewing as a

pp. 117-122.

⁴² Rudenko, Z.Y. Stereotypes of Political Power in Russia // *Vestnik of Astrakhan State Technical University*, 2007, No. 3, pp. 265-268.

⁴³ Lukin, A.V.; Lukin, P.V. Myths of Russia's Political Culture and Russian History // *Polis. Political research*, 2009, No. 2, pp. 147-162.

⁴⁴ Vyazemskiy, Y. Problem of Falsification of Russian History and the General Historical Education: Theoretical and Practical Aspects // *Problemy sovremennogo obrazovaniya*, 2012, No. 1, P. 37.

⁴⁵ Levchenko, Y. Neprikosovennyj zapas, 2005, No. 2-3, pp. 40-41 – Review: The Past Is a Foreign Country. Lowenthal D.; transl. by A. V. Govorunov. Saint Petersburg: Vladimir Dal. 624 p.

Data Collection Method: A Critical Review".⁴⁶ Keeping in mind the complexity and sensitivity of the interview theme, we can confidently assert that the critical approach to the method as a whole here has an essential substantiation. It allows for constructing an approach with due consideration to advantages and flaws of interview method in general and in the more defined frame of this research. Particularly, we were willing to pay attention to the degree of validity and ethical considerations as those refer the most to the historical disposition of the interview. In regard to the former, Alshenqeti emphasizes the differences between internal validity of the qualitative method, which answers the question "Are the differences found related to the measurement?", and external validity, which, in turn, answers if the findings can be generalized.⁴⁷ While the interviewing method has a sturdy internal validity from the beginning, the goal of the present research in itself requires careful notice of external validity. We perform that by bringing in the historical data that relates to the period in question and analyzing components with reference to one another. That is – in addition to account of respondent's perspective, which is the central object, we solidify external validity by putting respondent's answer in the context of historical facts, where it would have a lower chance of fitting in the demythologization process while containing inapplicable judgments, specific for a given respondent, and vice versa. In regard to the latter, Alshenqeti cites the following observation by Cohen: "an ethical challenge to researchers would be the openness and intimacy of the interview situation as it may lead respondents to disclose information that they may later regret, and there is a risk that the interaction may become a quasi-therapeutic relationship for which most researchers might not have been trained".⁴⁸ In cases of historical or political character, the ethical challenge begins way before an interview takes place. For both ethical and scientific integrity of the research, it is necessary to disclose all the

⁴⁶ Alshenqeti, H. Interviewing as a Data Collection Method: A Critical Review // *English Linguistics Research*, 2014, No. 1.

⁴⁷ Ibid. P. 43.

⁴⁸ Ibid. P. 44.

available details regarding the process to the respondent, including recording and research guide, which narrows the final sample to the informants openly willing to speak about the period and their activity without concealing core information or suffering troubling consequences. Those considerations became a principal foundation in the preliminary part of the empirical research.

Accordingly, we transfer the description to the core subject of formation of data and the method as a research tool. The tool that was used can be defined as a semi-structured in-depth interview in most of the cases, with some minor deviations which will be specified and illustrated in the analysis. Each part of the constructed definitions has an empirical rationale behind it relating to the research background details. In-depth character allows to have a vast spectrum of fields within which the respondent might wish to provide an advanced number of details on an appealing topic, which proved to be an efficient feature in the empirical part, given that some topic caused predicament of respondents. Semi-structured choice is not only a way to balance out a full-on narrowly subjective perspective in the narrative interview and the questionable validity of rigidly guiding structures with limited options in respect to historical base, but also an instrument of thematical division, as it was decided to highlight the most prevalent and frequently appearing compositions of mythologization.

The final sample consists of 10 interviews, principally collected by snowball sampling in which the initial contact has facilitated subsequent introductions to his acquaintances (see Interview Table 1). All of the interviews were collected in Saint-Petersburg in the period between November 9th and December 12th of 2018. The respondents held a variety of governmental positions in the period between 1991 and 2000 with the core hallmark for selection being the effective participation of the respondent in the political process, marked by *decision-making*. Complicated process of gaining access to respondents and interview arrangement excluded the possibility of other collection methods, also limiting the geographical scope and restricting

gender balance. It disrupted the balance of the schedule as well – some extended periods of time have passed with multiple refusals, while two dates contained different interviews practically at the same time. The initial plan was to set up interviews in one controlled location, though it turned out unfeasible due to interviewees narrow locational availability. Hence, some interviews were conducted in remote places, to our dismay – in interviewees-controlled environment like a personal office, which was unsolicited. Despite that, the sample is representative of the political elite community of the 1990s as a whole, featuring male predominance (20% in the sample, 10-15% in Russian State Duma since 1991)⁴⁹ and overwhelming majority of Moscow and Saint-Petersburg place of residence, given the impairments in regional politics of the period. The age of the respondents is ranging from 46 to 80 years old respectively, with median standing at 70 years old, meaning that the sample is shaped mainly by the post-war Soviet generation. In the Interview *Table 1*, technical details of the interview are outlined as well, for which a few remarks are pertinent. The length of the interview, with the lowest bar set at 45 minutes, varies drastically. As observed, such difference is primarily connected with the commitment of the respondent to the full disclosure – the longest interviews contain the most detailed narratives. The question of confidentiality was discussed separately with each of the informants, since it posed an ethical concern. In the end, it was decided to only conduct interviews with the respondents who were willing to participate on terms of non-anonymized responses to avoid problematic arrangements and to make the sample more congenerous.

⁴⁹ Gender of Power: How Many Women Deputies and Ministers There Are in Russia? // TASS, 31.08.2016. Mode of access: <https://tass.ru/politika/3576455>

Table 1

Interview

N	Interviewee	Date	Source	Format	Length	Recording	Confidentiality
1	Alexander Yurevich Sungurov (ex-deputy of Lensovet, ex-member of Presidential Public Chamber, human rights activist)	09.11.18	Previous contact	In person	66 min.	Audio and notes	Not required
2	Alexander Leonardovich Nezdurov (ex-assistant of deputy of Legislative Assembly of Saint-Petersburg, ex-manager of regional elections)	09.11.18	Previous contact	In person	129 min.	Audio and notes	Not required
3	Petr Sergeevich Filippov (ex-member of the Presidential Council, ex-head of the PARNAS party)	11.11.18	Referred by A. Sungurov	In person	80 min.	Audio and notes	Not required
4	Sergei Alekseevich Tsyplyaev (ex-spokesman of the Russian President in Saint-Petersburg)	22.11.18	Referred by A. Sungurov	In person	78 min.	Audio	Not required
5	Tatyana Leonidovna Barandova (ex-assistant of State Duma deputy, ex-manager of regional elections)	26.11.18	Previous contact	In person	134 min.	Audio	Not required
6	Yuriy Michailovich Nesterov (ex-deputy of State Duma, ex-vice Minister on Communicational Policy)	30.11.18	Referred by P. Filippov	In person	81 min.	Audio	Not required
7	Yuliy Andreevich Rybakov (ex-deputy of State Duma, ex-head of Democratic Russia party, human rights activist)	02.12.18	Referred by P. Filippov	In person	74 min.	Audio	Not required
8	Sergei Alexandrovich Vasilyev (ex-vice Minister of Economics, ex-head of Center on Economic Reforms)	03.12.18	Referred by P. Filippov	In person	46 min.	Audio	Not required
9	Yuriy Innokentievich Vdovin (ex-deputy of Saint-Petersburg City Council, ex-chairman of Commission on Information and Publicity)	06.12.18	Referred by P. Filippov	In person	83 min.	Audio	Not required
10	Natalia Leonidovna Evdokimova (ex-deputy of Saint-Petersburg Legislative Assembly)	12.12.18	Referred by P. Filippov	In person	69 min.	Audio	Not required

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The following section is devoted to the analysis of the empirical data aimed at pattern identification, processing and embedding the result into the process of demythologization. The structure of the section follows the linear thematical path of the interview guide, divided into thematical sections: view on mythologization as a whole, socio-economic situation, transition to democracy, criminality and Chechen Wars.

View on mythologization

First of all, it is considered to be crucial to highlight the distinctive patterns that were found in the interviewees' reasoning on the very fact of mythologization of the given period and its genealogy to understand how the more detailed parts of their narrative are constructed. Regarding the former, exhaustive consensus was found among respondents who affirmed that Russian society suffers from one-perspective representation of the period: "It was an amazingly interesting time. It was definitely hard time. It was catastrophic for huge, broad layers of the society, who impoverished, lost landmarks, found for themselves that their whole life turned out to be a myth. As a result, there was a feeling of terrible discomfort in the public consciousness. Alas, it was inevitable" (Y. Rybakov, 77 y.o., partial higher education, member of Human Rights Council in Saint-Petersburg, in 1990s – deputy of the State Duma of two convocations). Meanwhile, with respect to the latter, the information we gathered from respondents' answers enables us to manifest with certain assurance that there are two fundamental reasons for the persistent vision of the 1990s in a negative way, which are hardly possible to be seen separated, rather they complement each other in the historical context. According to respondents' insights, one of the premises of such one-sided view is that the majority of Russians who were already mature during the 1990s still, not surprisingly, perceive this period principally through their tough personal experience and hardships they faced back then, projecting their experience on the whole picture: "This is not a fairy tale, not a stereotype. This is what people went through"

(T. Barandova, 46 y.o., higher education, lecturer, in 1990s – assistant deputy of the State Duma). Another presumable cause is that the contemporary Russian government reinforces and fuels the imagery of that decade on repeating occasions via multiple state propaganda channels and it has already integrated the condemnation of the "dashing" 1990s as one of the pillars of its tacit ideology and state identification: "The *"dashing" nineties is a move that reflects how people feel that it was hard, that everything collapsed in the nineties. The dashing nineties is a brilliant stamp*" (A. Nezdyurov, 59 y.o., higher education, vice-president of humanitarian center "Strategy", in 1990s – assistant deputy of the Legislative Assembly of Saint-Petersburg).

Setting out the first reason, some informants saw two-fold justification behind it: objective and subjective in turn. The objective side involves essentially everything what is set forth later in this section, with regards to factors of socio-economic situation in country and their influence on the population's welfare, on its deterioration to be precise, e.g. hyperinflation, unemployment to mention only few of them. However, the subjective side, referring to what is indicated partially in the subsection of political situation and freedom, embraces non-commonplace interpretation of people's aversion towards the period of 1990s as an expression of their inability for self-realization during this period. This thesis was supported by the remark that the transition from the USSR to democratic Russia was accompanied by fundamental shift in societal paradigm. While in the Soviet Union, the paradigm implied all citizens to be: "gray mass [all like others] and everything that bulge and stand out – cut off" (Y. Vdovin, 80 y.o., higher education, publicist, in 1990s – St. Petersburg City Council deputy), whereas in the 1990s the incredible level of freedom, that Russia has never witnessed before, put those people with conformist mindset in precarious position. The state no longer was able to reward for and did not demand total submissiveness from its population: "The transition to a market economy is very difficult. After all, before prices were set, and you knew for sure that if today you have bread worth 12 kopecks, it will be 12 tomorrow,

and the day after tomorrow, and after 10 years. And when prices were released, the first thing that happened was hyperinflation. Money just depreciated in the blink of an eye. Unprofitable enterprises, especially that of the military-industrial complex, that were previously maintained by the state. People understood that they are impoverished, while others are enriched nearby. Feeling of injustice led people to stop supporting reforms” (N. Evdokimova, 70 y.o., higher education, Executive Secretary of the Human Rights Council of St. Petersburg, in 1990s – deputy of the Legislative Assembly of Saint-Petersburg). On the contrary, arrival of capitalism signified the change of formal equality on the equality of opportunities. And the latter favors not the obedience, collectivism and conformism, but pushfulness, individualism and sharp thinking – qualities that ordinary Soviet citizen lacked chronically. Hence, most of the informants agree that this inability to use appearing window of opportunities, especially comparing themselves with those who succeeded, encouraged frustration both about the period and its attributes (including more emancipated political position of people, various other freedoms etc.) as a whole and envy towards new middle class that transformed in numerous claiming them “thieves” and “speculators”.

Turning to the second reason, all informants shared the viewpoint that nowadays-Russian authorities have employed the strategy of opposing themselves to their predecessors in the office, whose time in charge is associated with poverty and administrative chaos, appealing both to people’s pockets and to minds. Economic aspect seems to be the simplest and the most convincing one: *“just compare how do people lived under Eltsin and how they live now”, from factual point of view this argument is unchallengeable at all. “But as long as you are at least a bit aware about of structural changes in political economy, you will see the truth”* (P. Filippov, 73 y.o. higher education, public figure, in 1990s – member of President’s Analytical Center on socio-economic issues). And the “truth” in that context is that Eltsin and his team had to implement reforms being one step aside from the abyss of population’s hunger and political chaos that were the product of late

USSR policies and process of its dissolution. Therefore, the fact that Russian establishment was capable not to fall in that abyss is already a great achievement. The prosperity of people under Eltsin’s successors is explained by the informants simply by the fact that such sensitive economic measures like shock therapy, privatization, default left behind, all have contributed to Russian economy transition to market. Furthermore, what was indeed the trigger for people’s income rise is the oil price upsurge: while during Eltsin presidency they were extremely low, the rise occurred in the millennium border: *“The vision of the nineties is one-sided due to the fact that it was followed by a period with very high rates of economic growth and well-being. Partly, for objective reasons, because the basis of the market and the market system has already been created, and, partly, for such random reasons, such as rising oil prices”* (S. Vasiliev, 61 y.o., higher education, member of the board of the state corporation “Vnesheconombank”, in 1990s – deputy minister of economy of the Russian Federation). In addition to that, the current situation, in which the oil prices are decreasing and Russia’s welfare respectively, serves as reliable proof for this argument.

In terms of another aspect why Russian government prefers to draw and emphasize strict boundary line with former leadership, the majority of respondents held that it is rooted in contemporary elites desire to present its distinction in a form of “order vs. freedom” binary opposition, taking into account that ordinary Soviet people, whose mentality was discussed above, do not inherently need freedom as such, because it does not guarantee tangible benefits itself, thus they are more likely to choose to be protected by “strong hand” of national leader, who is ultimate and impartial arbiter. *“Myth created quite seriously in the early 90s, just Putin’s team to show how much better it has become compared to that time. There is such a stable stereotype “dashing nineties”, but at the same time, of course, in the 1990s political institutions were created that work and worked well. Because Yeltsin did have heart problems in the elections for a second term, he went to the operation, but at the same time all the institutions worked, and the state was developing. There was*

a government chairman who made decisions in accordance with the constitution. There were deputies who agreed, everything worked. And now, when these institutions have been transferred to the imitation position, 2-3 years ago Putin disappeared somewhere, everyone said: "Oh, how to live further?" Because everything is tied to one person – this is the worst thing. From the institutions they made a facade, a screen" (A. Sungurov, 67 y.o., higher education, head of humanitarian center "Strategy", in 1990s – St. Petersburg City Council deputy). In addition, such opposition predictably fails to impose necessary vision of the 1990s on the new generations who did not experience material hardship of that period and for significant part of whom contemporary state propaganda is "a little more than empty sound" and hence authorities do not possess strong arguments to convince youngsters that freedom has to be sacrificed for the sake of order. Due to this, many interviewees associated forthcoming alterations within society with the protest spirit among youth.

Socio-economic situation

Before the analysis of informants' insights regarding socio-economic situation in a country, we underline that this section is treated as the basic one in the study of mythologization. Some of the informants, in their view, believe that in this respect application of Marxist basis-superstructure model fits the explanation of the myths' origin. It is a fact that primary care of all people is satisfying of their basic needs, which is exactly the realm of economy. Consequently, in case if it is not possible to provide population with basic goods and acceptable conditions of life, the relation of citizens towards all "derivatives" of economic system, such as politics and social structure will have negative shades, despite objective values those institutions may possess. That is why plenty of Russians clearly remember food shortages and purchasing impotence, but only few sorrows on freedoms the period was accompanied with: *"...humanitarian aid, participation in power, how they started their business. They forget the fact that their business collapsed in the two thousandth, and not in the nineties, the fact that they were excommunicated from any*

influence on the power in the two thousandth, they also forgot. In the nineties, they still took part and could lead this or that person or not to bring to power" (A. Nezdyurov, 59 y.o., higher education, vice-president of humanitarian center "Strategy", in 1990s – assistant deputy of the Legislative Assembly of Saint-Petersburg).

To proceed with elaborate analysis of interviewees' opinions on the economic matters, we should note that regarding this section the difference between the spheres in which our respondents held positions is of high priority. It is justified by the striking contrast in informants' views on separate purely economic issues. Although, all of them unanimously respond positively on the question whether the level of social inequality was sharp and that the vast majority of people found themselves near the poverty threshold, the interviewees who occupied non-economic related issues were mostly confused trying to specify the exact cause of the abovementioned situation, usually referring to the reformers' mistakes in economy transition implementation. Those who were tied to economic affairs offices presented much clearer picture. Apart from all, they considered the whole package of measures that was carried out to accomplish transition from socialism to capitalism as essentially "emergency measures", due to the already adverted fact that economy of Soviet Union was on the brink of total collapse and dissatisfaction of people is the sign of their unawareness and misunderstanding of that state of affairs. *"It was definitely a difficult time. The Soviet Union was so late with its reforms that it ended with the collapse of the economic and political, and then went the military rescue operation. Literally, imagine, in the house one extinguishes the fire, and the residents are unhappy that they are poured with foam" (S. Tsyplyaev, 63 y.o., higher education, Dean of the Faculty of Law at Institute of Management, RANEPa, ex-spokesman of the Russian President in Saint-Petersburg), as one of the respondents noticed ironically.*

Besides, people involved in economic matters in 1990s, contributed to the deconstruction of common myths about particular economic reforms that took place in 1990s, the most notorious among which is privatization. The name of its inventor,

Anatoly Chubais and the notion of “vouchers” or privatization bills has already become a synonym to vacuous speculations and deception of people. However, one of the respondents maintained: *“...there was no other way [apart from “vouchers”] to overcome the corps of “red directors” [current chief executives on plants and factories]. Therefore, there were many reasons why privatization was the beginning of such a stratification of citizens: first, this was done in a hurry, (...) the second reason – inflation, the third reason – it is impossible to build overnight, and we, the Russian people, believe: “We need to be right tomorrow everything to be well”, there was not enough patience in order to withstand this whole story”* (N. Evdokimova, 70 y.o., higher education, Executive Secretary of the Human Rights Council of St. Petersburg, in 1990s – deputy of the Legislative Assembly of Saint-Petersburg). Nevertheless, they did agree that speculations took place during the process of privatization, but those wrongdoings appeared to be unpredictable consequences of the privatization and were not targeted actions of government to deceive and “rob” people: *“To a large extent, the way property ownership was distributed ... this was before the collapse of the USSR, when spontaneous privatization began. The one who stood close to the pie he got it. The reformers tried to achieve a more equal distribution of property, which, one might say, did not work out”* (S. Vasiliev, 61 y.o., higher education, member of the board of the state corporation “Vnesheconombank”, in 1990s – deputy Minister of economy of the Russian Federation). Moreover, talking about hyperinflation that caused depreciation of people’s savings, the interviewees explained it with excessive money stamp in Soviet Union, that were not provided with corresponding commodity volumes, as soon as there was no market economy laws this trick was efficient, but once transition occurred and state was devoid of economy regulations tools, it immediately caused the enormous paces of inflation: *“... and situations, like, this, for instance: literally, the woman had several thousand rubles and thought she was rich, and a year later it turned out that she could not buy anything, became a commonplace”* (P. Filippov, 73 y.o. higher

education, public figure, in 1990s – member of President’s Analytical Center on socio-economic issues), whereas the government catastrophically lacked tools to curb it.

Transition to democracy

In the course of discussion of politics and the degree of success in democratic state building, nobody from respondents restrained his or her reasoning only to the period of 90s, tending to compare the situation during that period and the current status quo in that sphere. According to our research guide, this section is divided into several segments: one is devoted to the democracy introduction and facilitating of the regime, while another comprehends the questions of actual demand for freedom and what level of freedom people could enjoy. Taking into account volatility of the topics, we presume that the answers of interviewees are characterized by considerable degree of social group subjectivity, especially in the light of the fact that the questions they were asked, intentionally did not focus on particular historical events, but on the broader historical processes’ evaluation and interpretation. Therefore, informants inclined to stick to explanations delving into details of analyzing political culture of ordinary Russians and political elites along with their vision of freedom and power respectively.

Overall, answering the question about the quality of democracy in the 1990s most of respondents marked the events of September-October of 1993 (de-jure: Constitutional crisis, de-facto: dissolution of the parliament) as a point of no-return for Russian democracy, which began its revival during “Perestroika” in the end of the 80s and after 1993 incident, it entered the period of fading that has been continuing until nowadays: *“The democratic elites’ fear of communistic revanche mixed with self-interest aspiration to power clouded their judgements and entailed disrespectful relation towards Supreme Soviet [Russian parliament in 1991-1993] that eventually ended up with the shooting at the White house with tank guns. I don’t reject that this parliament was conservative, stubborn, incompetent sometimes, but despite these qualities of legislature, Eltsin should not have solved the conflict through explicit*

confrontation” (Y. Nesterov, 73 y.o., higher education, party functionary, in 1990s – deputy of State Duma). One more fateful event for Russian democracy that was denoted is the occurrence of Presidential elections of 1996 that are widely known for the unprecedented political campaign in support of the incumbent, Boris Eltsin, that proceeded with numerous wrongdoings and, allegedly, electoral fraud: *“They did everything, “Vote with the heart” [one of slogans of Eltsin’s electoral campaign in 1996]... and so on and so forth. As a result, we elected the poorly capable Boris Nikolayevich, who, indeed, was falling apart on the go. It was a hinged dummy. This should not have been done. It was not local, it was a global mistake: shooting and [rigged] elections”* (N. Evdokimova, 70 y.o., higher education, Executive Secretary of the human Rights Council of St. Petersburg, in 1990s – deputy of the Legislative Assembly of Saint-Petersburg). Eventually it was a dark sign for democratic procedures and institutions. In the opinions of interviewees, the two events are largely connected to the political culture of the elites that were in charge back then. First and foremost, one should understand that the new democratic elite was comprised of former Soviet “nomenklatura” (Eltsin himself was the former Politbureau candidate). Hence, despite his reputation as anti-Soviet democratic movement leader, he was still the carrier of Soviet political culture, which was characterized as *“inability to make any kind of organizations, except hierarchy of power vertical, moreover, the educated part of Russian society is essentially totalitarian in its approaches and attitudes. There is a universal social model “irremovable leader and tribe”. Therefore, the ruling part did not cope with its task and again began to build the usual vertically hierarchical society, because the educated class did not know how do that otherwise”* (S. Tsyplyaev, 63 y.o., higher education, Dean of the Faculty of Law at Institute of Management, RANEPa, ex-spokesman of the Russian President in Saint-Petersburg). Relying on this thesis the dissolution of parliament and following adoption of “personal” constitution on the referendum, alongside with fraud elections do seem to fit the logic of the person who employed democratic rhetoric to obtain power and later on used available tools to retain and it, notwithstanding to democratic procedures. Moreover, similar

logic guided many regional authorities and heads of other state bodies to sacrifice democracy in order to preserve power and its privileges, that together led to the curtailing of further reforms in democratic direction: *“As stated in the verses of Voloshin [the head of President’s Administration in 1999-2003], who always amazed me with his prophetic thought: “Not for the first time with dreams of freedom, we are building a new prison”* (S. Tsyplyaev, 63 y.o., higher education, Dean of the Faculty of Law at Institute of Management, RANEPa, ex-spokesman of the Russian President in Saint-Petersburg).

Concerning common citizens, respondents are convinced that one should not forget that in addition to state officials with Soviet mentality in charge, many of whom was “just colored in democratic colors”, there were dramatically more common citizens with Soviet legacy in form of the flawed and incomplete picture of freedom and democracy. To start with the former, the most crucial thing is that in the usual sense of Soviet person freedom was associated with West, as long as with economic prosperity and that was precisely the tragedy of Soviet person. Because the first thing he or her expected after liberalization is abundance of goods and services and opportunity to conduct idle lifestyle. It was extremely unpleasant surprise for to discover that genuine freedom demands responsibility and, in the first place, responsibility for his own fate: *“When he [the person] saw the social inequality in which he lived; when he got out of that limiter, for which he could not jump, got to the surface, the so-called freedom - he looks like, you know, like a deep-sea perch, which he was pulled out from a depth of two kilometers, and he, because he lived in the distance, internally the pressure was such that while he was being pulled out, his stomach was already throwing out. So it was with a Soviet man who lived for more than 60 years under conditions of paternalism, where his life was regulated from birth to death”* (Y. Rybakov, 77 y.o., partial higher education, member of Human Rights Council in Saint-Petersburg, in 1990s – deputy of the State Duma of two convocations). Those few who realized this maxim, started to extract benefits from prevailing conditions and most of respondents pointed to the image of the “chelnoky” (shuttles) who symbolized the dawn of Russian small business and entrepreneurship:

“Unfortunately... the vast majority of people was not among those young entrepreneurs, but they made up a part of those who were not paid for their work for months” (T. Barandova, 46 y.o., higher education, lecturer, in 1990s – assistant deputy of the State Duma). That undoubtedly contributed to the popular disappointment in the worth of freedom. With respect to this, early 2000s economic boom due to which most of Russian citizens, being satisfied with long-awaited growth of welfare, allowed new Russian leadership to launch gradual return back to authoritarian traditions and relationships.

Respondents outline the similar reason for frustration about democratic rule that is also connected with the level of well-being. Their argument is built upon the fact that the initial enthusiasm of people who persistently voted on various types of elections almost did not witness any positive consequences of their actions, the absence of which was rooted predominantly in the incredible weakness of state administrative and financial potential, apart from endless demagoguery from populists who sought the office: *“You see, in order for something to remain a democracy, you have to be that. Therefore, of course, it did not remain a democracy. (...) It moved in this direction. In the political direction, it moved very intensively; economically, it was even stronger; just almost collapsed, everything has been democratized in two days ... and the social sphere, in which there was a powerful collapse. For the Soviet person, the social sphere was the major one”* (T. Barandova, 46 y.o., higher education, lecturer, in 1990s – assistant deputy of the State Duma).

Criminality

This particular myth was confirmed by most of the informants, who agreed that the frequency and spreading of miscellaneous forms of criminal activities on various levels of societal hierarchy was perceptibly high: *“This was a big problem, as I mentioned earlier. If we are talking about ordinary people, they were afraid, because they could have been accidentally killed in some sort of scuffle. And when it comes to entrepreneurs consider an example: some entrepreneur is driving in an armored car on the University Embankment, he stops at a traffic*

light, a man with a grenade launcher approaches him, shoots and blows up his car. Here you are, please. But this, of course, those who had to [eliminate]. Or the vice-governor Manevich, who was killed from the roof with two shots. Or the murder of Galina Vasilyevna Starovoytova at her own house entrance. And sometimes random people got there by chance” (A. Sungurov, 67 y.o., higher education, head of humanitarian center “Strategy”, in 1990s – St. Petersburg City Council deputy). Nevertheless, they opposed the standpoint that it was inherent exclusively for the period of 1990s, instead all of them traced one of the sources of that phenomenon in the late Soviet Union: *“As soon as the transition to the market takes place, primary capital appears. In a significant part of these primary capital arose from those who were already illegally located: shadow businesses, shadow economy. For entrepreneurship they were imprisoned in Soviet times: if a person, for example, created an underground workshop for sewing jeans, he was considered a felon. He was put in jail, he could sit for five years. They were released, they began to engage in legal business, but the fact that they passed through prisons meant that they had great connections with the criminal world. Naturally, this one the criminal element quickly seized money and quickly seized law enforcement. They were called power entrepreneurs, that is, those entrepreneurs who were engaged not only legal business, but also the power. Formation of such a symbiosis: entrepreneurship and criminal activity – it was almost inevitable at that time”* (S. Vasiliev, 61 y.o., higher education, member of the board of the state corporation “Vnesheconombank”, in 1990s – Deputy Minister of economy of the Russian Federation). What is called “shadow economy”, the whole sector of Soviet economy, that prospered because of the eternal deficit that planned economy was not able to overcome. After the USSR collapse, so did the Soviet all-forbidding legal system and the wave of freedom literally allowed criminality to “go out of shadow” and employ even wider spectrum of methods of profit-making.

Another point made by the informants is that there was nothing especially surprising in the fact of crime level tangible upsurge. They stated that any political regime liberalization naturally leads to those such kind of social alterations,

specifically if we suppose that the scope of changes has a systematic character, as in the case of 1990s Russia: *"...I had a conversation with Dutchman who said me that, guys, now you will have a crime raised up and it will crawl everywhere, because this is the period of primary capital accumulation, and you will not get away from Marx in this plan, and, of course, they will be use all the mechanisms that are possible."* (Y. Vdovin, 80 y.o., higher education, publicist, in 1990s – St. Petersburg City Council deputy). Criminals, due to their intra-organizational connections turn out to be the first ones who are capable to adapt to the new social and legal conditions and, thanks to this advantage, they could enjoy the benefits of the systematic chaos on the initial stages of fundamental liberalization that includes empty legal field, weakening of state administrative and law-enforcement capacities: *"Of course, at that time there was still no legislation that would allow in fact to fight this. The prosecutor's office made a helpless gesture and said: "And on the basis of what do we have to imprison this or that, when you still do not have such an article in the Criminal Code?"* (Y. Rybakov, 77 y.o., partial higher education, member of Human Rights Council in Saint-Petersburg, in 1990s – deputy of the State Duma of two convocations). One of the respondents even proposed the idea that the essential proportion of criminal community in 1990s made up former law enforcement and military officers so-called "siloviki", who painfully yearned about former imperial pride and did not associate their officer's duty with democratic leaders, who were seen as "betrayers of Motherland".

Still, there is one more reason, according to the interviewees' insights, why pervasive criminality was not the peculiar feature of only 1990s period. They rejected the myth that new Russian government succeeded in tackling criminal elements in the early 2000s, since it imprisoned only few of them, while many of them were assimilated: *"It's hard to say that the whole criminal business was suppressed. Organized criminal groups simply merged with the state at a very high level, breaking through to higher floors"* (S. Tsyplyaev, 63 y.o., higher education, Dean of the Faculty of Law at Institute of Management, RANEPa, ex-spokesman of the Russian President in Saint-

Petersburg). Moreover, in the contemporary Russia, the criminality brings drastically more harm than it did during 90s. The only cause why this fact does not yet recognized by people is that the "crimson jackets", who had frightened whole districts and get involved in shootout with similar "thugs", were replaced by "people in expensive business suits", who collect tribute not from separate entrepreneurs, but from the people of the whole country and do it explicitly through various corruption practices which was not the commonplace in 1990s at all. The last point, though, could not have been taken for granted since it presented the self-evaluation by respondents of their own group.

Chechen wars

The inclusion of Chechen wars in the current thematical scope seems odd from the very beginning. While we discuss broad layers of historical timeline such as a transition from one political regime to another that include a multitude of processes, the Chechen wars are two solitary cases of events with distinct timing, seemingly too narrow to conduct a comprehensive analysis upon. Their frequency of appearance as one of the noticeable stamps of the 1990s does, however, put them in the same cognitive spot when a narrative about the period emerges. The exceptionally tragic aftermath of both events became one of the key accounts on why such placement occurs. Unlike the previous subsections, we can no longer perceive the group of informants as congenerous – the degree of involvement into the wars varies vastly between them, so separate narratives arise, though with similar structure. Thus, we analyze patterns in three distinguished cases: direct on-site involvement in the events of Chechen wars (or at least one of them), decision-making that could have impacted the course of wars and observation of inside political processes involved.

We begin with the narratives of respondents who experienced the wars directly. On-site involvement, such as diplomatic missions, usually corresponds with a more tremulous regard towards the topic and this case is no exception. The emotional memory which affects the responses plays a factor here

which can be seen from the style of language: *“the war was truly, truly felonious, I cannot name it otherwise... they turned it into a bloody massacre”* (N. Evdokimova, 70 y.o., higher education, Executive Secretary of the Human Rights Council of St. Petersburg, participated in human rights missions during the first Chechen war). All of the respondents here have expressed a similar attitude towards the purpose and course of the war – it could absolutely had been avoided and appeared unnecessary: *“... that it could have been avoided – absolutely. Moreover, we worked a lot within the framework of the Strategy Center in Chechnya in the late 2000s, when everything was more or less alright there. And the participants of the seminars, people who worked in the administration before, told me that the agreement on “delimitation of powers between Russia and Tatarstan”, successfully signed in 94, was written in Grozny. It was written to be signed by Eltsin. And Eltsin was completely fine with the agreement”* (A. Sungurov, 67 y.o., higher education, head of humanitarian center Strategy, participated in the human rights missions during the first Chechen war). In this context, the notion of “small victorious war” which was imposed by the higher authorities was brought up by two respondents: *“The situation, in which Eltsin started to believe that “small victorious war” can stop the separatism in the whole republic, was created artificially”* (Yuliy Rybakov, 77 y.o., partial higher education, member of Human Rights Council in Saint-Petersburg, participated in negotiations in Budennovck during the first Chechen war). We can conclude that the position of those who were directly involved in those wars, though holding official positions, is not much different from most of the common population, especially those that suffered from the consequences of military actions. Despite that, there are insights on the causal mechanisms behind the outbreak of the war which may be considered as contribution to the demythologization, such as the existence of “tight barrier” around president Eltsin which “tricked” him into the beginning of the first war: *“a president was tricked by a tight barrier around him which did not let him meet Dudaev”* (Yuliy Rybakov, 77 y.o., partial higher education, member of Human Rights Council

in Saint-Petersburg, participated in negotiations in Budennovck during the first Chechen war).

The narratives of the respondents who were involved in the decision-making are for the most part similar, though they contain *more straightforward responses*: *“At that time I was a member of the Presidential Council and I said: “I am against the Chechen war... Adamantly against!”* (P. Filippov, 73 y.o. higher education, public figure, participated in strategical decision-making regarding the first Chechen war in the Presidential Council). It appears that the character of their work ethic made them contemplate on a more deliberate approach to the war itself, though still condemning its emergence.

Surprisingly, those respondents, whom we can define as “inside observers”, witnessing the process of the decision-making but not engaging in it, departed from the two previous groups on one statement. Generally, they tended to imply that the war could not have been avoided, using more elusive phrasing as: *“The state is falling apart. Chechnya is declaring its independence. If we put ourselves in Eltsin’s shoes, it is hard to imagine other, politically available solutions of that problem”* (S. Tsyplyaev, 63 y.o., higher education, Dean of the Faculty of Law at Institute of Management, RANEPa, ex-spokesman of the Russian President in Saint-Petersburg). It is not our task to discern which perspective provides a more factual and feasible argument, though it is worth noting that the perception of “observers” could have been distorted by inability to affect the outcome of the war. In itself, the case of Chechen wars is by far the most complicated one in the context of demythologization since there are too many confounded groups involved, in which one perspective barely gives out a comprehensive contribution.

Conclusion

Discussed in this paper are results of work provided and the significance of present research findings for existing academic framework regarding research object (i.e. mythologization of the 1990s). We managed to collect comprehensive and extensive responses from political decision-makers of the 1990s and analyze those responses in all the eminent

thematical provisions that are connected to the mythologization of the period with the reference to the theoretical foundation. Although the research method itself (interview with several decision-makers of 90s) is not unique and does not stand strong by its own the given paper out of other works of its kind, what virtually does highlight the peculiarity of it is the research object. Meanwhile, major studies in the field examine opinions and insights of respondents towards specific issues of that time that attach them articulate historical orientation, the given research inextricably binds contemporary phenomenon, which is mythologization and its agents, with events that occurred in a period of time in the past. What is more, unlike the majority of papers on the issue of mythologization, the present work makes it possible to identify not only concrete features of the representation of 1990s in mass consciousness, but also to trace objective political processes behind it by means of collation of historical context with interviewees' insights that are also backed our theoretical grounds, the thing that many studies in the field lack chronically. It means that the contribution of this paper to the overall scope of knowledge on the issue of mythologization relates to the opportunity to explore broader range of political phenomena, utilizing the data obtained from informants.

One of the numerous possible illustrations of applications of inferences that we reach in the study of demythologization is the topic of reinforcing of myths about 1990s by current Russian government as an essential part of implicit state ideology, mentioned briefly in this paper. That could be seen from the perspective of Carr's and Ricoeur's theses on interpretation of national history for contemporary regime for the sake of its own legitimization as well. Thus, apart from the distinctive picture of findings concerning the prevalence, content and origins of myths about the 1990s, the present research could represent an interest as a source of experts' insights and data for studies of current Russian identity politics.

From what has been formulated, we can make out a coherent conclusion. The inside view on the political history of Russia in the 1990s reasonably contributes to the demythologization process by providing a historical perspective which emphasizes broader spectrum of causal mechanisms

of particular events as well as revealing favorable outcomes of those events, invisible from a scholar or observer outlook. Nonetheless, it is clear that the single group of narratives is not entirely sufficient to perform a massive achievement in the demythologization of the period as a whole, and sometimes even in specific cases, as we illustrated on the example of Chechen wars. On an expansive level, empirical research has to be conducted studying responses of multiple social and cultural groups. For that purpose, this paper might serve as a solid foundation.

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ВНУТРЕННИЙ ВЗГЛЯД НА ПОЛИТИЧЕСКУЮ ИСТОРИЮ РОССИИ 1990-х ГОДОВ КАК ИНСТРУМЕНТ ДЕМИФОЛОГИЗАЦИИ

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<p>Информация о статье: <i>Поступила в редакцию:</i> 10 августа 2019 <i>Принята к печати:</i> 10 января 2020</p>	<p>Аннотация: Целью данного исследования является обнаружение причин, почему период девяностых годов российской истории XX века окружен целой плеядой стереотипов, мифов, объединенных клише «лихие девяностые». Также в этой работе делается попытка проанализировать, насколько субъективны по своей природе наиболее распространенные из этих мифов.</p>
<p>Об авторах: <i>Вяткин И.О.</i>, студент образовательной программы “Политология и Мировая Политика”, Департамент Прикладной Политологии, Санкт-Петербургская школа социальных наук и востоковедения e-mail: iovyatkin@edu.hse.ru <i>Максимов А.В.</i>, студент образовательной программы “Политология и Мировая Политика”, Департамент Прикладной Политологии, Санкт-Петербургская школа социальных наук и востоковедения e-mail: avmaksimov_1@edu.hse.ru</p>	<p>В связи с этим, первую часть работы занимает обзор литературы, посвященной природе социальной «мифологизации» исторических событий, на основе которого делаются выводы о значимости субъективной трактовки прошлого («конструирования истории») как инструмента легитимизации настоящего, прежде всего политического. Кроме того, обзор обнаруживает ряд устойчивых исторических нарративов, ассоциирующихся с 1990-ми годами, эксплицитно и имплицитно циркулирующих в российском политическом дискурсе.</p> <p>Методологической основой работы выступают глубинные интервью с людьми, занимавшими посты в органах российской государственной власти в 1990-е. В результате проведения интервью, жизненные трудности, с которыми столкнулось большинство граждан на протяжении 1990-х годов, вкупе с использованием негативно окрашенного идеологического штампа «лихих 90-х» современным российским политическим режимом были отмечены информантами в качестве основных причин мифологизации. В свою очередь, при разборе конкретных мифологем, связанных с тем или иным событием или процессом, респонденты оказались едины во мнении, что все заявленные “мифы” являются упрощенными производными рецепции данных явлений обывателями, страдающими от недостаточного понимания глубины и сложности происходившего. Отдельное внимание при этом обращается на субъективное сравнение качества жизни в 1990-е и в 2000-е годы.</p>
<p>Ключевые слова: Российская политическая история; демифологизация; девяностые годы; политика памяти; идеология; реформы; общественное сознание</p>	<p>Делается вывод о том, что наличие квази-официальной позиции государства, поддерживающей обывательское представление о 1990-х, накладывает определенные ограничения на масштаб и интенсивность публичной дискуссии о роли 1990-х годов в истории российского государства, что определенно препятствует демифологизации данного периода в массовом сознании.</p>

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