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Contemporary Russian nationalism in the historical struggle between 'official nationality' and 'popular sovereignty'

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This chapter focuses on the dynamics of the historical role and ideational content of Russian nationalism from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the present.[1] It discusses the under-studied question of the mutual relationship between two manifestations of Russian nationalism: state nationalism and grassroots nationalism. The latter variety has appeared in Russia as a carrier of ideas of civic and popular sovereignty, drawing on the ideologues of the French Revolution. I argue that, throughout history, Russian state authorities have attempted to neutralise civic nationalism by substituting it with something ostensibly similar but actually very different: a paternalistic idea of 'official nationality' in the form of 'imperial nationalism'.

This political technology has been employed repeatedly in Russian history, as seen also during the recent events since 2014. On the other hand, although grassroots Russian nationalism has always had a primarily anti-liberal tendency, this has come to the fore only when a political liberalisation could be observed – during the liberal 'thaws'. When periods of authoritarian reaction returned, Russian nationalism as a societal phenomenon faded away, squeezed out by the ideology of the state.

Russian nationalism: From the Decembrists to 'the Black Hundreds'

Elsewhere I have discussed the evolution of the idea of the 'nation' in the Russian context and the related changes in the ideology of Russian nationalism during 'the long nineteenth century', from 1790

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through 1917 (Pain 2015a; 2016b). Several historical stages in this process stand out.

The first stage, 1790–1833, saw the emergence in Russia of a civic conception of the 'nation' as the banner of popular sovereignty, political representation and constitutional order. This interpretation of the nation appeared long before official state nationalism and the ethnic interpretation of nation, and remained dominant in Russia for several decades. This idea was variously defended by the Decembrists – the revolutionaries among the nobility, who in December 1825 demanded the limitation of autocracy in Russia, either through the establishment of a constitutional monarchy, or by the introduction of a republican system. Some experts see the Decembrists as the first representatives of a nationalist ideology in Russia (see Sergeev 2010). In the same civic interpretation, the idea of the nation was used in 1797 by the future emperor Aleksandr I (at that time heir to the throne), who announced that, on becoming tsar, he would grant Russia a constitution and that 'the nation (*natsiia*) will elect its representatives' (quoted in Miller 2012). However, after the Decembrist revolt and the reign of Nikolai I (especially after the Polish uprising 1830–1, with its slogans of national sovereignty), 'the former discourse about the *nation* and *national representation* as a desirable, although difficult, goal to achieve was replaced in official circles by the rejection of a constitution, and national representation was seen as an inappropriate principle for Russia' (Miller 2012, emphasis in original).

In the second stage, 1833–63, came the nationalisation of the idea of nation: the era of official nationality. One of the major strategies to defend the monarchy against the idea of a civic nation was to replace it with other, quasi-similar ideas. In 1833, Minister of Education Sergei Uvarov outlined a formula that became well known in Russia: 'Orthodoxy, autocracy, nationality'. This triad was intended as a bulwark against European freedom of thought, and an antithesis to French revolutionary ideas of 'freedom, equality and brotherhood', which Russian conservatives deemed unsuited for the Russian people. The main innovation in Uvarov's formula was the concept of 'nationality' (*narodnost'*) from which the whole doctrine took the name of 'official nationality'. As opposed to Western models, it emphasised Russia's devotion to its own traditions and distinctness – like the current concept of 'Russia's special path'.

According to Uvarov, the uniqueness of the Russian 'official nationality' consisted in the Russian people's devotion to Orthodoxy and autocracy, rejecting the idea of popular sovereignty. 'Official nationality' was primarily a patriarchal and paternalistic idea which

excluded any notion that the people should legitimise the monarch's right to rule. The power of the tsar comes from God; at the same time the principle of nationality prescribes for the tsar the moral obligation to love his people. He is the father of the people – so the children, his subjects, must faithfully honour their autocratic father.

The third stage, 1863–90, brought the first ethnicisation of the idea of the nation and the advent of ethnic Russian nationalism. The concept of 'nationality' had difficulty taking root – not only in the Russian language, but also in political practice. Even the Slavophiles of the 1840s–50s (Konstantin and Ivan Aksakov, Aleksandr Koshelev, Iurii Samarin and others) considered the doctrine of official nationality as 'despotism'. All this encouraged the state ideologists – the guardians of autocracy – to continue their search for terms to replace the seditious concept of the 'nation' (*natsiia*). Count Petr Valuev, one of the most influential state officials under Tsar Aleksandr II (1860s–80s), stressed the importance of replacing the highly politicised concept of the 'nation' (Fr. *nation*) with 'nationality' (Fr. *nationalité*), seen as a purely folk concept reflecting the culture and customs of the people. Over time in Russia, the concept of 'nationality', now *natsional'nost'*, took root in this sense, and in the mid-twentieth century began to be used in academic circles to define 'ethnicity' or 'ethnic identity': a group of people linked together by the myth of a shared origin and with their own self-designation (ethnonym) (Bromlei 1983: 57–58). Valuev also brought into the political language the concept of 'the national question' (using this phrase first in 1863 in a report to the tsar about the situation in Ukraine). Originally, this concept had purely negative connotations, indicating the threat of national (today we would say 'ethnic') separatism. However, when the ethnic nationalism of another group was perceived as negative – what about that of Russia?

With each passing decade in Russian history, the national problem increasingly shifted from its civic roots to something more ethnically coloured. The national topic was interpreted from an essentialist viewpoint as a certain set of characteristics bestowed by fate upon specific peoples (ethnic nations). From the 1880s, Russian Slavophiles, in their disputes with their Westerniser opponents, began actively developing Uvarov's idea of fundamental, everlasting and pre-ordained differences between the Russian people and the Western nations. Moreover, the Slavophiles of the 1880s–90s (such as Nikolai Danilevskii, Konstantin Leontiev and Vasilii Rozanov) rejected the legacy of their predecessors, the early Slavophiles of the mid-nineteenth century. In contrast to them, they adopted the German

mystical idea of a 'national spirit', introduced by Johann Gottfried Herder.[2] The late Slavophiles actively developed the idea of Russia's special path, contrasting the national character of the Russians – patient, spontaneous, warm, generous and inclined to *sobornost'* (a preference for collectivism) – to a generic image of a Western mentality, seen as always self-interested, greedy, deceitful and coldly calculating. From the circles of the late Slavophiles there also originated the ideological trend that became known as 'Russian nationalism'. If the late Slavophiles were theorists of nationalism, Mikhail Katkov, who was close to them in spirit, became one of the first nationalists in real politics. Katkov enjoyed substantial influence on state power during the reign of Tsar Aleksandr III – directly, in the capacity of adviser to the tsar, and more indirectly, exercising pressure on the government through the influential newspaper *Moskovskie vedomosti*, which he edited. For example, Katkov sought to eliminate 'foreigners' from the civil service, persons of non-Russian origin, such as Finance Minister Nikolai Bunge or Foreign Minister Nikolai Girs. Like many others, Katkov had begun his activity as a liberal Westerniser, but by the 1880s, he had become a radical Russian chauvinist.

The fourth stage, 1905–17, saw the political formalisation of Russian imperial nationalism and aggressive xenophobia. The first legal party of the Russian nationalists, the Union of the Russian People, emerged in 1905. The service of autocracy and the preservation of the empire were its main goals: 'The Union of the Russian People . . . establishes as its sacred, immutable duty to make any effort to ensure that the land won by the blood of our ancestors remains an eternally inalienable part of the Russian state' (Programma. . . 1905). The programme of action of the radical right-wing of Russian nationalism, which took shape politically at the time, contained ideas of monarchy linked to xenophobia – anti-Semitism in particular. These groups, collectively known as 'Black Hundreds', fomented and organised pogroms against Jews, as well as the murder of two Jewish deputies of the State Duma, Mikhail Gertsenshtein and Grigorii Iollos (Stepanov 2013). It was the Black Hundreds who launched the slogan 'Russia for Russians', which became a common principle held by all Russian nationalists – the political dominance of ethnic Russians, expressed in the demand for preferential rights to ethnic Russians: the *Russian nation*.

Thus, the idea of nation emerged in Russia in the late eighteenth century, with expectations of revolutionary change, centring on the constitution and the limitation of autocracy. By the late nineteenth century, this idea had degenerated into an ideology of defending autocracy and the imperial structure. Russian nationalism has

since involved various institutionalised entities promoting national egotism, great-power chauvinism and xenophobia.

State nationalism and grassroots nationalism in the Soviet period

In the Soviet Union, nationalism was officially prohibited as an ideology opposed to the state policy of internationalism. However, the content of Soviet internationalism changed quite radically several times, always bringing a shift in attitudes towards nationalism. Various social and ethnic communities became subsumed under the concept of the 'nation'.

Historian Yuri Slezkine maintains that the founder of the Soviet state, Vladimir Lenin, took an uncompromising stance on the issue of 'nations' and 'national rights': 'it was one of the most uncompromising positions he ever took, his theory of good ("oppressed-nation") nationalism formed the conceptual foundation of the Soviet Union' (Slezkine 1994: 414). I agree with Slezkine as regards the essence of his conclusions, but will challenge his terminology. Indeed, 'good nationalism' is not mentioned in the works of Lenin or his collaborators: to them, nationalism was something extremely negative. In Lenin's view, the ethnic consolidation of national minorities in Russia represented *a national liberation struggle* against Russification. Support for this struggle meant working to establish *real equal rights*, whereas the term 'nationalism' was generally reserved for the activities of political forces defending tsarist power in the name of the ethnic majority – the Russians – or, as they were called at that time, the 'Great Russians'. Such nationalism, which the Bolsheviks referred to as 'Great Russian chauvinism', was sharply denounced by the Communists. In the 1920s, that was the line followed by the entire leadership of the Communist Party.

A noteworthy representative of this line was Iosif Stalin, who was responsible for the nationalities policy of the Party as well as of the Soviet state. His speech at the 12th Party Congress in March 1923 corresponded fully with Leninist doctrine on the national question. Stalin denounced the tsarist Russification policy, supported the struggle of 'dependent nationalities against imperialist oppression', and declared that

> vestiges of great Russian chauvinism, which reflect the privileged position of the Great Russians in the past, can still be found in the Soviet Union. . . . Therefore, a decisive battle against the vestiges of Great Russian chauvinism is a first priority task for our party. (Stalin 1923)

However, in 1928–32, during the 'Great Transformation', this policy was radically changed, although initially only in relation to the national minorities. By then, Stalin had started the collectivisation of Soviet agriculture, with massive confiscation of land from the peasantry – mainly ethnic Russians – resulting in deep dissatisfaction among the vast majority of the population. The Soviet authorities then began to whip up xenophobia against national minorities, perhaps seeking to deflect social dissatisfaction into ethnic channels. However, another interpretation is also possible: when state terror was unleashed in the 1930s, it spread, becoming directed against national minorities as well. Whatever the case, ethnic cleansing and deportation of representatives of various national minorities and ethnic groups became a mass phenomenon in the 1930s. In the 1940s, large nations, with hundreds of thousands of members, were deported en masse: Crimean Tatars, Germans, Chechens, Ingushetians, Balkars, Karachais, Kalmyks and others (Polian 2005: 5).

In the 1940s, Stalin revised his own thesis about the unacceptability of the 'privileged position of the Great Russians'. During the Great Patriotic War and immediately afterwards, references to the leading and organising role of the ethnic Russians featured in his rhetoric. His decision to highlight the role of the ethnic majority population immediately gutted the policy of internationalism. Instead of implementing the idea of actual equal rights, the country returned to the imperial principal of a hierarchy of peoples, with the Russians as the 'elder brother', and the Russian republic, the RSFSR, as the 'elder sister' in the family of Soviet republics. In December 1943, the Politburo approved the lyrics of the new Soviet national anthem (replacing 'The Internationale'), which opened with words about how Great Russia (*Velikaia Rus'*) had gathered around her the other republics in an 'unbreakable union'. Yet another sign of the turnabout in Soviet nationalities policy was the new reliance on traditionalism and folkloric Russian nationality: in the mass propaganda, images of Russian heroes like Ilia Muromets from the medieval *bylina*s (epic poems) appeared together with the Kiev-era Prince Aleksandr Nevskii and even the tyrannical Tsar Ivan the Terrible. State awards carrying the names of tsarist military commanders were instituted. All of this was quite alien to Leninist internationalism.

During and after the war, Stalin's policy increasingly included elements of ethnic nationalism. The state ordered the production of artistic works, like films, novels and musical pieces that praised a specific kind of 'Russian character'. At the same time, many artistic works presented negative images of Soviet citizens of other

nationalities (German in particular), who were depicted as hidden, masked enemies harmful to Russia (Beliaeva and Mikhailin 2014).

Between 1930 and 1950, Soviet state propaganda fanned phobia against 'traitor-peoples', groups who became subjected to ethnic cleansing and deportation from their traditional territories. In 1948–53, an unmistakable state-orchestrated anti-Semitism appeared in the campaign against 'cosmopolitanism': Soviet Jews were accused of cosmopolitanism, that is, lack of Soviet patriotism – an accusation often accompanied by dismissal from work and even arrest (Fateev 1999).

During this period, Stalin's nationalities policy lost any resemblance to the original version of Soviet internationalism: it simply became a second edition of the imperial ideology of 'official nationality'. All three elements of Uvarov's triad reappeared in some shape. The element of 'autocracy' was clearly discernible, as the new ideology was no less authoritarian or paternalistic than it had been during the times of Nikolai I: Stalin was hailed as 'the Father of the nations'. The 'nationality' (*narodnost'*) of the regime was demonstrated by systematically contrasting Russian Soviet culture with the 'alien' Western culture. And finally, instead of Orthodox Christianity, Marxism – or more precisely, Stalinism – filled the role of official state religion.

The state policy of Soviet-type Russian nationalism ('official nationality') left no room for grassroots societal Russian nationalism – indeed, any manifestations of such nationalism were severely repressed. This situation continued also for some years after Stalin's death. In 1957–58 some underground nationalist circles were broken up: the Russian Popular Party (*Russkaia narodnaia partiia*), the Russian National Party (*Russkaia natsional'naia partiia*) and the Russian National-Socialist Party (*Rossiiskaia natsional'no-sotsialisticheskaia partiia*), as well as Viktor Trofimov's student circle in Leningrad ('Dissidentskie. . .' n.d.). These were all small organisations (fewer than ten members) devoted to the reading and discussion of theoretical questions, but all their members were sent to prison for many years. Other forms of self-organised ethnic and religious communities also continued to be suppressed. The year 1959 was marked by the mass closure of churches, monasteries and religious schools, as well as persecution of priests and pastors.

These repressions eased up in the early 1960s, a time of relative liberalisation known as the 'Khrushchev thaw'. This period saw activity blooming among not only the liberal intelligentsia – the '60's generation' (*shestidesiatniki*) – but also Russian nationalists. As noted by the historian Artem Fomenkov, the preconditions

were now created for the semi-legal (non-sanctioned, but not persecuted) political activity of nationalist groups (Fomenkov 2010). In 1964–67 the national-religious All-Russian Social-Christian Union for the Liberation of the People (*Vserossiiskii sotsial-khristianskii soiuz osvobozhdeniia naroda*, VSKhON) operated almost openly in Leningrad. Of all the underground dissident organisations of that time, this probably had the largest membership (twenty-eight members and thirty candidate members). The group was led by Igor Ogurtsov, who held that the state structures should be organised in accordance with Orthodoxy and Dostoevskii-inspired nationalism (*pochvennichestvo*).

Fomenkov concludes that the party organs and the KGB to some degree themselves initiated the activity of the semi-legal nationalist groups, to provoke attacks on the liberally thinking intelligentsia. This was partly accomplished: between 1964 and 1970, denunciations of the so-called bourgeois intelligentsia were quite frequent in the 'literary-patriotic' circle known as Radonezhtsy. Several writers with nationalist attitudes belonged to this circle, including Ivan Shevtsov, Igor Kobzev and Feliks Chuev. Starting from 1963, the journal *Molodaia gvardiia* (*Young Guard*) became the mouthpiece of Russian anti-liberal *pochvennichestvo*-nationalism – in reality, of Russian nationalist thought. From 1968, it was joined by *Nash sovremennik* (*Our Contemporary*). The authorities regarded these two journals and the writers involved (Stanislav Kuniaev, Vladimir Soloukhin, Vadim Kozhinov and others) as ideational fellow travellers. Their activity was tolerated but contained within the framework of the censorship and the norms of 'official nationality'. However, on the crest of this wave, these artists and scholars managed to produce works and actions that were genuinely oppositional and nationalist. This was the case, for instance, with the writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the historian Lev Gumilev and the mathematician-cum-nationalist publicist Igor Shafarevich.

The KGB did not immediately exert repression against them; as noted, the secret police may have been trying to foment confrontation between the two camps of dissidents – Russian nationalists and Western-oriented liberals. However, in the Soviet period such confrontations, even if they occasionally did take place, were played out in rather unobtrusive forms, mainly in cautious discussions on the pages of books and in journals published abroad.[3] The general refusal of Soviet dissidents to accept totalitarianism was stronger than their points of disagreement, and prevented the latter from erupting into the open. An example was the collaboration between
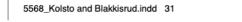
Igor Shafarevich, who later gained publicity as a fanatical propo-
nent of anti-Semitism, with Mikhail Agurskii, who in the late 1980s
became a prominent leader of the Zionist movement in the Soviet
Union. In 1974, both of them, together with Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn
and others, took part in the preparation of *From Under the Rubble*,
an underground anthology of anti-Soviet publicist articles (*samizdat*)
– a book that became a symbol of collaborative activity among the
various layers of the Soviet dissident movement.

State nationalism and grassroots nationalism in post-Soviet Russia

In the Soviet period, there were numerous examples of mutual sup-
port between dissidents who held very different views. After the col-
lapse of the Soviet Union, however, not only ideational but also sharp
political disagreements among the various currents of the former dis-
sident movement came to the fore. The new configuration of political
groups, and the lines of confrontation, were often quite unexpected.

It might seem paradoxical that in the early 1990s the vast major-
ity of the new organisations of Russian nationalists collaborated not
merely with Communists, but with the most conservative phalanx
among them – the uncompromising Stalinists, the ideological heirs of
those who had repressed earlier generations of Russian nationalists
and had replaced the concept of 'Russian' with the concept of 'Soviet'.
Some scholars hold that the choice of collaborators was made accord-
ing to the principle of the 'lesser evil': in the early 1990s, Russian
nationalists had to accept either the slogan 'Back to the USSR' or
'forward to the Western world', they had to embrace either Stalinism
or Western liberalism – and the great majority opted for Stalinism
(Novikov 2012: 263). In my view, this choice came naturally to the
ideational heirs of 'the Black Hundreds'. To them, Stalin was not so
much the leader of Communists as the ruler of the empire. Moreover
Stalin, like the 'Black Hundreds', was radically anti-Western. Finally,
Stalin had been the initiator of state-sponsored Soviet anti-Semitism,
something highly regarded by xenophobes among Russian national-
ists of the 'Black Hundreds' type.

During the twilight of the Soviet Union and in the early post-Soviet
years, such Russian nationalists were among the first to create or join
political parties, movements, fronts and so on. Following Vladimir
Malakhov (2006), I present a general scheme of chief currents in
Russian nationalism in the post-Soviet period, while also introducing
some minor readjustments in his classification. Malakhov underscores

two main sources of contemporary Russian nationalism: the 'Soviet-communist' and the 'traditionalist-*pochvennik*' subcultures (Malakhov 2006). I call the first subculture 'Soviet-imperial', and include in it not only Communists (leftists), but also non-Communist (rightist) ideologues of imperialism.

LEFTIST IMPERIAL NATIONALISTS

In this category we find the leading figures of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), headed by Gennadii Ziuganov, as well as more radical leftist groups such as Viktor Anpilov's Working Russia (*Trudovaia Rossiia*). In all these groups, Stalin's hybrid of imperial statism and ethnic nationalism was reborn. A crucial element of the nationalist-Communist propaganda in the 1990s was the image of a 'divided Russian people' resulting from the redrawing of borders between the successor states after the collapse of the Soviet Union. According to Ziuganov, the aim of the 'Russian idea' should be to reunite the divided Russian people (Ziuganov 1994).

Malakhov (2006) also focuses on what he calls a group of 'post-Communists'. Among them, we find Aleksei Podberezkin, leader of the Spiritual Heritage (*Dukhovnoe nasledie*) movement, who hails from Ziuganov's party. Podberezkin was among the first to exploit and romanticise the symbols of the empire. Others in this category are Sergei Kara-Murza, who renounced Stalinism in favour of a more moderate leftist version of a Russian *Sonderweg*; Aleksandr Prokhanov, the main ideologue of the People's Patriotic Union of Russia (*Narodno-patrioticheskii soiuz Rossii*, NPSR), a movement led by Ziuganov between 1996 and 2003; Eduard Limonov, the leader of the National Bolshevik Party (*Natsional-bol'shevistskaia partiia*); and finally, the young author Sergei Shargunov, who since 2016 has represented the Communist Party in the State Duma.

RIGHTIST IMPERIAL NATIONALISTS

Among the better-known ideologues of rightist imperial nationalism are Vladimir Zhirinovskii and Aleksandr Dugin. The former combines anti-Communist rhetoric with a radically expressed idea of imperial expansion – specifically, the need to re-establish the Russian Empire within its 1913 borders. Since 2003, Zhirinovskii and his party have added a new slogan to their imperial idea: 'We support the poor! We support the [ethnic] Russians!' (LDPR 2003), as well as a demand for the elimination of 'artificial discrimination against

Russians'. What this discrimination against Russians consists of, however, Zhirinovskii does not explain.

Dugin, as the leader of the International Eurasian Movement, is a theoretician of civilisational nationalism. He sees the Russian Empire as a result of a civilisational mutual attraction between the Slavic-Orthodox and the Turkic-Muslim peoples, as well as a geopolitical territory for the confrontation between Russia and the USA.

TRADITIONALIST-*POCHVENNIK* NATIONALISTS

The *pochvenniks* are also concerned about the imperial idea, but defence of the empire does not have top priority for them. Instead, they focus more on the interests of ethnic Russians, on the basis of the unique cultural traditions and conditions (*pochva*, or soil) of Russia. The *pochvenniks* trace their Soviet genealogy not to the state nationalists, but to either the Soviet dissident nationalists or the semi-legal literary circles in the 1960s, as well as to the literary milieus around the journals *Molodaia gvardiia* and *Nash sovremennik*. Some *pochvenniks* reject Communism (these are the 'white' *pochvenniks*) whereas the majority of them relate to Communism with equanimity, and some even idolise the figure of Stalin (these are the 'red-browns'). Common to the ideology of all *pochvenniks* is some degree of ethnic nationalism, ranging from moderate expressions of ethno-nationalism to the most extreme racism. An example of the former would be the adherents of Lev Gumilev, while the latter is represented by the views of Viktor Korchagin, editor of the first Russian translation of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. In the 1990s Korchagin led the Russian Party (*Russkaia partiia*), a relatively large organisation with more than 5,000 members, promoting the idea of an ethnically pure Russian state. Similarly, in the early 2000s, the co-chairs of the National Great-Power Party (*Natsional'no-derzhavnaia partiia*), Aleksandr Sevastianov and Boris Mironov, represented such radically racist views.

Russian racists are divided, first, between a secular and a religious phalanx; then, within the religious group, between the 'neopagans' (or simply 'pagans') and those adhering to Orthodoxy. The Orthodox *pochvenniks* have established political forces like the Union of Orthodox Banner-Bearers (*Soiuz pravoslavnykh khorugvonostsev*), the Union of Orthodox Brotherhoods (*Soiuz pravoslavnykh bratstv*), the party In Defence of Holy Russia! (*Za Rus' sviatuiu!*) and others. In 2002, the 'pagans' established a Library of Racist Thought (Malakhov 2006), an initiative supported by Andrei Saveliev, who had earlier represented the Motherland (*Rodina*) faction in the State Duma.

OFFICIAL NATIONALISM AND 'OFFICIAL NATIONALITY'

The final category concerns the policies of the Russian state authorities aimed at manipulating mass consciousness by evoking artificial traditionalism and a hypersensitive patriotism as a defence against threats (usually imagined) to the independence of the state and its autonomous development. A certain interest in traditionalism was already evident in the administration of the first Russian president, Boris Eltsin. During his time in office, the double-headed imperial eagle again became a state symbol in the state coat of arms, and the imperial tricolour became the official state flag. Public manifestations of the religiosity of the new state authorities were frequent; numerous photographs showed the president together with the patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church. Nevertheless, in my view, for Eltsin the main purpose of this was not so much to boost his ratings by drawing on the growing popularity of traditionalism, as to use the traditional, historic tsarist symbols as a counterweight to the artificial Communist symbols (see Pain 2015b). In Eltsin's thinking, the resurgence of the Orthodox Church which had been destroyed by the Bolsheviks should also symbolise his strategic line of returning Russia to her 'natural history' which had been interrupted by the Communist takeover.

While Eltsin followed a political course of 'returning Russia to Europe', his successor, Vladimir Putin, resurrected the Stalinist policy of a 'besieged fortress', Cold War-style anti-Western rhetoric and spymania. Eltsin symbolised Russia's break with totalitarianism; under Putin, official notes of protest have gone to the OSCE and to all European countries that have denounced Stalinism and Hitlerism as equally unacceptable versions of totalitarianism (*Argumenty i fakty* 2009; News2.ru 2009). Eltsin underscored the anti-imperial character of his policies; under Putin, the dominant line has been to present Russia as a 'great power' – which essentially means a cult of the empire. The propagandistic mobilisation of Russia's ethnic majority is also based on support for this cult.

The state policy of imperial nationalism in the post-Soviet period has developed in fits and starts. The first phase was heralded by Putin's 2007 Munich speech, regarded by many Western politicians as signalling a return to the Cold War. The second phase commenced with the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the subsequent military activities in the Donbas, severely exacerbating tensions between Russia and the West. The third phase is tied to Russia's military operations in Syria from 2015 onwards. These have led Russia and

the Western world to the brink of direct military engagement, giving Russian state nationalism yet another turn.

Each of these new phases in the increasing confrontation with the West has sharpened the harshness of the statements coming from Russian politicians. Even Russian diplomats have appealed more to the emotions of the Russian grandstand than to the international community. Thus, for instance, the Syrian crisis led Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov to draw on Russian ethnic fears, by playing up the threat of US Russophobia (Plavskaia 2016).

In parallel, Stalin-type rhetoric about the unique cultural dignity and superiority of the ethnic Russians is being revived: after Crimea and Syria, the 'fighting spirit' of the Russians has been hailed. In the words of political scientist Sergei Karaganov, who is close to the Kremlin, 'Russians aren't good at haggling, they aren't passionate about business. But they are outstanding fighters' (Karaganov, quoted in Neef 2016).

The Russian state authorities attempt to shield themselves from the world by demonising their enemies and by ostentatious praise of the Russian people. This is nothing new in Russia. Whenever it happens, such official nationalism leads to suppression of grassroots societal nationalism. This is how it was under Nikolai I and under Stalin; now it is being revived under Putin. Just when Putin assumed the presidency, Russian nationalist parties began to be denied official registration. Dozens of leaders of these parties and of their regional branches were taken to court on charges – sometimes trumped-up – of various crimes.

Whenever the state authorities have pursued a policy of liberalisation, this has led to a revival of grassroots nationalism. Such a revival took place during the Khrushchev thaw in the early 1960s, and was repeated in the liberalisation projects of Mikhail Gorbachev (1985–91). At that time, the National-Patriotic Front 'Pamiat' (*Natsional-patritoticheskii front 'Pamiat'*), founded by Dmitrii Vasilev, appeared. The Front was founded in 1987 at a non-sanctioned rally in Moscow against Gorbachev's perestroika and the policy of liberalisation. Pamiat's anti-liberal oppositional stance continued into the first post-Soviet years, but now this policy was even more pronounced in the ultranationalistic splinter organisation Russian National Unity (*Russkoe natsional'noe edinstvo*, RNE). In October 1993, both these political organisations (many of their members bearing arms) opposed the Eltsin administration in the conflict between the Russian president and pro-Communist insurgents in the Russian Supreme Soviet.

Eltsin's supporters won this confrontation, but there were no negative consequences for the above-mentioned Russian national-ist organisations. On the contrary, in 1995 Pamiat acquired legal status (previously, it had been registered in the Ministry of Justice as an interregional organisation only), while RNE in 1999 even tried to register its own candidates in the State Duma elections. In the 1990s – during the Eltsin epoch – more favourable conditions were created for grassroots political self-organisation of the population than ever before in Russian history. The new Russian state authorities refrained from suppressing the activity of most nationalist organisations, even if Russian nationalists at that time stood in fierce opposition to the powers-that-be.

Another period of (limited) liberalisation occurred between 2008 and 2012, during the presidency of Dmitrii Medvedev. In those years, the currents of Russian nationalism described below first emerged (see also Pain 2015a).

The short history of anti-imperial, 'national-democratic' Russian nationalism

Surfing on the wave of political protests in Russia in 2010–12, the contours of a brand-new variety of Russian nationalism appeared. Called 'national-democratic' by its advocates, this variant of Russian nationalism has several specific features.

AN ANTI-IMPERIAL CHARACTER

Konstantin Krylov, one of the most popular theorists of this 'new' nation-alism, has emphasised that Russian nationalism proper began to emerge only when it shifted from its obsession with the principles of imperial-ism and 'great power-ism' to the idea of promoting the interests of the nation. According to Krylov, 'Russian nationalism proper is essentially a new phenomenon. I date its history from around the first decade of the 2000s' (quoted in Nazdem.info 2010). Until the late 1990s, Russian nationalism was conceived of in imperial terms, but this movement, Krylov holds, ought not to be called Russian 'nationalism': 'everything boiled down to fantasies about of "how we can make good the empire".' The national democrats, on the other hand, see consistent nationalism as the opposite of imperial ideology: the latter asserts not the sover-eignty of the people, but the sovereignty of the ruler. Nationalism, says Krylov, 'considers the state as being of secondary value. The state exists for the people and not the people for the state' (ibid.).

ANTI-SOVIETISM

Rejecting the idea of empire and reconsidering the role of the state and society led many Russian nationalists to rethink Stalinism, which the Russian nationalists of the 1990s held forward as their banner. Stalin, these statists had declared, 'gathered the Russian lands' and greatly expanded the territory of the Russian Empire. 'When the Soviet state fell apart', says Krylov, 'all ideologically committed Russian forces sided with the Communists. As a result, they could not produce anything but a "red-brown synthesis"' – which, in the opinion of this 'genuine nationalist', led to disaster. But by 2010, the situation had changed radically and the Russian nationalists proposed a new idea: 'Nationalism and democracy are practically the same thing' (ibid.).

A 'DEMOCRATIC TURN'

The first sign of what would later be called the 'democratic turn' in Russian nationalism was the formation of an 'anti-Soviet platform', as with the appearance of a separate anti-Soviet section in the 2012 Russian March (Manifest. . . 2012). After that, many nationalist leaders in their speeches increasingly began to reject not only Stalinism, but also authoritarianism as a political principle. A notable feature of this new Russian nationalism is its demonstrative opposition to those in power. Representatives of the national-democratic opposition began to make appearances and speak at opposition rallies. Thus, the leaders of the National Democratic Party (*Natsional'no-demokraticheskaia partiia*, NDP), including Konstantin Krylov, Vladimir Tor, Rostislav Antonov and Aleksandr Khramov, appeared at the 2011–13 rallies 'For fair elections' in Moscow. Aleksei Shiropaev and Ilia Lazarenko, the ideologists of the National Democratic Alliance (*Natsional-demokraticheskii al'ians*), have promoted the idea of a 'nation-oriented' democracy even more consistently. Valerii Solovei, leader of the New Force party (*Novaia sila*), has also expressed similar national-democratic views in his public speeches.

At the interface between the national-democratic model and the autocratic and imperialist one, the ideas of Egor Prosvirnin – founder of the popular nationalist Internet project *Sputnik i Pogrom* – have evolved. Prosvirnin is one of the most controversial figures among the Russian nationalists. In his programmatic writings in 2010–12, he vehemently criticised the Soviet Communist regime, comparing it to a dark night: 'amidst a clear Russian day, suddenly the dark night

of communism fell' (Prosvirnin 2012). He has also focused on the necessity of democratic changes that would, in his view, benefit ethnic Russians: 'Our ideal is a Russian national democratic, law-based state . . . with an economic life based on the principles of the rule of law and free competition' (Prosvirnin n.d.; see also 2014a). All this served to draw Prosvirnin close to the national-democratic trend in Russian nationalism. At the same time, the anti-liberal rhetoric in most texts on Sputnik i Pogrom's webpages, with ideas of expansionism and territorial revenge, revealed Prosvirnin's affinity to the ideology followed by the majority of imperial nationalists.

The difference between traditional Soviet imperialists and the new Russian nationalists representing the new national-democratic wing came to the fore in the winter of 2013/14 with the demonstrations organised by the Ukrainian political opposition in Kiev's Maidan Square. At the time, a significant number of Russian national democrats supported the Maidan protesters in one way or another, the National Democratic Alliance most consistently. The leader of this organisation, Aleksei Shiropaev, described the events in Kiev as 'an anticolonial, democratic, European revolution (in terms of its civilisational vector)' (Shiropaev 2014). The Russian nationalists in the NDP assessed the Maidan incidents more cautiously, but without concealing their support for the protests. However, after Russia's annexation of Crimea, the nationalist opposition quickly went into decline. For example, Prosvirnin, who until then had directed caustic criticism at the Russian authorities, now made no secret of his support for the government's actions during the Crimean crisis, and welcomed the inclusion of the peninsula into Russia. He commented on his change of position in a text on his website:

> And the fact that Putin, after decades of surrendering Russian interests everywhere and in every way, suddenly remembered that Crimea is Russian land, is actually good . . . It would be strange, to say the least, to criticise Putin for having begun to fulfil a part of our programme. (Prosvirnin 2014b)

The decay of Russian national democracy

When Crimea had been annexed by Russia, even the national democratic elite of Russian nationalists, or at least most of them, proved unable to relinquish the imperial stereotypes. Russian nationalism lost its temporary character of opposition to the government; among its ranks the popularity of President Putin and even of the 'great leader'

Stalin was growing. However, this twist was not tantamount to a rebirth of the leftist Stalinist nationalism of the 1990s. In post-Crimea Russia, nationalists have merged into a single, internally poorly differentiated mass of supporters of the idea of Russia as a great power (*velikaia derzhava*), proud of the actions of the Russian armed forces in Crimea, Donbas and Syria. Anti-Western sentiment has increased significantly. With this ideological dissolution into the general flow of aggressive patriotism, Russian nationalism has lost its ideological originality, its own special niche of political activity – and consequently, the ideological basis even for the consolidation of its former supporters. Except for xenophobia, there is no longer a specific, distinct topic around which the nationalists could converge. For the time being Russian nationalists exhibit one of the lowest levels of not only civic, but also ethnic, solidarity in the entire post-Soviet era.

This conclusion is consistent with the general trend of changes in collective consciousness in the post-Crimea period. First, the interests of the masses are shifting from domestic problems, including ethnic questions, to 'more important' state issues: the annexation of Crimea, the conflict in Donbas and 'the intrigues of the West' in Ukraine. Data from the Levada Centre show that one out of three Russians surveyed (35 per cent) think that after the annexation of Crimea the outside world has begun to fear Russia more than before (Levada 2016); moreover, 63 per cent of the respondents think that domestically Russia also faces more enemies than before (Elkina 2015).

Second, the structure of ethnic phobias is changing. Typical post-Soviet phobias – towards peoples of the Caucasus and Central Asia – have weakened somewhat. In 2014–15 sociologists from the Levada Centre recorded the lowest level of animosity towards 'other nationalities' (defined as people from the Caucasus and Central Asia) over a five-year period. Such hostility was felt 'very often' or 'often' by 13 per cent of the respondents in 2015 and 14 per cent in 2014; prior to 2010, the scores had been 19–20 per cent (Levada 2016: 195).

On the other hand, members of ethnic communities traditionally considered 'insiders' and 'close to' the Russian people have now fallen into the category of 'foreigners'. Against the backdrop of a relative reduction in manifestations of unspecified Russian ethnophobia towards 'other nationalities', there has been a conspicuous rise in negative attitudes towards Ukrainians, whom many Russians until recently referred to as 'brothers' or 'as Russian as we are'. This change is evident from the responses to the question 'Is it necessary to limit the time of stay in Russia for people of the following nationalities?' With regard to Ukrainians, there has been a rapid rise in affirmative

answers: in early 2014, 1 per cent of those surveyed answered 'yes', at the end of the same year, 8 per cent, and in 2015, 14 per cent (in previous years, starting from 2004, such scores had always been less than a few percentage points) (Levada 2016). This clearly shows how statist, imperialist attitudes can suppress well-established ethnic stereotypes.

It should be noted that even in those instances when ethnic stereotypes, prejudices and phobias may be prominent in the consciousness of some Russians, this rarely leads to support for autonomous, self-organised nationalist groups. Such groups are regarded as hooligans, extremists or simply as unreliable partners. These same Russians, however, are often ready to embrace Russian chauvinism if it stems from the state itself. Aleksandr Verkhovskii refers to Russian sociological surveys which show that the majority of respondents are in favour of imposing a ban on those nationalist movements (RNE, skinheads and others) that are known to them. At the same time, they are favourably inclined towards those nationalists that enjoy the support of the state (like the Russian Cossacks). 'Consequently', Verkhovskii argues, 'the average Russian citizens continue to tie their hopes to the powers-that-be – it is precisely the state that ought to solve all problems: specifically, it is obliged to chase out the migrants' (quoted in Kuzmenko 2016).

Features of self-identification among the ethnic majority in Russia

Even in a period of social growth and rising popularity of the national-democratic strand of nationalism, its theorists noted that the purification of Russian nationalism from Soviet, imperialist ideology requires a lot of time and effort (Krylov in Nazdem.info 2010). Instead of such purification, however, post-Crimea Russia has shown a growth in the influence of imperialistic ideology among Russian nationalists. Perhaps this might be because, among ethnic Russians (the social basis of Russian nationalists), state identity has traditionally been much stronger than national identity. Ethno-sociological studies conducted in the 1980s, the 1990s, and the 2000s by groups of ethno-sociologists led by Iurii Arutiunian and Leokadiia Drobizheva provide evidence of the correlation between these two identities.

In the twilight of the Soviet era, in 1988, when growing ethnocentrism began to assume a political formalisation and 'national fronts' had appeared in several republics of the Soviet Union, for the majority

of ethnic Russians their state-centred identity predominated over their Russian ethnic identity. A sociological survey conducted by the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Science showed that 78 per cent of the respondents defined themselves as 'Soviet', and only 15 per cent as 'Russian'. By contrast, in control groups composed of Uzbeks, Georgians and Estonians, the ethnic identity was predominant (reported in Arutiunian et al. 1999: 165). This research also demonstrated how Russians paid significantly less attention to their national culture and history than did other groups. In responding to a question about the most significant problems requiring attention, only 10 per cent of Russians living in the non-Russian republics, and even fewer Russians living in their own ethnic environment within the RSFSR, mentioned 'the development of our own national culture' – whereas 30 to 50 per cent of the Uzbek, Georgian and Estonian respondents saw this as an important issue (Arutiunian 1992: 399). The Russians surveyed also showed less attention to their ethnic group's past, to the idea of a common historical destiny as a factor of ethnic cohesion, to national symbols and to various other points used by sociologists as indicators of ethnic and cultural identity (ibid.: 399–400).

In the first post-Soviet years (1991–93), the growth of ethnic self-awareness and traditionalism took hold also within the Russian Federation. During the so-called 'parade of sovereignties' the elites and the masses in the republics within the Russian Federation (Bashkortostan, Tatarstan, Dagestan, etc.) attempted to gain greater autonomy based on national (ethnic) features. In Chechnya, the national movement declared the republic's independence from the Russian Federation. Even under these conditions, however, Russian self-awareness changed little compared to the Soviet era. More than 80 per cent of the Russians surveyed evinced ethnic nihilism, or indifference, and chose the response, 'I have never thought about what nationality I am'. Only 8 per cent answered, 'I never forget that I am Russian' (Pain 2004: 185).

Between 1994 and 1996, ethnic self-awareness peaked among most ethnic groups in the Russian Federation. The many ethnic conflicts in those years, ethnic separatism and the Chechen War, could not but stimulate the growth of Russian ethnic self-awareness, as evident from several sociological studies. Still, while one quarter of the Russian respondents now clearly emphasised their ethnic identity ('I never forget that I am Russian'), other ethnic groups in Russia showed an even greater increase in ethnic self-awareness: such

attitudes were expressed by between half to two thirds of those surveyed (Pain 2004: 185). To a significant degree, growing Russian ethnic self-awareness came as a response to the agitation of the ethnic minorities. Hence, when in the late 1990s the ethno-political upsurge began to diminish among most ethnic groups in Russia, the traditional territory- and state-centred identity regained its dominant position among ethnic Russians. In 1999, 79 per cent of Russian respondents defined themselves as 'Russian citizens', as against only 20 per cent among the Yakuts surveyed (Drobizheva 2009: 32).

The Russian ethnic majority do not respond to ethnic traditionalism, but rather to great-power traditionalism: pride in being part of a state with a thousand-year history that includes great military victories and territorial conquests. This is borne out when we consider the heroes in the hall of fame, compiled on the basis of national Internet surveys conducted in the first decade of the new millennium. The list is dominated by the names of tsars, other state leaders and generals such as Petr I, Aleksandr Nevskii, Dmitrii Donskoi, Ekaterina II, Ivan the Terrible, Iosif Stalin and Georgii Zhukov. Only the cosmonaut Iurii Gagarin somewhat redresses the balance among the top ten of this long list of 'state heroes' within the historical consciousness of the Russian people. Likewise, the Great Patriotic War (the Second World War) was chosen as the most significant event in history. One specific feature of the Russian national consciousness, as distinct from, for example, German collective self-awareness, emerges from these evaluations: German society, which engendered Nazism and German totalitarianism, associates the Second World War with national disaster and with defeat in war; by contrast, Russian society, under the influence of propaganda, could associate the Stalinist totalitarian regime with the great victory over fascism.

On the other hand, the predominance of the state-centred identity over ethnic identity is not necessarily an exclusively Russian feature – many people who represented the ethnic majority in the central area of an empire are characterised by this type of identity. For the English, for instance, 'British' overarching identity is much stronger than it is for the Irish, Scottish and Welsh peoples, whose ethnic identities largely figure as the antithesis to the 'British', which is still largely perceived as imperial (Lipkin 2007). In Spain, the ethnic majority, the Castilians (*castellanos*), sacrificed their ethnonym and the name of their language in favour of the national name 'Spaniards' (*españoles*). This pre-eminently state-oriented identification contrasts with the marked

predominance of ethnic identity among Spain's minorities, such as the Basques (Kozhanovskii 2007: 241). In France, non-ethnic identities (civic, state and individualistic) have historically prevailed over ethnic identity, although ethnic phobias have erupted also there, as after the French defeat in the 1870–1 war with Germany. More recently, ethnic phobias in French society have intensified towards a new enemy: the immigrants, or rather, *non-European* immigrants. This has somewhat strengthened the ethnic self-identification among many French people – who are nevertheless considered to show much weaker ethnic self-awareness than that of Corsicans, French Basques, French Catalans, and many other ethnic and regional minorities in France (Filippova 2007: 202–10).

All these differences in self-identification among the ethnic majority and the minorities are well explained by the nature of this type of identification itself, which comes to the surface in the relationship between 'us' and 'them'. For minorities surrounded by an ethnic majority, the latter is always the 'constitutive other'. The majority, by contrast, notices the minorities only under certain circumstances – for instance when ethnic conflicts and other incidents occur; when the size of minority populations increases significantly; or when new minorities appear in the country. Ethnic identity is usually not static – it waxes and wanes, especially among the ethnic majority population. But whereas ethnic identity may quickly ignite and fade, the formation of civic consciousness is a long and difficult process that can span several centuries.

Michel Foucault sought to decipher the genealogy of modern power in Western countries, and, through the example of France, analysed the modern forms of control over the people as well as strategies for opposing them (Foucault 2003). For this purpose, he juxtaposed two concepts. The first was the concept of 'population', a passive category, an object of governmental control, a resource for ensuring the security of the country and the development of the territory. The second concept was that of 'society': an active social subject, a source of resistance to paternalism. Precisely such persistence, in Foucault's opinion, leads a country towards another type of government, one which better matches the interests of a civic society and nation. According to Foucault, a French civil nation has not yet been completely achieved, although the idea of popular sovereignty had been proclaimed two centuries earlier. In Russia, the elite began to proclaim the idea of popular sovereignty not much later than in France: even today, in the second decade of the 2000s, there is still no sign of a civic, political nation or of a state subordinated to the interests of the nation.

According to the Levada Centre, no growth in political self-awareness among the people as a source of power could be observed in Russia: between 2006 and 2015, more than two thirds of the respondents (from 67 per cent to 87 per cent, depending on the year) consistently affirmed that they did not believe that they had any influence on the political or economic life of the country (Levada 2016: 58).[4] In fact, aspirations of realising the principle of popular sovereignty have even declined. To the question 'Should we insist (*zastavit'*) that the state must serve our interests?' the share of affirmative answers has decreased by as much as 24 percentage points in a quarter of a century: from 37 per cent in 1999 to 13 per cent in 2015 (ibid.: 64). Moreover, in 2015, when the desire of the Russian public to induce the authorities to act in the interests of the people was shown to be at a minimum, a large majority of respondents (60 per cent) did not harbour any illusions regarding the popular character of the Russian government, seeing it as 'mostly not accountable' or 'not accountable at all' to society (ibid.: 62). Only an absolute minority – 9 per cent of those surveyed – believed that 'Our authorities represent the people; they have the same interests as the common people' (ibid.: 65). A further important indicator of the growth in civic consciousness is also lacking in Russia: the aspiration to participate in the governance of the country. During the ten-year period 2006 to 2015, more than half of those surveyed said they were generally 'reluctant to engage in any contact with the authorities' (ibid.: 61).

With historian Geoffrey Hosking, we can say that in Russia 'state-building obstructed nation-building' (Hosking 1997: xxiv). Hosking was writing about Russia's past, but his statement is also applicable to the present situation. In Russia in the early twenty-first century, the state authorities have been imposing on society an ideology very similar to the doctrine of 'official nationality'. Here the regime is supported by the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church, which to a large degree is dependent upon the state. This makes it easier to subjugate Russian society under the authoritarian regime. In Russia we find what Foucault would call a 'population' – not a 'society' interested in controlling the state machine and able to realise its leading role.

Concluding remarks

What is today called 'Russian nationalism' can be described as post-imperial consciousness – with nostalgia for the days of the Empire, resentment and various political phobias. This kind of consciousness

is characteristic not only of Russian statists, but is also quite widespread among various ethnic communities in Russia. Moreover, it can be found among adherents of different political views, and among people living in other states generally referred to as belonging to 'the Russian World' (Pain 2016a). This is a passive and, to a large extent, virtual community. The vast majority of its members support the slogan 'Crimea is ours!' They admire the 'polite people' and the Donetsk fighters, and follow their activities on television.

If we compare the number of people who participated in the 2015 Russian March with those who took part in the liberal marches of that year, for instance the march in memory of the liberal activist Boris Nemtsov, killed on 27 February 2015 in downtown Moscow, then it appears that the liberal opposition is more ready for self-organisation than are Russian nationalists. Statism essentially paralyses social activism: civic indifference is compensated by the cult of a strong leader and the myth that the individual person is only 'a grain of sand on the beach', a tiny part of the abstract mass of 'our people'.

The fact that imperial consciousness has no rigid ethnic ties, that it is not transmitted through the channels of cultural tradition but is created under the influence of socio-political conditions, would indicate that a radical reprogramming of such a mass psychology is possible. The incentives for such transformation may come not only after a deep historical trauma, as in Germany after the defeat of Nazism, but also as a result of evolutionary changes, as happened in France. Theoretically, this is also possible in Russia. However, today there are no political forces in the country that could start the deconstruction of the imperial consciousness. On the contrary: we find a continued discrediting of the basic tenets of a civic nation – and that undermines the people's desire for, and faith in, the possibility of society ruling the state.

Notes

1. The article was prepared within the framework of a research project funded by the Russian Science Foundation (RSF No. 15-18-00064).
2. This idea had also exerted a strong influence on Uvarov, and later evolved into the doctrine of the 'special German path' (Ger. *Deutscher Sonderweg*).
3. One example of the latter is the Westerniser Andrei Siniavskii's criticism of another dissident, likewise repressed by Soviet power, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, for nationalism, in The New York Review of Books (Sinyavsky and Andreyev Carlisle 1979).

4. Based on the sum of the answers 'probably not' and 'definitely not' to the question: 'Do you have any influence on the political and economic life in Russia?'

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