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**Church, State and Memory:**

**Remembering the Revolution and Building the Nation in Contemporary Russia<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract**

The collapse of the Soviet Union set Russia's ruling elites the challenge of nation-building: while "Russians" had to be imagined as a political community on behalf of which the newly-established Russian state was ruled, their national history needed to be narrated. Crucial for this enterprise was interpreting the Soviet past. Although the latter was used for political purposes by both Boris Yeltsin (who attempted to break with it) and Vladimir Putin (who established continuity with it), a politically usable interpretation of the Russian Revolutions was never found. Such is the consensus that emerged in 2017.

Challenging this consensus, I argue that a specific interpretation of the Revolutions – nested within a narrative that covers Russia's history from Kievan Rus to the contemporary Russian Federation – has been developed in Russia. Turning Russia's politically problematic past into a politically usable one, this interpretation is (re)produced through the project "Russia – My History". As "Russia – My History" (initially developed within the Russian Orthodox Church) is becoming a part of state-sponsored efforts to forge a politically expedient vision of Russian history, the interpretation of the Revolutions (re)produced through it is acquiring the status of an "official" one in present-day Russia.

**Introduction**

In 2017, as various scholarly, cultural and public events – conferences, lectures, exhibitions, theatrical performances, and internet-based projects – dedicated to the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Russian Revolutions took place in Russia and abroad, their organizers,

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participants, and audiences were asking the same question: why is it that this anniversary is *not* being commemorated (much less celebrated) by Russia's ruling elite? Calling the country's revolutionary past "inconvenient" for the political establishment in present-day Russia (Torbakov 2018), and claiming the centenary of the Revolutions to be "embarrassing" for Russia's incumbent leaders (Malinova 2018), observers agreed: the ruling elite in Russia is silencing the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1917 Revolutions.

In order to explain this silence, some pointed to the fact that it was difficult for Russia's incumbent leaders to come up with a politically usable interpretation of the Revolutions (Torbakov 2018), while others stressed that the public perception of 1917 remained polarized (Fitzpatrick 2017). Still others mentioned that the unwillingness to remember the Revolutions on the part of Russia's ruling elite is informed by their rejection of the very idea of revolutionary change (Kalinin 2013) or is motivated by their desire to prevent the import of "color revolutions" from abroad (Kolonitskii 2017). Thus, the consensus which has emerged in 2017 is that, in the absence of a politically expedient interpretation of the 1917 Revolutions, contemporary Russia's ruling elite is attempting to suppress its memory altogether.

With my article, I intend to challenge this consensus. I argue that a specific interpretation of the Russian Revolutions – nested within a narrative that covers Russian history from the mysterious city of Arkaim to the annexation of Crimea – has been developed in contemporary Russia. Turning Russia's politically problematic revolutionary past into a politically usable one, this interpretation is (re)produced mainly through the project "Russia – My History"<sup>2</sup>. Initially developed within the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), "Russia – My History" is becoming a part of state-sponsored efforts to forge a (politically expedient) vision of Russian history. As it is happening, the interpretation of the Russian Revolutions (re)produced through it is acquiring the status of an "official" one in present-day Russia.

My findings are based on my own visits to the historical park in Moscow (May and November 2017, and August 2018) and to the park in Saint Petersburg (August 2018), on personal

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<sup>2</sup> The project has already become the subject matter of (highly critical) attention, both in Russia and abroad. See, for instance, Budraitskis, Il'ia, Gleb Napreenko. 2016. "Pobedila li 'istoricheskaiia Rossiia'?" *Raznoglasiia*, 25 March. Available at: <<https://www.colta.ru/articles/raznoglasiya/10454>>; Kotsubinsky, Daniel. 2017. "Istoriki dolzhnyi prizvat' obshchestvo k boikotu proekta 'Rossiia – moia istoriia'." *Gorod 812*, 11 December. Available at: <<http://gorod-812.ru/istoriki-dolzhnyi-prizvat-obshhestvo-k-boikotu-proekta-rossiia-moya-istoriia/>>; Kurilla, Ivan, Sergey Ivanov, Adrian Selin. "'Russia, My History': History as an Ideological Tool." *Point and Counterpoint*. 5 August. Available at: <<http://www.ponarseurasia.org/point-counter/russia-my-history-as-ideological-tool>>; Laruelle, Marlene. 2018. "The Russian Orthodox Church's Conquest of the History Market." *Point and Counterpoint*, 7 June. Available at: <<http://www.ponarseurasia.org/point-counter/russian-orthodox-churchs-conquest-history-market>>; Selin, Adrian. 2017. "Muzei iz 'Vikipedii': pochemu v Peterburge populiarna vul'garnaia istoriia." *RBK*, 19 December. Available at: [https://www.rbc.ru/spb\\_sz/19/12/2017/5a38de299a7947fbdda11bfa?from=regional\\_newsfeed](https://www.rbc.ru/spb_sz/19/12/2017/5a38de299a7947fbdda11bfa?from=regional_newsfeed).

interviews with current personnel and visitors to these two parks, and on relevant documents, books, articles, and media publications.

### **State Legitimacy and National History: Memory of the Revolutions in post-Soviet Russia**

In the world of mass political participation where subjects are replaced by citizens, a state, to be (perceived as) legitimate, must (seem to) be executing its rule on behalf of those ruled, and, thus, fulfilling their will. In other words, its rule must (appear to) be “proceeding naturally from a familiar and intelligible ‘we’” (Geertz 1973, 317). Hence, the ruled must be imagined as a community, at the same time internally homogenous and distinct from other communities of the kind. The “nation” becomes the way of imagining such a community (Anderson 1991); nationalism the predominant rhetoric in which a state’s legitimacy is debated (Calhoun 1997). Somewhat rephrasing Ernest Gellner (1983), we may conclude that in the world of nationalism, only those political units that are congruent with national ones are held legitimate.

While national communities are fundamental for the legitimacy of modern states, the pasts of these communities are central to national imaginings (Alonso 1988; Coakley 2004; Cruz 2000; Heisler 2008). To imagine a nation, therefore, it is necessary to narrate its past, thus inventing its history. Indeed, “the narrative construction of past events and the discursive representation of history” is crucial for “all of the variegated approaches to theorizing nationalism, however different their claims regarding its origins” (Bell 2003, 66). States, if only because they are capable of “making historiography into a nationalist enterprise” (Olick and Robbins 1998, 126), are particularly powerful narrators of (national) histories. Possessing access to, and control over, resources that allow for constructing (politically expedient) historical narratives, their ruling elites are able to forge national communities, thus legitimizing their “monopoly on administrative control” (Boyarin 1994, 16).

Since 1991, Russia’s ruling elite has been facing the challenge of legitimizing, first, the very existence of the state that emerged upon the disintegration of the USSR, and, secondly, their governing position in it. To tackle this challenge, it is (as it was in 1991) necessary to imagine a national community on behalf of which Russia is ruled, hence to narrate this community’s national history. Interpreting the Soviet period of this history (the Russian Revolutions which this period began with included) is an inescapable part of this endeavor.

Both Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin deployed Russia’s Soviet past – though in strikingly diverging ways and with significantly different results – for their respective political ends.

“Soviet”, indeed, was at the heart of their both symbolic policies<sup>3</sup>. Just like Mikhail Gorbachev, who, during Perestroika, used the uncovering of the worst pages of the Soviet past in order to authorize the reforms that he and his team were introducing (Sherlock 2007, chap. 2), Boris Yeltsin, in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, employed the latter’s dark history to bolster his personal legitimacy and the legitimacy of the state he was ruling. However, in contrast to Gorbachev, who tried to “re-revolutionize the revolution” but never tried to undermine its legacy (Corney 2009, 275), Yeltsin was condemning the Revolution as illegitimate (Corney 1998, 390–94). His aim being a profound break with the Soviet past, the Revolution was framed as the disaster that interrupted the normal course of the country’s development (Torbakov 2018); its positive effects were denied altogether. As 1991 was conceived as the nation’s founding event, attempts were made to build the “new Russia” based on the idea of its “democratic choice” (Malinova 2016). Yeltsin’s attempted symbolic break with the Soviet past, however, proved to be rather superficial; retribution for the crimes of this past was never accomplished (Smith 1996). At the same time, few resources were invested in the symbolic construction of the new democratic Russia (Smith 2002).

If Boris Yeltsin’s symbolic policy was based upon the rupture with the Soviet past, that of Vladimir Putin’s presupposed establishing a continuity with it. Most importantly in this respect, the Great Patriotic War (as World War II is commonly referred to in Russia and in post-Soviet space) was deployed to shore up the personal legitimacy of Vladimir Putin (Wood 2011), as well as the legitimacy of the political regime of which he is the leader (Kurilla 2014). Having managed to codify the memory of (the victory in) the War (Edele 2017), Russia’s ruling elite succeeded in turning it into “the ideological engine of Russia’s resurgence” (Carleton 2010, 144). But what about the Russian Revolutions?

The October Revolution being the Soviet Union’s founding event (Corney 2004), while Russia’s ruling elite employing the Soviet past for political purposes, it is necessary to conceptualize 1917 in a politically expedient way. Yet, however pressing, this seems to be a challenging task. Indeed, interpreting the Russian Revolutions in such a manner as to legitimize the political regime, which (practically) rests upon the political disengagement of the citizenry (Greene 2017), and (symbolically) is shored up by the idea of the stability achieved after the chaos of the 1990s, is no easy a task. Unable to tackle it, Russia’s “historical entrepreneurs” opt for forgetting the Russian Revolutions. (Hence, in 2017, their centennial anniversary – in striking contrast to annual celebrations of Victory Day – was kept quiet (although it did not go completely

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<sup>3</sup> Based on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1981), I regard symbolic policy as that related to the (re)production of specific interpretations of social reality, and the imposition of such interpretations on individuals, groups, and society as a whole. (Re)production of certain interpretations of historic events is an important part of symbolic policy.

unnoticed) by Russia's ruling elites.) Such is the widely shared understanding of present-day Russia's "official" memory of the 1917 Revolutions. But is this understanding adequate?

I suggest that the rapid development of the project "Russia – My History" demonstrates quite the opposite: an interpretation of the Russian Revolutions politically expedient for present-day Russia's ruling elite (and gradually acquiring the status of an "official" one) has been developed in Russia. It is to the (pre)history of this project which – as the result of the joint efforts of the ROC and the state<sup>4</sup> – has grown into a chain of multimedia historical parks located all over Russia that I now turn.

### **"Russia – My History": Church and State Join Forces**

The (pre)history of the chain of multimedia historical parks "Russia – My History" dates back to the mid 1990s: the project is a "spin-off" of the Ecclesial-Public Exhibition-Forum "Orthodox Rus", a long-lasting ROC project, whose aim is to "unite efforts of the Russian Orthodox Church, the worldly power, the public targeted at preserving and further developing traditional spiritual values of the national culture, art and moral, consolidating the Russian society"<sup>5</sup>. Today, the Forum, which is held annually in many locations both in Russia and abroad, includes dozens of cultural events: exhibitions, lectures, conferences, concerts. The most important of these take place in Moscow and make up part of the festivities dedicated to Russia's two holidays: the national (the Day of People's Unity) and the Orthodox (the Feast of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God) ones, both being celebrated on 4 November. It began, however, with a single exhibition-fair held in Mikhaylovsky Manezh in Saint Petersburg in October, 1995. The small Saint Petersburg exhibition was a success, and, with the blessing of Patriarch Alexei II, became annual. The project grew rapidly: in 2003, the exhibition "Orthodox Rus" was first held in Moscow; in 2004, it received the blessing of the Holy Synod; in 2006, it expanded to become an exhibition-forum.

Although the annual fora were popular enough with Orthodox believers, their organizers decided to reach out for a wider audience, the result being the 2011 exhibition "Russian Orthodox Church – a Summary of Twenty Years: 1991 – 2011". The exhibition, held from 4 till 7 November

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<sup>4</sup> Rapprochement between the ROC and the state has been evident in the realms of school education (Glanzer and Petrenko 2007; Lisovskaya and Karpov 2010) and foreign policy (Curanovic 2012; Evans 2002; Payne 2010). Evident too are the impact that the ROC has on the symbolic policy of Vladimir Putin's regime (Agadjanian 2017), and the attempts to employ Orthodoxy in building the nation on behalf of which present-day Russia is ruled (Agadjanian 2001). However, cooperation between the ROC and the state in the field of production of (politically expedient) historical narrative(s) is a relatively new development. Nonetheless, it has already attracted scholars' attention. See, for instance, (Torbakov 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Official web-site of the Ecclesial-Public Exhibition-Forum "Orthodox Rus" [*Cerkovno-obshhestvennaja vystavka-forum "Pravoslavnaja Rus"*]: <http://www.pravoslav-expo.ru>

in Moscow Manezh, was organized by the Patriarch's Council for Culture, which had been created one and a half years earlier, and of which (then Archimandrite) Tikhon Shevkunov had been appointed the Executive Secretary<sup>6</sup>. "Russian Orthodox Church – a Summary" was one of the Council's first projects. Telling the story of the restoration of church life in the canonical territory of Moscow Patriarchate over the course of the twenty years that had passed since the collapse of the Soviet Union, "Russian Orthodox Church – a Summary" became a testing ground for the technological and design solutions that would predetermine the exhibition's great success: according to the organizers, tens of thousands of visitors visited it over the four days. It was this success that pointed the organizers of the exhibition in the direction to be followed for further development of the project. As the idea of uniting the technological and design solutions deployed in the 2011 exhibition with the history of Russia emerged, the project "Orthodox Rus'. My History" was born.

Two years later, on 4 November 2013, "The Romanovs", the first multimedia exhibition of the cycle "Orthodox Rus'. My History" was opened in Moscow Manezh. Dedicated to the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Romanov Dynasty, it narrated the history of Russia from the accession of Mikhail Romanov to the throne in 1613 up to the Revolutions of 1917. The overwhelmingly positive response of the audience came as a surprise, even for the creators of the project: prolonged a number of times, the exhibition remained on display until 24 November. As a result, it was visited by over three hundred thousand people over a period of three weeks, up to fifteen thousand people daily; some visitors spent as long as eight hours queuing to see "The Romanovs". The exhibition was still on display in Manezh when calls to make it available to an even wider audience – either by turning it into a permanent one, located somewhere in Moscow, or by showing it in Russia's many regions – were voiced. In 2014, "The Romanovs" was, in fact, shown outside Moscow: from 16 February to 2 March – in Saint Petersburg, from 21 July to 6 July – in Tyumen, from 5 to 21 December – in Krasnodar. In addition, a clone of "The Romanovs" was opened on 15 August, 2014 in the Livadia Palace in Crimea.

The triumphant success of "The Romanovs" encouraged the creators of the project "Orthodox Rus'. My History" to develop it further and narrate the history of Russia – from Kievan Rus' to post-Soviet Russian Federation – in the manner they had used to tell the story of the Romanov Empire. On 4 November, 2014, the exhibition entitled "The Rurikids", dedicated to the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Saint Sergius of Radonezh and recounting the history of Russia from the mysterious city of Arkaim to *Smuta* [The Time of Troubles], was opened in Moscow Manezh. In

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<sup>6</sup> The Patriarch's Council for Culture was created upon the decision of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church on 5 March, 2010. See the Journal of Sessions of the Holy Synod No 7. Available at: <<http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1106470.html>> (accessed 25 September, 2018).

the following years, the project “Orthodox Rus’. My History” was completed with two exhibitions: “From Great Upheaval to Great Victory” and “1945 – 2016”. Both of them were shown in Moscow Manezh, the former – dedicated to the period between the Russian Revolutions and the Victory in the Great Patriotic War – from 4 to 22 November, 2015, the latter – telling the history of the post-war years – from 4 to 22 November, 2016.

After “The Rurikids” opened in Moscow, voices were heard suggesting that the exhibition, just like “The Romanovs” the previous year, should travel around Russia’s regions. Indeed, on 9 September, 2016, the exhibition was opened in Sevastopol, Crimea. However, by then it had already become evident that “Orthodox Rus’. My History” would turn into something bigger than a few multimedia exhibitions traveling around Russia. In fact, shortly after “The Rurikids” had been – again, with great success – shown in Moscow, its creators came up with a different, and rather ambitious, strategy for further developing the project. Instead of working towards bringing separate exhibitions of the cycle “Orthodox Rus’. My History” to Russia’s various regions, they decided to unite the exhibitions under one roof, and, calling what would appear as the result “Historical Parks ‘Russia – My History’”, have them operating permanently all over Russia. The first of such historical parks was opened in Pavilion No 57 of the Moscow exhibition center VDNKh on 29 December, 2015, and consisted of three exhibitions: “The Rurikids”, “The Romanovs”, “The 20th Century: From Great Upheaval to Great Victory”; the fourth, “1945 – 2016”, was still under construction at the time. The historical parks that sprang up throughout Russia in 2017-2018, however, include all four exhibitions, thus narrating the history of Russia in its entirety. At the time of writing this article, historical parks “Russia – My History” operate in Moscow, Ufa, Ekaterinburg, Stavropol, Volgograd, Makhachkala, Yakutsk, Kazan, Tyumen, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, Nizhny Novgorod, Samara, Novosibirsk, Omsk, Saint Petersburg, Perm, Saratov, Rostov-on-Don, and Krasnodar. The creators of the project have no intention of stopping at that: historical parks will continue to open until 2020.

From the very beginning, the state was providing the administrative and financial recourses necessary for the project’s development. Not only were the tours of “The Romanovs” and “The Rurikids” around Russia’s regions organized with the direct support of President Vladimir Putin and the Government of Russia<sup>7</sup>, but in 2013, the Fund for Humanitarian Projects [*Fond Gumanitarnyh Proektov*] was created to administer what would later become a chain of

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<sup>7</sup> See Instruction of the President of the Russian Federation No Pr-687, 31 March, 2014 on realization of the interactive exhibition “Romanovs. My History” in subjects of the Russian Federation; Instruction of the Government of the Russian Federation No OG-P44-2399, 9 April, 2014 on execution of the instruction of the President of the Russian Federation No Pr-687; Instruction of the President of the Russian Federation No Pr-2878, 16 December 2014, Article 1-a on demonstration of the exhibition “Rurikids. My History” in subjects of the Russian Federation. Measures taken towards execution of the instructions of the President and the Government are accounted for in the 2015 Report of the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation.

multimedia historical parks “Russia – My History”. The official website of the Fund<sup>8</sup> lists the Presidential Executive Office, the Moscow Patriarchate, the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation, and the Governments of Moscow and of Saint Petersburg as its partners. The Fund’s founder and managing director is Ivan Esin, who previously worked as leading legal counsel for “Gazprom Neft”, one of Russia’s largest oil companies and a subsidiary of the (at least 50 percent state-owned) giant “Gazprom”. Esin’s professional path is not the only link between the project “Russia – My History” and “Gazprom”. In addition to public funding from both, federal and regional budgets, historical parks receive donations from sponsors, mainly from “Gazprom”. Thus, with the combined efforts of the ROC and the state, within five years, “Russia – My History” has grown into a chain of multimedia historical parks whose branches are now present in nineteen Russian cities.

### **“Russia – My History”: Exhibitions without Exhibits**

Despite the geographical spread of the chain “Russia – My History”, the content of the exhibitions on display in its various branches is nearly identical. More precisely, what is identical is the so-called “federal component” of such content, i.e. the one that narrates the history of Russia as a whole. In addition to “federal”, the content of each of the historical parks is completed with a “regional component”: a special exhibition or a section that is dedicated to the history of the corresponding region of the country. In the current article, my focus is on the “federal component” of the content of the historical parks’ exhibitions.

Some of Russia’s most respected scholarly and educational institutions – including the Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Russian State University for the Humanities, and the State Archive of the Russian Federation – are mentioned as having contributed to the creation of this content. Nonetheless, the names of the exact people who worked on it – those who wrote specific fragments dedicated to one or other historical period, event or figure, as well as those who put these fragments together – remain unknown. The role of one person in the creation of the project “Russia – My History”, however, is stressed whenever the historical parks are discussed, namely, that of (now Metropolitan) Tikhon Shevkunov<sup>9</sup>. Not only was Metropolitan Tikhon the author of the concept of the exhibitions of the cycle “Orthodox Rus’. My History”. He is personally responsible for the final editing of all the content that appears in the “Russia – My

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<sup>8</sup> Official website of the Fund for Humanitarian Projects: <<http://expohistory.ru>>

<sup>9</sup> Worthy of notice, Tikhon Shevkunov has repeatedly been referred to as Vladimir Putin’s personal confessor in both Russian and foreign media. At the same time, in the interview he gave to Zoya Svetova in November 2017, Father Tikhon denied having any close connections with the Russian president and admitted only to being acquainted with him superficially. The interview is available at <<https://www.svoboda.org/a/28851429.html>> (accessed 3 October, 2018).

History” historical parks (at least, of the federal component). What does this content – created, according to the administration of the parks, by hundreds of historians, museologists and designers under the personal supervision of Father Tikhon – look like?

Each of the four exhibitions – “The Rurikids”, “The Romanovs”, “The 20th Century: From Great Upheaval to Great Victory”, and “1945 – 2016” – that the federal component of the “Russia – My History” historical parks includes is, in turn, composed of halls, which, much like in a palace enfilade, flow from one into another, creating a space-time of Russian history: advancing along the corridor-shaped space of park exhibitions, a visitor travels through time, from ancient Rus’ to contemporary Russia. Importantly, visitors’ progress through the exhibitions of the historical parks is heavily predetermined by the latter’s spatial constitution. Having little freedom in choosing either which of the exhibition halls to view and which to miss out, or in what sequence to observe the halls of any of the four exhibitions, a visitor, thus, follows the path set out by the historical parks’ creators. As she does so, the history of the Russian state and that of the Orthodox Church unfold before her eyes: the two are represented in the parks as indissolubly intertwined.

In the “Russia – My History” historical parks, four exhibitions are on display, but without exhibits. All that is shown to visitors of the parks are hundreds of interactive multimedia devices – screens, panels, lightboxes – on which thousands of pages of text are projected. (It is these texts that, according to members of the historical parks’ administration, are edited by Tikhon Shevkunov personally). While photographs and drawings are numerous, documents are almost entirely absent in the historical parks, which are, thus, very much like history textbooks that their visitors are expected to spend hours reading. However, they rarely attempt to do so: an average individual visitor spends up to three hours viewing a historical park, while a guided tour of any of the four park exhibitions lasts no longer than 1.5 hours.

In order to narrate Russian history to visitors, the creators of the historical parks employ means of expression other than lengthy texts projected onto numerous multimedia devices. These are elements of scenography, including the spatial organization of the parks, color and light, music<sup>10</sup> and sound effects. It is primarily through the careful use of scenography in the parks that particular historical figures are portrayed in a certain way and selected historical events are invested with specific meanings<sup>11</sup>. In addition, short movies are screened in several of the historical parks’ halls. These, without any intricacy or ambiguity, reveal a vision of Russian history<sup>12</sup> that

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<sup>10</sup> Visitors of the historical parks are haunted by the sounds of Georgy Sviridov’s “Snowstorm”, a romantic waltz written for the 1964 film adaptation of the Alexander Pushkin novel.

<sup>11</sup> Marlene Laruelle in her very recent article (2019) pays close attention to the way color and light are used in the “Russia – My History” historical park in Moscow.

<sup>12</sup> Importantly, the creators of “Russia – My History” have, in personal interviews, stressed that their aim is not to forge a specific interpretation of history, but rather to provide visitors to the historical parks with “objective facts”. If, observing the parks’ exhibitions visitors reach specific conclusions, it is simply because the facts “speak for

(being highly emotionally charged and at the same time open to political use) the creators of the historical parks (re)produce.

### **“Russia – My History” and the Problem of 1917: Interpreting the Russian Revolutions**

The four exhibitions that the historical parks include are nearly equal in terms of the amount of physical space that they occupy, yet unequal in terms of historical time periods that they cover: the emphasis, thus, is put on Russia’s history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Within the latter, the focus is, in turn, on the 1917 Russian Revolutions. Evidently, to provide an interpretation of it is of utmost importance for the creators of the historical parks.

1914 is represented here as the point of fracture: it was then that Russia peaked in its development (under the reign of one of its greatest leaders, Nicholas II), and it was then that it was enmeshed in the war by a treacherous Europe. February of 1917, in turn, is depicted as the opening act of the drama of Russia’s Twentieth Century. Why did the February Revolution happen? Among the contributing factors, the authors of the historical park list the agrarian and the national questions, the degeneration of religious life, the low living standards of the majority of the population, the decline in trust between the rulers and society, the paralysis of the monarchy, and the inability of the power-holders to tackle the challenges of the time. However, all of the factors listed above were not the “real” reasons behind the Revolutions. Those were the petty intrigues of enemies within (the intelligentsia and aristocracy, the former chasing their wrong political ideals, the latter pursuing their private interests) and without (foreign rivals worried by Russia’s rapid economic development) Russia.

While Russia’s internal traitors, encouraged by the country’s unscrupulous external competitors, are represented in the historical parks as responsible for (or guilty of) the February Revolution, the October Revolution is depicted as the latter’s (nearly inevitable) consequence. If authors of the February Revolution are rendered as committed and self-interested destroyers of Russia, the Bolsheviks, paradoxically enough, are portrayed as Russia’s saviors. Having (nearly haphazardly) come to power, they (even if against their own intentions) rebuilt (although in different shape and form) Russia precisely at the moment when its utter collapse seemed inevitable<sup>13</sup>. The portrayal of the Bolsheviks suggested in the “Russia – My History” historical parks, however, is far from unambiguous. While Joseph Stalin is pictured here as a controversial

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themselves”. This contrast between the evident emotionality of the historical park exhibitions and the declared objectivity of their creators is, indeed, striking.

<sup>13</sup> This interpretation of the February and the October Revolutions is in stark contrast to the vision of the two that was popular at the beginning of the 1990s. Then, the “good” liberal-democratic February revolution was opposed to the “bad” Bolshevik coup.

– yet outstanding – political leader who played the key role in restoring the Russian state (and, surprisingly enough, resurrecting the Orthodox Church), Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky are characterized as the (nearly successful) destroyers of both the Church and the state. This seemingly self-contradictory rendition of the Bolsheviks, however, does not add inconsistency to the interpretation of the Russian Revolutions (re)produced in the historical parks. Rather, it shores up the unequivocally statist historical narrative that is being forged here. In the historical parks, the Russian Revolutions are cursed, while the USSR, the state that emerged in their aftermath, is glorified. In a similar vein, while the legacy of the (Lenin’s and Trotsky’s) iconoclastic 1920s is questioned, that of the (Stalin’s) conservative 1930s-40s is praised.

Within the narrative of the Revolutions developed in the historical parks, the portrayal of their maleficent instigators is counterbalanced by the representation of their innocent victims. Those are first Nicholas II and his family, and second Orthodox believers. If the former fell prey to the senseless cruelty of the revolutionaries striving for power, the latter suffered for their faith<sup>14</sup>.

Overall, the interpretation of the Russian Revolutions created in the historical parks is that of a tragic mistake. The mistake committed by Russians lured by the simplistic slogans of populists. Everything that followed the Revolutions – including the Civil War, the Stalinist Repressions, and the Great Patriotic War – is represented here as the cost of this mistake and, at the same time, as the price that needed to be paid for Russia’s future resurrection. The latter was embodied, first and foremost, in the 1945 Victory, and the post-war triumph of the Soviet Union.

As the concepts of “sin”, “retribution”, and “atonement” substitute for those of “mistake”, “cost”, and “price”, the story of the Russian Revolutions can be (and often is) told in the language of the Orthodox faith<sup>15</sup>. From a tale about the tsar who abdicated his throne, it, thus, turns into one about the people who betrayed their tsar and renounced their God. The ordeals that followed were nothing less than retribution – and atonement – for the committed sin. Nicholas II and his family were martyrs who gave their lives for Russia and its people. (Tellingly, on display in the historical

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<sup>14</sup> The contradiction between the emphasis that is put, in the historical parks, on Orthodox believers as innocent victims of the Revolutions, and the nearly advantageous representation of Stalin, which is suggested here, is evident. The creators of the parks, however, manage to resolve it through carefully using spatial organization. The persecution of the Orthodox Church and that of Russia’s other religious groups, the atrocities of collectivization and the horrors of the Gulag, the national operations of the NKVD, are all accounted for, yet each in different halls of the historical parks. In the Moscow park, for instance, a separate hall, which narrates (in great detail) the tale of the persecution of the Church, is situated next to that which is dedicated to the 1920s. By contrast, the histories of the Great Terror and the Gulag are recounted (rather briefly) in a hall which is adjacent to the one dedicated to the pre-war years. Moreover, between the two halls – that entitled “1920s” and that named “Before the War” – two more, relatively big, halls are located. Thus, the persecution of the Orthodox Church, while overshadowing not only the outrages against Islam, Judaism and Buddhism, but also the other evils committed by the Soviet state in the 1920s, is disentangled from the repression of the 1930s-40s and becomes associated with the names of Lenin and Trotsky, not with that of Stalin. Overall, in the historical parks, the history of the Soviet repression is fragmented; the latter’s significance is, therefore, diminished.

<sup>15</sup> For the analysis of the interpretation of the 1917 Revolutions developed within the ROC, and the comparison of it with the one suggested in official political discourse, see (Zimmermann 2018).

parks is the quotation of Nicholas II: “Probably, to save Russia, the sacrifice of atonement is needed. I will be that sacrifice”.) Martyrs, too, were Orthodox believers who, persecuted by the Soviet state (executed or sent to the Gulag), suffered for their faith. It was those martyrs who, through their sacrifice, earned Russia’s salvation. The phenomenon of new martyrdom<sup>16</sup> is, hence, of crucial importance for the religious reading of the Russian Revolutions.

Although Tikhon Shevkunov is probably the most prominent of those hierarchs of the ROC who are keenly preoccupied with perpetuating the memory of the new martyrs in contemporary Russia<sup>17</sup>, the “Russia – My History” historical parks, of which he is the demiurge, narrate the history of the Russian Revolutions in secular, but not religious, terms. Indeed, in the “From Great Upheaval to Great Victory” exhibition of the historical parks, the history of the persecution of the Orthodox Church is represented in great detail; moreover, the very concept “new martyrs and confessors of Russia” is used here extensively. However, the creators of the historical parks do not go further in representing the religious narrative of the history of the Russian Revolutions. The project “Russia – My History” may be regarded as a “meeting point” where the two visions of the Revolutions – the secular and the religious ones – intertwine. Nonetheless, of these two visions, it is elements of the former that are more pronounced in the interpretation of the Russian Revolutions (re)produced in the historical parks. This interpretation, thus, is not so much *orthodoxizing* the Russian Revolutions, as *secularizing* the Orthodox reading of it<sup>18</sup>. Resulting from the interplay of the secular and the religious readings of the Russian Revolutions, the interpretation of it that visitors of the historical parks are exposed to demonstrates in a rather peculiar way the process

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<sup>16</sup> Nicholas II and his family were canonized by the ROC as royal passion-bearers in 2000. Along with them, nearly two thousand Orthodox believers who had suffered during the persecution of religion in the Soviet Union were glorified by the ROC as new martyrs and confessors of Russia. On the phenomenon of new martyrdom in contemporary Russia, see (Christensen 2018). For the analysis of the way the memory of new martyrs is developing, and influencing the memory of the repression, see (Bogumił 2018; Bogumił and Łukaszewicz 2018; Dorman 2010; Rousselet 2013). For an account of the way Nicholas II and his family are remembered in present-day Russia, see (Dianina 2018).

<sup>17</sup> Of utmost importance for this endeavor was the construction of the Church of the Resurrection of Christ and the New Martyrs and Confessors of the Russian Church. Located in Sretensky Stauropegic Monastery of Moscow, which (then Bishop) Tikhon Shevkunov was the abbot of, the church was consecrated by Patriarch Kirill. Vladimir Putin was present at the ceremony that took place on 25 May 2017. The official account of the ceremony is available at: <<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/54447>> (accessed 20 September 2018). This was one of the very few public events related (in one way or another) to the Russian Revolutions that the president of Russia attended during 2017. The other, also rich in religious connotations, took place on 4 May 2017 near the Nikolskaya tower of the Moscow Kremlin. It was the inauguration ceremony of the memorial cross dedicated to Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich. The official account of the ceremony is available at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/54573> (accessed 20 September 2018). The cross is a replica of the original one, established on the site of the Grand Duke’s assassination in 1908 (and taken down in 1918).

<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, when talking about the Russian Revolutions on the weekly TV program “Word of the Pastor”, of which he is the host, Patriarch Kirill presented a secular (and very much politicized) interpretation of it, which bore a striking resemblance to that (re)produced in the “Russia – My History” historical parks. The program “Word of the Pastor” is broadcast on Channel One Russia. Two episodes of the program were dedicated specifically to the centenary of the Russian Revolutions: On 8 July 2017 and on 28 October 2017. Video recordings of the program are available at the Channel One Russia official website: <https://www.1tv.ru/shows/slovo-pastyrya> (accessed 3 October 2018).

which Yuri Teper (2017) rightly points out: as the rapprochement between the Russian state and the ROC continues, it is not only the former that is becoming more religious, but also the latter that is growing secular<sup>19</sup>.

### **Politically Usable Revolutions: 1917 and the Pendulum of Russian History**

Before the eyes of the visitors of the historical parks, the history of the Russian Revolutions unfolds like pendulum swings: from the rapidly developing “Great Russia” of the pre-revolutionary period, towards “decay, chaos, expulsion, tears, violence, blood, death” that inevitably follow the (resulting from the Revolutions) “suicidal collapse [*razval*] of the state”<sup>20</sup>, and back, towards restoration, at enormous cost, of what had been forfeited during the Revolutions. At the same time, 1917 is represented here as one among many successive swings of the pendulum of Russian history, which moves back and forth from the flourishing and grandeur of the periods when the state is consolidated to blight and degeneration when it is not. National (dis)unity is crucial for this incessant movement: while consolidation of the state is based upon it, the state’s ruin results from the lack of it. Thus, the history of Russia is envisioned in the historical parks as developing through a cyclical pattern<sup>21</sup>. In this ever-repeating drama, (tragic) internal dissent brings on (disastrous in its consequences) failure of the state; however, when the former is overcome (always after unthinkable loss and suffering), the latter returns to its greatness. This template is employed in the historical parks to tell the stories of the Fragmentation and the Yoke – followed by the rise of Moscow, of the Time of Troubles – followed by the Accession of the Romanov Dynasty, of the Revolutions of 1917 – followed by the Victory in the Great Patriotic War, and, finally, of the Disintegration of the USSR – followed by today’s Russia Rising up from its Knees.

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<sup>19</sup> Particularly indicative in this respect is the disappearance of the very term “Orthodox” from the title of the project in question. The latter was modified from “Orthodox Rus’. My History” to “Russia – My History”. The reasons behind this gradual secularization of the project were voiced by one of my informants rather unambiguously: “To make a step towards the masses [...], to make the park more universal [...] we removed the accent on Orthodoxy [...] This change makes it [the park] look more attractive for the people who are very demanding”. Personal interview with one of the researchers of the Saint Petersburg historical park, August, 2018, Saint Petersburg.

<sup>20</sup> Text of audio guide for the exhibition “The Romanovs”, recorded in the Moscow historical park “Russia – My History” in November 2017.

<sup>21</sup> This specific vision of Russian history inherits a long-lasting tradition within Russian historiography and may be deemed a yet another attempt to narrate the history of Russia as “always repeating itself”. Famously employed by Nikolai Karamzin in his “History of the Russian State” in the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the cyclical approach towards narrating the history of Russia is commonly associated with Russian conservative thought. However, it can be reproduced in various ideological contexts. Thus, in the liberal version of the cyclical narrative of Russian history the latter is represented as recurrent movement from attempts at liberation inspired by great reformers to subjugation under the thumb of oppressive autocrats. For the overview of the broad variety of models of cyclical thinking, see (Mjør 2018). For the analysis of the way cyclical interpretation of Russian history was used for political ends in contemporary Russia, see (Carleton 2011).

Because it is nested within the cyclical narrative that covers Russian history from Kievan Rus' to the present-day Russian Federation, the (statist) tale of the Russian Revolutions, which is narrated in the historical parks, becomes focused on national unity rather than internal division, and historical continuity rather than rupture with the past. It is precisely how the "Russia – My History" historical parks turn Russia's (politically problematic) revolutionary past into a politically usable one (for Russia's ruling elite).

Upon the interpretation of the 1917 Revolutions that the parks (re)produce, the national community, on behalf of which Russia is being ruled, is imagined in a specific way: as imminently united. Stressing national unity – which, though tragically lost in the run-up to 1917, was not shattered by the Revolutions, but was reacquired in their wake – the parks represent Russians as a nation that remained self-same throughout a thousand years of its history. (At the same time, emphasizing continuity of Russian history – and downplaying ruptures in it, the rupture of the 1917 Revolutions included – they portray the present-day Russian Federation as inheriting the thousand-year-old tradition of statehood.)

The unity of the Russian nation as it is represented in the historical parks, however, is reached (and sustained) primarily for the sake of the Russian state: it is only to protect the state from its enemies that Russia is (always) surrounded with and (constantly) threatened by that this unity is needed; at the same time, it is only when united that Russians are able to fight their country's many enemies<sup>22</sup>. Thus, it is not the nation that is celebrated in the historical parks, but the state: the vision of Russian history that is being forged here is not so much nationalist as statist.

The state (represented in the historical parks as the final cause and the end goal of historic development) is valorized independently of its ability (or inability) to cater to its citizens. The legitimacy of Russia's current political regime which – while placing emphasis on strong centralized executive power – is failing in terms of economic performance is being, thus, shored up in the parks<sup>23</sup>. The weakening of the state (which is what internal disputes are inevitably followed by), and, even more so, its collapse (which is what revolutionary changes imminently bring) being depicted here as the ultimate tragedy, the very idea of *stability* is celebrated in the historical parks. Contemporary Russia, in turn, is characterized here precisely as that: stable. While

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<sup>22</sup> Of those enemies, the primary one is the *West*. Striking in this regard is the phrase that is represented in the historical parks as direct quote from Prince Alexander Nevsky (and which, most likely, it is not): "To strengthen defense in the West, to look for friends in the East". The banner with this "quote" is displayed in the hall of the exhibition "The Rurikids" dedicated to the Mongol Invasion. While the *West* – thus turned into the constitutive Other of the national community of Russians – is used in the historical parks to define what Russia *is not*, Orthodox Christianity is employed here to identify what Russia *is*.

<sup>23</sup> While Johannes Gerschewsky (2013) claims complementary relations between ideational and output components of legitimacy in authoritarian regimes, stressing that when the economy is in decline and the regime can no longer deliver, strengthening ideological indoctrination may be used to bolster its legitimacy, Magnus Feldmann and Honorata Mazepus (2018) suggest that in the wake of the 2008 economic crisis, the Putin regime was able to re-define the very meaning of performance, national security and nationalism becoming the latter's key indicators.

Vladimir Putin is portrayed in the historical parks as the leader who was capable of steering Russia out of the impasse of the “turbulent 90s”<sup>24</sup>, Russia itself is pictured here as (re)acquiring its glory after *the catastrophe* of the Soviet collapse. Tellingly, in the historical parks, the latter is compared, rather unambiguously, to *the disaster* of the Russian Revolutions.

### **State-Sponsored History: “Russia – My History” and the “Official” Interpretation of the Revolutions**

It is through the project “Russia – My History” that this interpretation of the Russian Revolutions, focused on national unity and historical continuity, is promoted, not through the words and gestures of members of Russia’s ruling elite. Nonetheless, when the latter speak of 1917, their vision of it is strikingly similar to the one (re)produced in the historical parks. The creators of “Russia – My History” on the one hand, and Russia’s ruling elite on the other, are united in the belief that the Russian Revolutions were a “true national disaster”<sup>25</sup>. While the notion of – tragically lost and happily retrieved – national unity is central to the interpretation of the Russian Revolutions (re)produced in the historical parks, the official commemorative events dedicated to the centenary of 1917 were inspired by the (somewhat similar) concept of reconciliation<sup>26</sup>. Not only did the metaphor of reconciliation haunt members of the Organizing Committee for the Centenary of the 1917 Russian Revolution<sup>27</sup>. Throughout 2017, Vladimir Putin himself employed the concept of reconciliation whenever he spoke of the Russian Revolutions.

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<sup>24</sup> Importantly, the account of Russia’s post-Soviet transition presented in the historical parks corresponds to the one that Vladimir Putin has personally offered. In 2008, summing up the achievements of his two presidential terms, he contrasted the chaos of the 90s (economic crisis, terrorist attacks, war in Chechnya, decentralization of administrative control, extreme poverty and the power of the oligarchs) with the unified, strong and consolidated Russia of the 2000s. See Putin’s Address to the State Council “On the Strategy of the Development of Russia for the period until 2020”, delivered on 8 February 2008. Available at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24825> (accessed 29 November 2018). For the analysis of Vladimir Putin’s discourse on the 90s, see (Malinova 2018a).

<sup>25</sup> This was how Vladimir Putin referred to 1917 when delivering his address at the inauguration ceremony of the memorial cross dedicated to Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich. A full transcript of the address is available at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/54447> (accessed 20 September 2018).

<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, two decades earlier, Russia’s incumbent elites had already employed the concept of reconciliation to deal with the memory of the Russian Revolutions: in 1996, right after Boris Yeltsin had been elected president for the second time, the Day of Great October Socialist Revolution was renamed to become the Day of Cohesion and Reconciliation. For thorough analysis of the use of reconciliation rhetoric in the official celebrations of the centenary of the Russian Revolutions, as well as of similarities and differences between the way(s) the concept of reconciliation was used by Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin, see (Malinova 2018b). The term “reconciliation” is not alien to the ROC either. It was used extensively in the discussions surrounding the canonization of Nicholas II and his family (Rousselet 2011). Similar rhetoric was employed to settle the Church’s internal affairs, including relations between the Russian Orthodox Church on the one hand, and the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad and Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia on the other (Garrard and Garrard 2008, chap. 6).

<sup>27</sup> The Committee was created upon the ruling of President Vladimir Putin No 412-rp on 19 December 2016. Available at: <https://historyrussia.org/images/documents/0001201612200017.pdf> (accessed 22 November 2018). Anatoly Torkunov, rector of Moscow State Institute of International Relations and co-chair of Russian Historical Society was appointed its. Among members of the Committee was the demiurge of the historical parks “Russia – My History” Tikhon Shevkunov. During their meetings, members of the Committee were using the term “reconciliation”, and synonymous ones, incessantly.

What matters, though, is not the similarities between the interpretation of the Russian Revolutions (re)produced in the “Russia – My History” historical parks and that reiterated by Vladimir Putin (and other members of Russia’s ruling elite), but the fact that the project is becoming part and parcel of state-sponsored efforts to construct – and disseminate – a politically expedient vision of Russian history. Not only was the state, from the very beginning of the project, providing the administrative and financial recourses necessary for its development. The historical parks of the chain “Russia – My History” are becoming integrated into the system of public education. In September 2016, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation recommended<sup>28</sup> that the historical parks be used for school history teaching. Since then, not only guided tours but also history lessons for school children and educational events for school history teachers – seminars, conferences, lectures – have taken place in the parks all over the country. In addition to this, the parks cooperate with information-methodical centers affiliated with *RANO*, departments of education at local administrations. Thus, the historical parks are turning into spaces where school children are being taught Russian history; at the same time, the public-school system is being used to promote the vision of history that is suggested in the historical parks.

Furthermore, the project “Russia – My History” has been *de facto* incorporated into official celebrations of the Day of People’s Unity. Celebrated annually on 4 November, this is the national holiday which, along with Victory Day, is fundamental for the specific symbolic policy which Russia’s ruling elites have been developing. On 4 November 2013, Vladimir Putin, accompanied by Patriarch Kirill and Tikhon Shevkunov, visited “The Romanovs”, the first exhibition of the cycle “Orthodox Rus”, and loved it<sup>29</sup>. In the following years, he saw “The Rurikids” (on 4 November 2014), “From Great Upheaval to Great Victory” (on 4 November 2015), and “1945-2016” (on 4 November 2016). On 4 November 2017, Putin turned up at the opening of “Russia Headed Towards the Future”, the fifth, and, until now, the last exhibition of the cycle, which was dedicated to Russia’s (future) technological, economic and cultural progress. Thus, for five years, attending “Russia – My History” – along with laying flowers at the monument to Kuzma Minin and Dmitry Pozharsky on Red Square in Moscow, presenting state decorations at the official ceremony at the Kremlin, and giving a state reception there – constituted part and parcel of Vladimir Putin’s personal annual ritual for 4 November.

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<sup>28</sup> Letter of the Department of State Policy for Public Education of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation No 08-1975, 21 September, 2016. Available at: <<http://mosmetod.ru/metodicheskoe-prostranstvo/vospitatelnaya-rabota/klassnaya-rabota/metodicheskie-materialy/metodicheskie-rekomendatsii-departamenta-gosudarstvennoj-politiki-v-sfere-obshchego-obrazovaniya-minobrnauki-r.html>> (accessed 29 April 2018).

<sup>29</sup> At the end of his visit, the president wrote in the honorary guests’ book: “With respect and gratitude for the work for the good of the Fatherland”. See: <<https://ria.ru/society/20131104/974610782.html>> (accessed 23 November 2018).

Introduced in 2005, at the beginning of Vladimir Putin's second presidential term, the Day of People's Unity marks the expulsion by the militia led by merchant Kuzma Minin and Prince Dmitry Pozharsky of Polish troops from Moscow in 1612. A year later, in 1613, Mikhail Romanov would ascend to the throne, becoming the first Russian tsar of the Romanov dynasty. The Day of People's Unity, hence, celebrates both, the end of *Smuta*<sup>30</sup>, the profound political, social, and economic crisis that struck Russia after the death of the last of the Rurikids, Feodor Ioannovich, and the beginning of Russia's three centuries under the Romanovs. Three centuries that would come to an end in 1917.

The ideas manifested in the Day of People's Unity are that of the people overcoming their internal strife and uniting in the face of their common enemy for the sake of salvaging their state, and that of the state being resurrected for glory and grandeur through the heroism and sacrifice of the people. Valorizing the consolidated state (and a reminder of the deadly consequences of division within the nation), the Day of People's Unity, thus, preaches the same – state-centered and unity-focused – vision of Russian history that is (re)produced in the “Russia – My History” historical parks. Given this ideological proximity between the project “Russia – My History” and the Day of People's Unity, it is of little wonder that when, in 2017, the time came to nominate Vladimir Putin for the (his fourth) presidency, the initiative group charged with this task was convened in VDNKh pavilion No 57, at the Moscow historical park “Russia – My History”<sup>31</sup>. A site that manifests vividly the (profoundly statist) ideas of national unity, historical continuity, and political stability. Ideas that are fundamental to Vladimir Putin's personal legitimacy and the legitimacy of the political regime of which he is the leader.

## Conclusion

Over the last several years, one could observe the rapid development of the project “Russia – My History” which, by the end of 2018, has grown into a chain of multimedia historical parks with branches in Russia's largest cities. The result of cooperation between the ROC and the state, “Russia – My History” is a remarkable manifestation of rapprochement between the two, now in the field of historic production. At the same time, narrating Russian history from Kievan Rus' to the post-Soviet Russian Federation, the project demonstrates the ability of Russia's “historic entrepreneurs” to develop the politically expedient interpretation of the past that seemed politically

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<sup>30</sup> For a historian's account of how accurate the understanding of this event as the end of *Smuta* is, see (Nazarov 2004).

<sup>31</sup> See the detailed account of the convention at: <https://tass.ru/politika/4844768> (accessed 23 November 2018). Tellingly, the meeting of the organizing group for establishing the initiative group took place in the Museum of Victory on Poklonnaia hill in Moscow. See: <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/20/12/2017/5a3973059a7947077ea011e6?from=newsfeed> (accessed 23 November 2018).

problematic. Thus, “Russia – My History” offers an interpretation of the Russian Revolutions which, focused on national unity and historical continuity, allows for imagining the Russian nation on behalf of which present-day Russia is ruled. Nested within the historical narrative that represents (internal) disputes and (revolutionary) changes as generally having catastrophic consequences, this interpretation bolsters the legitimacy of Russia’s current political regime, which has been silencing dissenters and arresting change throughout the last two decades.

The amount of administrative and financial resources invested by the state in the development of the project “Russia – My History” not only testifies to the fact that Russia’s past will continue to be used for bolstering the legitimacy of the political regime in present-day Russia. It suggests that the repertoire of the country’s politically (ab)used past will broaden to include the Russian Revolutions. If nothing else, the interpretation of the latter, beneficial for Russia’s current ruling elite, is being promoted through the project “Russia – My History”. As the latter, initially developed within the ROC, is becoming a part of state-sponsored efforts to forge a politically expedient vision of Russian history, this interpretation is acquiring the status of an “official” one in present-day Russia. Will it, however, be accepted by Russian society? It certainly is too soon to tell.

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