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**THE IDEA OF WAR IN THE CULTURE OF THE RUSSIAN
NATION**

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Abstract:

This paper is devoted to the mentality as the result of social processes by shaping of life experiences, but in case of Russia with special understanding of spirituality play a key role in shaping national identity and thus the perception of war. The aim of this paper will be to analyse the idea of war in Russian culture, considering its relationship to Russian nihilism, its roots, and the consequences it entails. Understanding the place of the archetype of war and the enemy in the self-awareness of Russians is not only important from a research perspective. This paper is also about aspects of the treatment of the bodies of fallen soldiers fighting on the side of the Russian Federation. The first objective of this study was to analyse the idea of war in Russian culture. Next, understanding the place of the archetype of war and the enemy in the self-awareness of Russians. This paper is also about aspects of the treatment of the bodies of fallen soldiers fighting on the side of the Russian Federation. Author used following research procedures: 1. Literature review; 2. Collection of qualitative and quantitative data; 3. Analysis; 4. Formulation of conclusions. The article presents original scientific research an alternative view of the idea of war in Russian culture, describing the characteristics of a nation's mentality with various aspects of an ethnic group's spiritual life, as well as understanding of Russia's lack of respect to bodies of fallen soldiers fighting on the side of the Russian Federation.

Key words: security; mentality; nihilism; war; Ukraine; bodies of soldiers

1. Introduction

There is no doubt that Russian culture is still not fully understood by its neighbours, including Poland, as well as other Central and Western European countries. The Russian soul seems to hide many unsolved riddles and never ceases to surprise us, unfortunately also in a negative way. Just a few years ago, it was hard to believe that the current leaders of the Russian Federation would decide on full-scale military aggression against Ukraine in 24 of February 2022, condemning not only a 'brotherly nation' but also their own country.

Both the very start of the armed conflict and the manner in which it was conducted prove that Russia has deep disregard not only for its own laws, but also those of its neighbours and international law. The bombing of civilian infrastructure, blocks of flats and hospitals, the abuse of prisoners of war, the seizure of public and private property and, finally, the acts of genocide in Bucha and Irpin - these are crimes for which not only the Putin regime is responsible, but also the soldiers fighting on the Russian side and ordinary citizens supporting the invasion of a sovereign European state. Russia's war crimes are striking not only in their cruelty but also in their scale [1]. For some, these events came as an unpleasant surprise, while for others they were a logical consequence of the historical and ideological conditions in which this post-Soviet superpower has operated.

The aim of this paper will be to analyse the idea of war in Russian culture, taking into account its relationship to Russian nihilism, its roots, and the consequences it entails. Understanding the place of the archetype of war and the enemy in the self-awareness of Russians is not only important from a research perspective. This paper is also about aspects of the treatment of the bodies of fallen soldiers fighting on the side of the Russian Federation.



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2. Russian mentality

The idea of war in Russian culture is inextricably linked to the general mentality of the nation. Russian history is replete with events that have influenced the formation of national identity and mentality. Numerous wars, invasions, territorial conflicts and key geopolitical moments have had a lasting impact on Russian thinking. An analysis of the idea of war in the culture of the Russian people therefore requires an understanding of the mental background.

According to Alla Sergeeva, the roots of Russian national character are inextricably linked to geography, climate and historical factors. In doing so, the researcher points to one of the most fundamental features of Russian culture, which is a kind of rift between Eastern and Western civilisations. Within its mentality, two worlds, two great cultures meet. Russian 'Orientalism' consists primarily of a Byzantine component, which Kievan Rus borrowed from Byzantium after it was baptised in 988. Thus, Kievan Rus absorbed elements such as centralised state administration, the tax system, the possibility of changing state affiliation, rural and urban communities, traditions of iconography, or the coat of arms with the two-headed eagle [2].

After the fall of the Byzantine Empire in the 15th century, the historiosophical concept of 'Moscow - the Third Rome' emerged [3]. Russia of the time, as an Orthodox state, considered itself the heir of authentic Christianity. Moscow, as the capital of Rus, was seen as the third and final centre of the Christian world. This, in turn, stimulated the development of a national messianism, based on the belief in Russia's special role in human history. Sergeeva makes no secret of the fact that Russian messianism sometimes took extreme forms, combining with haughty nationalism and even chauvinism [2].

The second 'eastern' component of the Russian mentality is the result of centuries of contacts with the Tatars and Mongols. These relations also became irrefutable proof that strong, centralised state power was essential for security and stability. The Russians' subsequent victory over the Mongols gave them a sense of power, national pride, patriotism and distrust of foreign influence [4]. According to A.J. Siegień-Matyjewicz they created a specific way of thinking, worldview, attitudes, beliefs and habits of the majority of representatives of a particular nation - national mentality (ros. natsional'nyj charakter).

Functioning on the borderline between Western and Eastern civilisations has become the basis of a profound dualism. Russian culture has taken on features of both Western and Eastern civilisations. However, it should not be regarded as [5] a civilisational conglomeration - for the Russian mentality generated such ideas, worldviews, cultural phenomena that were original and atypical of both Western and Eastern traditions, e.g. about the mysterious Russian soul.

3. Influence of Russian nihilism on security

In Russian scientific literature, legal nihilism is defined primarily as an attitude consisting of a negative attitude towards the laws in force in each country. This attitude is expressed through a lack of trust in the law and the institutions that uphold it [6]. An analysis of the theories cited shows that Russian authors describe legal nihilism somewhat differently from authors like as Arthur Schopenhauer, Max Stirner, and Friedrich Nietzsche. So where is the source of Russian nihilism?

Nineteenth-century nihilism, which came to Russia from the West, became an integral part of the self-awareness of many representatives of the intelligentsia of the time. It was not, however, a shallow fashion, consisting in the simple borrowing of certain philosophical ideas. The seeds of nihilism, having found their way into the fertile soil of the 'mysterious Russian soul', yielded an abundant crop. This crop became Russian nihilism, which was a kind of phenomenon.



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According to contemporary researchers, legal nihilism is very deeply rooted in the mentality of Russian society [7]. Lack of trust in legal norms is a peculiar Russian tradition that is several hundred years old. Unlike Western states, Russia's social order was based not on law, but on moral-religious foundations, constituted by Orthodoxy [8].

In the West, the law is a guarantor of security, and the prohibition of certain behaviour enables the realisation of personal freedom. A person raised in Russian culture views these issues very differently. For them, the law is a tool of control, an instrument of repression, serving primarily the interests of the ruling elite [9]. As a result, the phenomenon of legal nihilism permeated all strata of Russian society. Legal regulations were bent by petty officials, but also by those holding the highest state positions [10].

Many decades later, perestroika began, an attempt to come to terms with the bloody past. An attempt that ended in failure. As a result, Soviet society was lulled into a sense of guilt for the sins of the past [11]. A large part of the Russian public is convinced that a significant improvement was brought about by the change of power in 1999. We could see how naive the belief in a 'strong leader' turned out to be in the second decade of the 21st century. The tightening of the Putin dictatorship that followed the annexation of Crimea in 2014 led, among other things, to the further degeneration of the Russian justice system. The police and the judiciary were de facto transformed into an apparatus of political terror [12].

4. The ethos of war as consequence of Russian nihilism

The history of Russia is basically a history of constant wars. wars - this is the thesis of some scholars. For most of its lifespan, the Kremlin has either waged hostilities, prepared for them, or leveled them. At the level of cultural archetypes, the Russian idea of war is primarily linked to defence rather than aggression. Olga Gefner notes that in the consciousness of the Russian people, war is not a struggle for territory or wealth, it is not lined with cruelty or the desire for profit. It is a 'holy war', motivated by noble anger against aggressors and oppressors. It is a war for the homeland, for justice, for peace, hence God himself helps the Russian people in their struggle [13]. War, above all, is fear, fires, blood, wounds, disability, death, tragedy, pain, betrayal. But also friends of arms, courage, bravery, saving the homeland, defending the faith, victory, faithfulness, noble deeds, joyful meeting with a loved one (father, brother, son) who has returned from the front [14]. The blatant violation of the law, the disregard for fundamental principles of morality and common sense obscures an obvious fact for the invaders: Russia's crimes reflect primarily on itself [15].

On 24 February 2022, Russia's invasion of Ukraine began, considered to be the largest armed conflict on European soil since World War II [16]. The official reason for the Russian aggression was supposed to be the protection of the population from the Kiev regime, as well as the denazification and demilitarisation of Ukraine [17]. In fact, however, at the heart of the decision were the imperial ambitions of Vladimir Putin and his henchmen, who dreamt of reconstructing the Soviet Union. These hopes were not fulfilled. Kiev did not fall after three days, as some Russian and US observers had predicted. The war has dragged on for months and turned from a local crisis into a global one. During the first five days, the main objective of the Russian invaders was to seize the capital of the invaded country and to cut off its access to the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. The seizure of territories along the latter body of water allowed the invaders to gain a land route to annexed Crimea. Another important task was to take control of the Kharkiv region. The most intense fighting was then carried out in the north-eastern and south-eastern areas of Ukraine [18]. It soon became apparent that the Russian army was unable to achieve either the objectives set at the start of the aggression or those set later. It failed to overthrow the government in Kiev, and after the defeat in the Kharkiv region it became clear that Russia would not create a land corridor connecting the



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occupied territories with Transnistria [19]. Personnel losses on the Russian side proved incomparably higher. Indeed, Putin's regime was not prepared to wage a war on this scale.

5. War as the cultural code of the Russian nation

According to philosopher F. N. Blucher, the ethos of just war is the cultural code of the Russian nation. The Russian Empire had the de facto character of a great war machine - the lives of the country's citizens were completely subordinated to military objectives, which shaped the mindset of future generations in this way. In Blucher's view, the so-called 'spiritual bonds' of the Russian people often have either an overt or covert military sense: "A Russian will never surrender", "A Russian will not leave his own to die", "A Russian is ready to sacrifice his life to save a friend" [20].

As Irina Glebova notes, society and power, by focusing on the problems associated with (or identified with) the war, justify their own actions, indispensability of the 'mistakes' or shameful events committed [21]. Inextricably linked to it is the image of the enemy. Russian propaganda feeds Russians with narratives about, 'Holy Russia', 'the Third Rome', or 'great Russian spirituality' [22]. As a consequence, for generations now, many Russians have had the impression that they de facto live in an ideal state, a socio-state structure that, apart from minor exceptions (in the form of dishonest officials or potholed roads), has no major flaws. So why does the country have so many problems? The propaganda's answer is simple: the enemy (usually external, in the form of richer, more democratic Western countries) is to blame in everything. Until the enemy is defeated once and for all, there will be no happiness or normality. Therefore, the war never ends. Since the victories in previous wars did not bring widespread happiness, it means that it was a half-success. The enemy will therefore suffer defeat regardless of military superiority [13]. Interestingly, the Russian Federation does not meet these standards even for its own soldiers. Their bodies are usually abandoned on the battlefield or burned in mobile crematoria. In this way, the Kremlin is trying to hide the losses the Russian army is suffering in the war against Ukraine. "Disposal" of corpses also avoids the obligation to pay benefits to the families of the fallen [23]. This is because a cremated soldier acquires the status of a missing person without news. There is no doubt that respect is due to the human body as participating in the dignity of the person. Logical consequence is lack of respect to deceased and his corpse [24].

6. Conclusions

A more important factor that continues to determine the Russian's behaviour is his long-term residence in a totalitarian state. His consciousness has been strongly influenced by both the crisis caused by perestroika and the 'shock therapy' of the social changes of the 1990s. The realities of everyday life are permanently and dynamically changing [25]. Russia is struggling with serious problems in areas such as the development of democracy, the protection of human rights, poverty, media freedom and judicial independence, the fight against corruption, bureaucracy and political instability [13].

Bakhtiev's analyses, but also similar reflections by other authors, give rise to a rather risky thesis: the war myths that Russians still believe in testify to the profound immaturity of this nation, or at least a significant part of it. The obsession with tracking down an external enemy, the constant struggle (real or imagined) with countries wishing to subjugate the 'Holy Rus', brings to mind the mechanism of projection known from psychology.

Russia is engaged in a devastating war with its closest neighbour Ukraine, is sinking into economic and political isolation, and also has a problem in its relations with its allies. Despite this, a



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significant part of this nation clings to its own falsified view of the world, and accuses the 'rotten West', 'Ukrainian neo-Nazis' or 'traitors to the motherland' of all its failures [22].

The predominant view among many predictions is that a defeat in Ukraine means the removal of Vladimir Putin from power. This, in turn, could trigger a civil war. One of the reasons for this will be the profound legal nihilism that has resulted in the failure of the legal system and constitutional bodies.

It is therefore not out of the question that legal nihilism, combined with other catastrophes, will lead to the disappearance of Russia from the world map in its current form.

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