Conservatism in the Post-Soviet Context: Ideology, Worldview, or Moral Choice?

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Mark Bassin

Lev Gumilev and the European New Right

The striking affinities that have developed between radical-conservative movements in Western Europe and Russia since the end of the Cold War have been widely noted. This paper considers these affinities through the example of the Soviet historian and geographer Lev Nikolaevich Gumilev (1912-1992). I argue that Gumilev and the European New Right developed perspectives that were highly comparable, founded on similar principles and articulated through similar images and allusions. Yet despite the powerful resonances in terms of basic concepts and theoretical orientation, there were nonetheless deep differences in terms of the conclusions regarding the practical implications for their respective societies that Gumilev and the Europeans deduced from these principles.

Mark Bassin is Baltic Sea Professor of the History of Ideas, in the Center for Baltic and East European Studies at Södertörn University in Stockholm. His research focuses on problems of space, ideology and identity in Russia and Germany. He is the author of The Gumilev Mystique: Biopolitics, Eurasianism and the Construction of Community in Modern Russia (Cornell UP); Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East 1840-1865 (Cambridge UP), and has co-edited the collections: The Politics of Eurasianism: Identity, Popular Culture and Russia’s Foreign Policy (G. Pozo, co-editor; Rowman and Littlefield); Eurasia.2: Russian Geopolitics in the Age of New Media (Mikhail Suslov, co-editor, Rowman and Littlefield); Between Europe and Asia: The Origins, Theories and Legacies of Russian Eurasianism (Pittsburgh UP), Soviet and Post-Soviet Identities (Cambridge UP), Space, Place and Power in Modern Russia: Essays in the New Spatial History (Northern Illinois UP) and География и Идентичность в Постсоветской России (St. Petersburg).
Per-Arne Bodin

The Revival of Grand Prince Vladimir

On November 4th 2016 a statue featuring the grand prince of Kiev Vladimir was inaugurated in Moscow near the Kremlin. Three short speeches were held at that occasion each of them with a conservative agenda. In this presentation I will analyse these three speeches held by president Vladimir Putin, by patriarch Kirill and by Natalia Solzhenitsyna as three different and sometimes colliding conservative discourses in today’s Russia. The aesthetics of the monument forms a fourth such agenda making a sort of summary of these three speeches as well as of the newly released film of Andrei Kravchuk ”The Viking”.

Per-Arne Bodin is professor emeritus at the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, Stockholm University. He has written extensively on Russian, Polish and Ukrainian literatures. One special interest is the relation between Russian culture and Russian Orthodox Tradition. His most recent books are Eternity and Time: Studies in Russian Literature and the Orthodox Tradition (2007) and Language, Canonization and Holy Foolishness: Studies in Post-Soviet Russian Culture and the Orthodox Tradition (2009). He has written several collections of essays in Swedish on Russian culture, literature and church history. He is member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities and doctor honoris causa at Uppsala University.

Thomas Bremer

The Russian Orthodox Church and its Conservative Partners in the West

The significance of conservative ideas in Russian Orthodoxy has repercussions also in Western Churches. This paper deals with the question how conservative groups and tendencies within the Catholic Church react to the developments in the Russian Orthodox Church, and how some of them seem to find in Russia an example for their own countries.
**Thomas Bremer** is Professor of Ecumenical Theology, Eastern Churches Studies and Peace Studies at the Faculty of Catholic Theology, University of Münster, Germany. After obtaining his doctorate with a dissertation on the ecclesiology of the Serbian Orthodox Church, he worked for the German Association for East European Studies. In 1999, he was appointed to the post in Münster. His research interests are the Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe (Russia, Ukraine) and in the Balkans (Serbia), Catholic–Orthodox ecumenical dialogue, and questions of churches in conflict. His book *Cross and Kremlin*, a history of the Russian Orthodox Church, has been translated into English (Grand Rapids, 2013), and with Andrii Krawchuk he co-edited *Eastern Orthodox Encounters of Identity and Otherness* (New York, 2014), and *Churches in the Ukrainian Crisis* (New York 2017).

**Alicja Curanovic**

**Conservatism and Russian Contemporary Exceptionalism**

Exceptionalism is a relatively common phenomenon among states. The sense of being exceptional steams from the state’s (nation’s) conviction that it has a unique destiny and a special mission. I this paper I will examine the latter as the significant component of exceptionalism. Mission, or more broadly speaking, messianism is usually analysed from religious, philosophical or cultural perspectives. However, it can also be approached as a reaction to the external pressure – a manifestation of reactionary modernisation. The effort of Russian intelligentsia in XIX and the beginning of XX century to define Russia’s mission in the world (*inter alia* the tradition of the Russian Idea) fits this explanation. The same is true for the conservative turn recently observed in Russian politics. Both are a result of Russia’s disappointment with the Western powers. Sense of mission embedded in the Russian tradition has a conservative character (contrary to the American mission). Although it contains the imperative to act, it aims to establish the elements of the ‘glorious past’ as a part of the future project. Therefore Russia’s mission is about preserving and guarding the order and as such, it’s conservative.
Alicja Curanović is Assistant Professor at the Institute of International Relations at the University of Warsaw. She holds a PhD in political science (PhD thesis: The Religious Factor in the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation). Her main research interests are international relations in the post-Soviet area; Russian foreign policy; religious factor in international relations; perception, identity, image and status in politics. She has conducted research *inter alia* at the Columbia University, Stanford University, the Russian State University for Humanistic Studies and MGIMO. Her articles appeared in renowned academic journals, e.g. “Politics and Religion”, “Nationalities Papers” or “Religion, State and Society”. Her monograph – “The Religious Factor in Russia’s Foreign Policy” (Routledge 2012).

Ilia Kalinin

**Genetically Modified Conservatism or Why Culture matters**

The Russian search for a national idea, that has continued uninterrupted for the past two decades, has finally reached its goal. The national idea has been found in Russian culture. To be more precise, in a specific articulation of the concept of “Russian culture.” Recognition of national identity by means of belonging to a common culture makes it possible to eliminate (actually to ignore) a variety of social divisions, whether these be ethnic, religious, social or political. The idea of a common culture, in which the term “Russian” refers not to ethnic, and not even to national (in the sense of the state) but to a civilizational frame rises to a more universal horizon than the various lines of division mentioned above, making possible an integration of political community. The drawback of this conception, of course, is that the borders of the political community, when it is based in this manner on cultural identity on a civilizational scale, rarely, if ever, coincide with the borders of the state. Even more, the essentialist paradigm that underlies cultural identity, when formulated in terms of tradition, legacy, historical past or the spiritual wellsprings of the nation, encounters an inevitable contradiction with civic identity, as regulated by formal-legal norms. The organic universalism of national culture triumphs over the abstract universalism of legal rationality: the roots of patriotic spirituality turn out to lie in the neighboring territories of other states,
presenting a more acceptable legitimation of official rhetoric calling for their annexation than, say, strategic military considerations of actual matters of the national interest. In fact, analysis should properly be focused not on the diagnosis and description of the conservative turn towards traditional values, but on illumination of the constructive principles of that organic tradition to which contemporary Russian conservatism appeals (in particular in its statist version). A shift of attention to the actual language of conservatism makes it possible to discover the mechanics of the invention of tradition within this discourse that seeks its roots in the historical past. Analysis of the means of articulation deployed by contemporary state conservatism reveals a scandalous absence of foundations at the very site from which (according to the visions of classical conservatism) the organic forms of national culture should arise. For this reason, we must consider not the political and cultural effects of conservative ideology, but rather the specific form of conservative discourse in which organism rhetoric masks a deeper belief in the limitless possibilities of social construction, in which tradition becomes a matter of administrative management, so that project takes the place of substance. That which is called the “conservative turn” in contemporary Russia is a project in which the “letter” of devotion to the native soil takes on the “spirit” of genetic engineering. In place of the “organic forms” of the conservatism of the past we are dealing here with “genetically modified foods,” grown in the laboratories of cultural politics.

Ilia Kalinin is an Associate Professor at Department of Liberal Arts and Sciences (http://artesliberales.spbu.ru/), St.-Petersburg State University; 2016-2017 – Visiting Professor, Freie Universität Berlin. His researches focus on early Soviet Russia intellectual and cultural history, practices of self-fashioning of Soviet Subject and on the historical and cultural politics of contemporary Russia as well (post-soviet social and cultural transformations; contemporary Russian politics of history; modernization/demodernization and politics of identity in contemporary Russia). He is editor-in-chief of the Moscow-based intellectual journal “Emergency Rations: Debates on Politics and Culture (Neprikosnovennyj Zapas/NZ: Debaty o politike i culture)” and two series of books published in Moscow Publishing House “New Literary Observer” (http://eng.nlobooks.ru/). He has published in a wide range of

Mikhail Lukianov

**Russia and the West in Conservatives’ Political Discourse in Late Imperial Russia.**

The Revolution of 1905 led to the limited democratization of Russian political system. Conservatives’ opinions about new institutions and practices substantially differed. As a rule, the negative attitude to them coincided with the negative reaction to the West on the whole, while loyalty to the “renewed Russia” correlated with benevolent attitude to it. During the Great War the supporters of the reform policy in conservative milieu, being explicitly anti-German and pro-Entente, strove for a dialogue between the state and society. At the same time the opponents of the political renewal demonstrated relatively less sympathy to Russia’s allies and insisted that the state was supposed to command the society. While more moderate conservatives joined the liberals in the Progressive bloc, the hardliners turned to be looked at as the most authentic representatives of Russian Conservatism. This identification discredited the latter and contributed to its failure in February 1917.

The insistence on Russia having a "thousand-year-old history" is ubiquitous in today's Russia. The phrase is recurrently encountered in President Putin's speeches, among politicians and Church leaders as well as public intellectuals. It testifies to an active politics of memory, where it serves for instance as a justification for claiming the Kievan heritage, or to demonstrate the importance of a strong state. However, politics of memory itself is not necessarily conservative. What is important with this phrase and the meanings it embodies in the context of conservatism is rather the emphasis it puts on having a past as a valuable asset itself, something that this paper sees as a specific feature of the conservative mode of thought. The past is seen as the main source of authenticity. By means of Karl Mannheim's classical analysis of the "conservative utopia," the paper discusses how the past as such is framed today as a "creator of value," where the essential task is to sustain the past into the present. At the same time, it expresses also a belief that Russia will always exist, no matter what happens, and that it is always capable of overcoming the most serious breakdowns. The phrase emerged as a response to upheaval and collapse, and provides comfort for those unhappy with the current situation. Thus, it serves also as a belief, uncontested by trials and tribulations. Paradoxically, this conservative idea may also enable certain forms of modernisation, given the belief that Russia will inevitably survive, no matter what. This paper explores the meanings and function of the "thousand-year-old history" phrase more in detail, as it appears for instance in the works of Natalia Narochnitskaia and Gennadii Ziuganov.

Kåre Johan Mjör is a researcher of Russian philosophy and Russian intellectual history at Uppsala Centre for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Uppsala University. He is the author of Reformulating Russia: The Cultural and Intellectual Historiography of Russian First-Wave Émigré Writers (Brill, 2011), and several articles on Russian thought from the eighteenth century to
the present, including contributions to journals such as Slavonic and East European Thought and Ab Imperio. His current project, which is funded for a three-year period by the Swedish Research Council, explores the concept of “creativity” (tvorchestvo) in Russian thought. His book *Russiske imperium* [Russian Empires, in Norwegian] will be published this spring.

**Victor Shnirelman**

**Russian Neo-conservatism and Apocalyptic imperialism**

The climax of the Putin’s rule is characterized by the neoconservative trend supported by numerous proponents of the contemporary political regime in Russia. A belief in the basic role of religion, which legitimizes current social order with a reference to God’s will, is one of the cornerstones of conservatism. The contemporary Russian conservatives want to secure authoritarianism from liberal values, and, American conservatives alike, an “intellectual tradition” seems more important for them than institutes. This makes up a background for a political theology based on the Christian eschatology which contains the ideas rooted in the Church Fathers’ views modified by the Russian Orthodox thinkers.

Yet, the constructions of various ideologists differ depending on generation. Whereas elderly authors put an emphasis on the image of enemy in form of the Jews and Freemasons, the middle-aged ones identify the enemy with the hated West, yet, the eschatological mission of Russia seems more important for them than an image of enemies.

In my paper I will focus on how the domestic order within Russia and its relationships with an outside world are viewed by certain well known Russian ideologists with a reference to the idea of the “end of times” and Apocalypse.

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Political Radicalism in Russia and its Roots (Moscow: Bridges of Culture – Gesharim, 2012);
“Russkoe rodnoverie: neioazychestvo i natsionalizm v sovremennoi Rossi” (Russian
Rodnoverie. Neo-Paganism and Nationalism in Contemporary Russia) (Moscow: Biblical-
Theological Institute, 2012); "Ariisky mif v sovremennom mire" (The Aryan Myth in the
Contemporary World) in 2 vols. (Moscow: NLO, 2015); “Koleno Danovo: eskhatologia and
antisemitism” (The tribe of Dan: eschatology and anti-Semitism) (Moscow: Biblical-
Antisemitism in Russia, 1970s – 1990s” (Jerusalem, 2002); “The Value of the Past. Myths,
Identity and Politics in Transcaucasia” (Osaka, 2001); “Who Gets the Past? Competition for
Ancestors among non-Russian Intellectuals in Russia” (Washington, Baltimore, London,
1996); “Russian Neo-pagan Myths and Antisemitism.” (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of

Andrei Shishkov

NeoPalamism as Construction of Orthodox Theological Tradition and Conservative
Ideology

Neopalamism is a complex of theological ideas that form the contemporary mainstream
Orthodox identity. This identity is based on opposition to modernism and Westernism. Being
a part of the theological project of neo-patristic synthesis, NeoPalamism is filled with the
conservative pathos of a return to tradition not spoiled by modernity. An important element
of NeoPalamism is the spread of the ideas of monastic mysticism (hesychasm) to the whole
church. Ethics (fulfillment of the moral commandments) is replaced by asceticism (theosis).
NeoPalamism also finds its application in the political sphere in the form of conservative
ideology (political Hesychasm, Byzantinism etc.). However, NeoPalamism is a new
phenomenon for Orthodox theological thought. It appears only at the beginning of the XX
century and comes into conflict with the Orthodox tradition of the XIX century, which is
considered as role-model by contemporary Orthodox public mind (returning to pre-1917 Orthodoxy).

**Andrey Shishkov** is the director of the Research center for studies on contemporary ecclesiological issues of the Eastern Orthodoxy and a senior lecturer of the chair of external church relations and social sciences at Ss. Cyril and Methodius Postgraduate Institute (Moscow); a secretary of the Synodal Biblical and Theological Commission of the Russian Orthodox Church. He reads courses on ecclesiology, political theory, and political theology at the Master’s program of the Postgraduate Institute. Shishkov has been co-leader of two projects on science and religion in Russia supported by the John Templeton Foundation. His research interests include ecclesiology, political theology, sociology of religion, post-secular theory, political philosophy, and the dialogue of religion and science.

**Mikhail Suslov**

**Slavophile Tradition in Russian Conservatism**

This paper identifies the Slavophile tendency in Russian conservative thought from the late 19th century to the present, arguing that Slavophilism has always been a hybrid and experimental “cultural software” product, designed to make sense of the traumatic processes of identity changing. The paper pays special attention to the multiple synchronic and diachronic compatibilities of Slavophilism with the family of fascist ideas. This obviously does not imply a normative judgment on Slavophile thought, which cannot be held accountable for the atrocities of fascist regimes in the twentieth century. Still, one needs to be aware of the protean character of fascism, which can have many sources, topologies, and chronologies, not necessarily compartmentalized in interwar Western Europe. When one observes fascism beyond the term, and beyond the “pale” of the First World War, one can achieve a better understanding of the ideological grounds and genealogies on which fascistogenic intellectual milieu has resurfaced in post-Soviet Russia.
Mikhail Suslov is a Marie Curie researcher at the Uppsala Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Uppsala University. His research focuses on Russian intellectual history, conservative, right-wing and religiously-motivated political ideas, geopolitical ideologies and socio-political utopias. His most recent papers dealing with (geo)political imagination include “‘Novorossiya’ Reloaded: Geopolitical Fandom in Online Debates,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 69, no. 2 (2017); “Of Planets and Trenches: Imperial Science Fiction in Contemporary Russia,” *The Russian Review* 75, no. 10 (2016). Recently he edited *Digital Orthodoxy in the Post-Soviet World: The Russian Orthodox Church and Web 2.0* (Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2016) and co-edited (with Mark Bassin) *Eurasia 2.0: Post-Soviet Geopolitics in the Age of New Media* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016).

Dmitrii Uzlaner

**Logic of “Scapegoating” in the Discourse of Traditional Values: Debates on Juvenile Justice in Russia**

Logic of “scapegoating” in the discourse of traditional values: debates on juvenile justice in Russia

In my presentation I will rely on Rene Girard’s ideas on scapegoating in order to illustrate certain tendencies in the conservative discourse on traditional values. Debates on juvenile justice are used as an example – I will look at texts, documents and public activities of Orthodox conservative actors who criticize the idea and practice of juvenile justice in Russia. What this analysis shows is that complicated issues of tensions between secular and religious norms are often interpreted through simplistic pattern of “scapegoating”: enemies (“fifth column”, “foreign agents”, “liberals”, “sexual perverts”) want to destroy our families, get rid of our children, i.e. bring chaos to social order. Solution is seen through the logics of purification – eradication of scapegoats and the chaos that they bring. In general, solution of complicated social antagonisms follows mythological logics of scapegoating. In the end I will reflect a bit on the role of mythos in conservative worldview (in Russia) as an element which,
on the one hand, makes this worldview powerful (f.e. as compared to the liberal one), but on the other hand – also dangerous.

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**Roundtable presenters**

**Maria Engström** is Associate Professor of Russian, School of Humanities and Media Studies at Dalarna University, Sweden. Her research focus is on the Post-Soviet right-wing intellectual milieu, the role of the Orthodox Church in Russian politics, contemporary Russian Utopian imagination, and Imperial aesthetics in Post-Soviet literature and art. Engström’s most recent publications include “Apollo against Black Square: Conservative Futurism in Contemporary Russia”, “Daughterland [Rodina-Doch’]: Erotic patriotism and Russia’s future”, “Post-Secularity and Digital Anticlericalism on Runet”, “Orthodoxy or death!": Political Orthodoxy in Russia”, “Contemporary Russian Messianism and New Russian Foreign Policy”, “Forbidden Dandyism: Imperial Aesthetics in Contemporary Russia”. She co-edited *Digital Orthodoxy: Mediating Post-Secularity in Russia*, a special issue of *Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media* (2015). Her current project “Visuality without Visibility: Queer Visual Culture in Post-Soviet Russia” (2017-2020) is supported by the Swedish Research Council.

**Ekaterina Grishaeva** is lecturer at the Department of Philosophy at Ural Federal University. She holds a Ph.D. in philosophy from the Ural Federal University. She was a junior fellow in the Institute for Human Science (Vienna, Austria), and a postdoctoral fellow at the Jagiellonian University (Krakow, Poland). During 2015-2016 Dr. Grishaeva worked on a
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Kåre Johan Mjør is a researcher of Russian philosophy and Russian intellectual history at Uppsala Centre for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Uppsala University. He is the author of Reformulating Russia: The Cultural and Intellectual Historiography of Russian First-Wave Émigré Writers (Brill, 2011), and several articles on Russian thought from the eighteenth century to the present, including contributions to journals such as Slavonic and East European Thought and Ab Imperio. His current project, which is funded for a three-year period by the Swedish Research Council, explores the concept of “creativity” (tvorchestvo) in Russian thought. His book Russiske imperium [Russian Empires, in Norwegian] will be published this spring.

Elena Namli is Professor of Ethics at the Faculty of Theology and one of the three research directors at the UCRS. Her most recent publications include Jewish Thought, Utopia, and Revolution (Rodopi, 2014), Universal Rights versus Sharia? Reflections on the Moral and Legal Dimensions of Human Rights Law and Sharia (Religion and Human Rights, 2013), Power and Legitimacy – Challenges from Russia (Routledge, 2012) and Religion and Politik i Ryssland (Swedish Science Press, 2012).

Susanna Rabow-Edling is Associate Professor in Political Science and Senior Research Fellow at the Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies. Her main research interests are Russian political thought in the long nineteenth century, especially nationalism, liberalism, and imperialism, Russian America and women’s history. Her most important publications include Married to the empire: three governors’ wives in Russian America 1829-1864 (University of Alaska Press, 2015), Slavophile Thought and the Politics of Cultural Nationalism (State University of New York Press, 2006).

Kristina Stoeckl is assistant professor at the Department of Sociology at the University of Innsbruck and principal investigator of the research project Postsecular Conflicts (ERC-STG-
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