



Performing Memory: Vladimir Putin and the Celebration of WWII in Russia*

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Abstract

By making World War II a personal event and also a sacred one, Vladimir Putin has created a myth and a ritual that elevates him personally, uniting Russia (at least theoretically) and showing him as the natural hero-leader, the warrior who is personally associated with defending the Motherland. Several settings illustrate this personal performance of memory: Putin's meetings with veterans, his narration of his own family's sufferings in the Leningrad blockade, his visits to churches associated with the war, his participation in parades and the creation of new uniforms, and his creation of a girls' school that continues the military tradition. In each of these settings Putin demonstrates a connection to the war and to Russia's greatness as dutiful son meeting with his elders, as legitimate son of Leningrad, and as father to a new generation of girls associated with the military. Each setting helps to reinforce a masculine image of Putin as a ruler who is both autocrat and a man of the people.

Keywords

Vladimir Putin; World War II; memory; patriotism; gender; masculinity; Stalin; Stalinism; Dmitry Medvedev

From his first inauguration on May 7, 2000 and his first Victory Day speech on May 9, 2000, over the course of the next eleven years, Vladimir Putin has repeatedly personified himself as the defender, even the savior of the Motherland. He noted in his inaugural address that he had taken on himself

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a gigantic responsibility, citing Boris Yeltsin's alleged send-off, "Take care of Russia [*Beregite Rossiuu*]." ¹

From the beginning Putin distinguished himself from Yeltsin – in his youth, vigor and especially over time, his masculinity. Close examination reveals that Putin and his handlers have structured his rule from the outset as a performance. Of late historians and observers of Russia have been asking whether Putin and his advisers have been striving to create a new cult of personality.² Studying the relationship between Putin and World War II reveals that they have also been creating an image that aligns him personally with the fate of the country. This *persona* is deeply identified with the ongoing commemoration of World War II, the suffering and redemption of the nation. The frequent invocation of World War II and its leading holiday May 9 have, over the last ten years, increasingly taken on a *personal* quality designed to identify Putin directly with the holiday and the victory in the war.

On the face of it the identification of Vladimir Putin with World War II would seem unlikely. Vladimir Vladimirovich was born October 7, 1952, seven years after the conclusion of the war. He served in the KGB and FSB, not in the Soviet or post-Soviet military. His principal foreign language is German; his KGB service was in Dresden in East Germany. Yet Victory Day and World War II are symbols that Mr. Putin has come back to again and again. They serve many purposes.

The reasons for the popularity of this war and this holiday with the Putin, and later Putin-Medvedev, administrations have been well shown by a number of scholars. The Great Patriotic War and its attendant May 9 holiday (Day of Victory) serve as a morality tale of suffering and redemption and a foundation myth.³ They encapsulate a victory myth that appears to shore up Russian

¹ "Inauguratsionnaia rech' V. Putina 7 maia 2000," <http://www.grani.ru/Politics/Russia/President/m.63920.html>, accessed on June 28, 2011.

² Julie A. Cassiday and Emily D. Johnson, "Putin, Putiniana and the Question of a Post-Soviet Cult of Personality," *Slavonic and East European Review*, 88, 4 (Oct. 2010): 681-707.

³ Valerie Sperling, "Making the Public Patriotic: Militarism and Anti-Militarism in Russia," in Marlène Laruelle, ed., *Russian Nationalism and the National Reassertion of Russia* (Routledge, 2009), pp. 218-71; Sperling, "The Last Refuge of a Scoundrel: Patriotism, Militarism, and the Russian National Idea," *Nations and Nationalism*, 9, 2 (2003): 235-53; Thomas Sherlock, *Historical Narratives in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), esp. pp. 161-85; Ivan Kurilla, "The Symbolic Politics of the Putin Administration," and Ivo Mijnsen, "An Old Myth for a New Society," in Philipp Casula and Jeronim Perovic, eds., *Identities and Politics During the Putin Presidency* (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2009), pp. 255-69, 270-91; Benjamin Forest and Juliet Johnson, "Unraveling the Threads of History: Soviet-Era

identity.⁴ They also identify current Russian events with the longer sweep of tsarist and Soviet history and remind Russians of the ostensible unity and determination of the whole Soviet population (with a blind eye turned to the repressions of the peoples deported during the war). WWII and May 9 serve as well as the favorite myth of the power ministries (the armed forces and secret services), strengthening their legitimacy as decision-making bodies, while undermining the power of liberalism more broadly.⁵ And finally, May 9 is the last significant holiday that commands national respect, November 7 and May 1 having both been discredited and commandeered by the Communists to the exclusion of other groups.

In this essay I take a different approach, considering the invocation of World War II and May 9 as rituals that have multiple functions and then considering Vladimir Putin's personal place in and identification with those rituals. My argument is that by making World War II the central historical event of the twentieth century, Putin and his handlers have chosen an event of mythic proportions that underlines the unity and coherence of the nation, gives it legitimacy and status as a world power. It functions precisely as a myth is supposed to function, creating a moment that is simultaneously timeless and rooted in time, that involves suffering and redemption, trauma and recovery from the trauma, creation of community, and a narrative way to understand Russia's ongoing challenges.⁶ As one of Serguei Oushakine's respondents

Monuments and Post-Soviet National Identity in Moscow," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 92, 3 (Sept. 2002): 524-47; <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1515475>. See also the articles by Lev Gudkov, Boris Dubin, Maria Ferretti, Joachim Höslér, Aleksej Levinson, Pavel Polyán, and Andreas Langenohl on WWII in *Osteuropa*, 4-6/2005; <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2005-04-26-osteuropa-en.html?filename=article/2005-04-26-osteuropa-en>. On questions of morality and story-telling: Serguei Oushakine, "We're nostalgic but we're not crazy: Retrofitting the Past in Russia," *Russian Review*, 66, 3 (2007): 451-82; Frederick C. Corney, *Telling October: Memory and the Making of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Elizabeth Hemenway, "Nicholas in Hell: Re-writing the Tsarist Narrative in the Revolutionary Skazki of 1917," *Russian Review*, 60, 2 (April 2001): 185-204; Ulrich Schmid, "Constitution and Narrative: Peculiarities of Rhetoric and Genre in the Foundational Laws of the USSR and the Russian Federation," *Studies in East European Thought*, 62, 3-4 (2010): 431-51.

⁴ Ivo Mijnsen, "The Victory Myth and Russia's Identity," *Russian Analytical Digest*, 72, 10 (Feb. 2010): 6-9.

⁵ Sherlock, *Historical Narratives*, pp. 162-63.

⁶ On the sacredness of World War II to Russian identity, see, *inter alia*, Catherine Merridale, "Redesigning History in Contemporary Russia," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38, 1 (Jan. 2003): 13-28; Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and the Fall of the Cult of World*

comments in his *Patriotism of Despair*, World War II serves as the “only remaining sacrality.” The suffering of the war can have an effect on each individual person, drawing them into a collective sense of belonging and redemption. Oushakine describes the Russian suffering in wartime (both WWII and Chechnya) as “a performative rather than a descriptive device,” as “a tool with which to ‘stir the memory of our feelings.’”⁷

Ultimately, references to World War II in Russia today, especially those that are acted out and not just spoken, appeal to the *iconicity* of this event, both as a paradigm of suffering and as one of victory. It is an icon because it is perceived visually and through affect rather than through reason. Putin’s Kremlin planners do not have to create a new ideology because “everyone knows” that the nation is sacred in its suffering and rebirth, in its role as savior of Europe from the evils of the barbarian Nazis.

Vladimir Putin as national leader then becomes associated with marking that mythic history and keeping it alive. In this essay I will show that the *piarshchiki* (those responsible for PR) in the Kremlin have gone to great pains to show this head of state, Mr. Putin, whether as President or Prime Minister, as personally identified with the Great Patriotic War in five principal contexts: 1) through his meetings with veterans; 2) through telling the story of his own family’s sufferings in the Leningrad blockade; 3) through visits to war memorials in churches; 4) through his participation in parades and the creation of new uniforms; and finally 5) through his creation of a girls’ school that continues the military tradition. In each of these settings (which form the backbone of this article) there is familial and especially a masculine connection to the war.⁸

The forms of the masculinity vary, including different presentations as dutiful son, solicitous father, and leader of men. In the first context – meetings with veterans – Vladimir Putin is the dutiful son who listens to his elders (as Yeltsin did not), sympathizes with their losses, and promises to keep the memories alive. He is also the young tsar who listens to the people’s petitions and promises to help them solve their problems. In the second setting, in telling his family history, he is also the son who remembers the war on a personal

War II (New York, 1994); Nina Tumarkin, “Story of a War Memorial” in John Garrard and Carol Garrard, eds., *World War 2 and the Soviet People* (New York, 1993), pp. 125–46.

⁷ Oushakine, *Patriotism*, pp. 6, 36, 62–63, 84–85, and *passim*.

⁸ For reasons of space this paper does not address the Presidency of Dmitry Medvedev who carries on some of the symbolic work of Mr. Putin (especially the appearance in parades), but not all.

level even though he was born after it, thus giving him legitimacy as one of those who (even though indirectly) went through the trial and redemption of the war (while also having simultaneously a legitimate Russian and larger-than-Russian pedigree). In the churches (the third setting) he takes on the air of sanctity associated with this war and its nationalist meaning for Russia; he works with the fathers of the church to bring Russia back into the fold of religion (here he takes up the mantle of the tsars as co-rulers with the church fathers). In overseeing the parades and the designing of new uniforms, he is the masculine avatar, elegant in a modern way.⁹ Finally, in the school setting he adopts a more secular and paternal tone, taking care of girls who have lost their fathers or whose fathers are far, creating an institution that puts him in league with the great tsars of Russia who created educational institutions (Peter the Great and Catherine the Great especially).

This identification of the person with the holiday and the victory creates an iconic character for Mr. Putin's rule (whether as president or prime minister). The nation is great because of its role in World War II, and Putin is great because of his association with the war. The war has been "a severe trial for our statehood."¹⁰ It creates the solidarity of peoples joined together in the nation in an hour of difficulty. But it also creates solidarity among generations, as Mr. Putin has constantly reiterated, in the memory of the war. Ultimately, Victory Day for Mr. Putin is "a lesson and a warning."¹¹ Putin as the son and Putin as the father both lead the nation back to remembering its past and reinforcing its internal unity.

The identification of holiday and leader *works* because they are each immediately recognizable and because, as they are publicly presented, they are coded in such a way as to be linked to each other. They operate in such a way that they can be grasped in a pre-reflective manner, i.e., through values and conventions that do not have to be consciously examined. A certain consensus can

⁹ This aspect is least developed here. I am currently writing an article on this specific "heroic" version of Putin's masculinity entitled "*The New Façade of Autocracy: Vladimir Putin and Hypermasculinity, 1999 to the Present.*"

¹⁰ Vladimir Putin, "Speech at the Military Parade and the Parade of War Veterans Held to Celebrate the 55th Anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945," *Military News Bulletin*, May 1, 2000; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/searchresults/article.jsp?art=0&tid=136488>, accessed on September 18, 2010.

¹¹ Vladimir Putin, "Den' Pobedy učit ii predosteregaet nas" (May 9, 2002); http://www.nasledie.ru/politvnt/19_44/article.php?art=, accessed on July 12, 2012; Speech at the Military Parade Celebrating the 57th Anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War May 9, 2002, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mjfqJBQc0wI>, accessed on July 10, 2011.

be gained through reliance on preexisting norms without communication and debate.¹² They do not require a formal declaration of ideology.¹³ The values of remembering the war are embedded in the actions of remembering it. Hard questions about the war (the country's preparation or lack thereof, the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, the role of Stalin, the repression and exile of whole nationalities) do not have to be answered because the war is a mythic event more than a historically specific one.¹⁴

These are useful images for the top leadership to deploy because their mythic qualities tend to foster cohesion, a quality that is crucial in a society that has been tremendously fragmented since the 1990s. The weakness of these values, however, is that they fail to take into consideration the social, political and cultural changes that have occurred in the Russian polity.¹⁵

Like many Soviet rituals, Putin's invocation of World War II and May 9 also serves a pedagogical function, which I think has not been studied. Putin has chosen to renew the practice of the so-called Memory Lesson [*urok pamiati*]

¹² For "normatively secured consensus" versus consensus secured through communication, see Nancy Fraser's discussion of Jurgen Habermas in "What's Critical about Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender," in her *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory* (University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp. 113-43.

¹³ Putin himself said in his address to the Federal Assembly in July 2000 that there was no need to search for a "national idea" (a reference to Yeltsin's ineffective attempt to develop such a national idea in the late 1990s). Instead Putin called for a resurrection of patriotism and historical memory as a means to reinforce national unity. "Poslanie Prezidenta Vladimira Putina Federal'nomu Sobraniuu RF, 2000," (July 8, 2000); http://www.intelros.ru/2007/01/17/poslanie_prezidenta_rossii_vladimira_putina_federalnomu_sobraniju_rf_2000_god.html, accessed on June 28, 2011.

¹⁴ This, of course, is not to say that there haven't been both scholarly conferences on the war and also huge debates over the significance of some of its most controversial aspects. In this article I look only at the war as a public event, a commemoration (a remembering together) that is deployed by President Putin for very specific purposes.

¹⁵ For the argument that nostalgia for the Soviet past and especially for Stalin may serve as an active impediment to democratization in Russia today see Sarah E. Mendelson and Theodore P. Gerber, "Soviet Nostalgia: An Impediment to Russian Democratization," *Washington Quarterly* 29, 1 (2005): 83-96; Kathleen E. Smith, "Whither Anti-Stalinism?" *Ab Imperio* 4 (2004) and Harley Balzer, "An Acceptable Past: Memory in the Russian Extrication from Communism," *Ab Imperio* 4 (2004). My argument here is not so much about democratization as rather the elevation of Putin as solo leader identified both consciously and unconsciously with the heroic Russian past. For a discussion of the origins of the Putin-Medvedev tandem and the use of 1612 as a guiding metaphor, see Elizabeth A. Wood, "Who Leads Russia?" *Audit of the Conventional Wisdom*, M.I.T. Center for International Studies (June 2008), http://web.mit.edu/cis/pdf/Audit_06_08_Wood.pdf.

which was common in Soviet times as a moment when students met with veterans of World War II to remember and grieve collectively. In 2008 it was announced, for example, that these “lessons” would be held in all Moscow schools on May 7.¹⁶ In 2010 the Ministers of Education in Ukraine and Russia announced that the two countries would share *joint* lessons in memory.¹⁷ These lessons have the function of asking teachers and students to engage in ritual emotional commitment to looking at the war as a moment of *moral* victory.¹⁸ As a “teachable moment” (to use our modern American term) “Memory Lessons” teach not only pride in one’s country but also respect towards one’s elders, empathy for the suffering of others, subordination of individual needs and interests to the greater good, fear before anarchy and disunity.¹⁹ These latter lessons have been taught in one form or another since Tsarist times (they are embedded, for example, in the Primary Chronicles and the Tale of Igor’s Campaign). Yet they have not always had the salience that they have attained under the Putin and Putin-Medvedev regimes. Under Gorbachev and Yeltsin these lessons in memory declined and even May 9 was not celebrated in a serious way until 1995.²⁰

¹⁶ “Urok pamiati o voine proidet 7 maia vo vsekh shkolakh Moskvyy” (May 5, 2010); <http://www.rg.ru/2008/04/16/putin-medvedev.html>.

¹⁷ “Edinyi urok pamiati proidet v shkolakh Rossii i Ukrainy k 65-letiiu Pobedy,” *Ukrainskaia Pravda*, April 20, 2010; http://www.materik.ru/rubric/detail.php?ID=9451&SECTION_ID=1. The Confederation of Independent States (CIS) in the summer of 2004 had also discussed the need “to remember the lessons of the past and conserve the memory of the high cost of victory” in WWII. СНГ-саммит (Sept. 16, 2004); <http://archive.kremlin.ru/text/news/2004/09/76829.shtml>, accessed on Nov. 15, 2010.

¹⁸ See Corney, *Telling October*, for a discussion of the role of *vechera vospominanii* in shaping the Soviet understanding of the revolutions of 1905 and 1917. Also Elizabeth A. Wood, *Performing Justice: Agitation Trials in Early Soviet Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005) for a discussion of teaching in a ritualized fashion.

¹⁹ In his film “Anna” (1993) the Russian filmmaker Nikita Mikhalkov shows his daughter’s continuous fear that the death of the successive rulers of the early 1980s (Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko) will mean war and the destruction of Russia.

²⁰ <http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/russia/victory-day>. A much larger topic is the plan for the “Patriotic Upbringing of Citizens of the Russian Federation for 2001-2005” [Patrioticheskoe Vospitanie Grazhdan Rossiiskoi Federatsii 2001-2005] announced by President Putin, Feb. 16, 2001, which, unfortunately, is outside the scope of this article. For the program, see http://www.rg.ru/oficial/doc/postan_rf/122_1.shtm, last accessed July 10, 2011. For analysis see especially Sperling, “Last Refuge of a Scoundrel” and E. Sieca-Kozlowski, “Russian Military Patriotic Education: A Control Tool Against the Arbitrariness of Veterans,” *Nationalities Papers*, 38, 1 (2010): 73. Also important to keep in mind, in practical terms, is the fact that the Kremlin has decreed that all schoolboys from age 15 should receive military training (decree of

Finally, Putin's celebration of the war has been associated with the nation coming to victory under one man, Joseph Stalin. For Putin this creates the serious problem of what to do about the dictator's repressions and terror. On the one hand, identifying himself with Stalin allows Putin to take on something of a father role.²¹ Like Stalin before him, Putin can adopt the mantle of "father of the fatherland" (though in a much reduced fashion). Still this creates a problem for Putin which he resolves principally by criticizing Stalin in foreign contexts and praising him in domestic ones.²² But it also creates an excellent opportunity. Stalin was man of exceptional stature, and Putin, in invoking his war, gains something of his stature.

The Early War Presidency and Campaigning Without Campaigning

Initially (in his first months as Prime Minister) it was not World War II that was iconic for Putin, but rather the war in Chechnya. From August 1999, when Yeltsin named Putin as Prime Minister, Putin and his handlers took great pains to craft this as a "war presidency."²³ Not only did Putin make his

Dec. 31, 1999); Richard F. Staar, "KGB & Other Buddies in Putin Apparatus," [2000]; http://www.ncoic.com/putin2_3.htm, accessed on July 15, 2011. An entire raft of dissertations have now appeared in Russia on the topic "military-patriotic education." They can be accessed by searching for the term "voennoe-patrioticheskoe vospitanie." One such list can be found at: http://www.disszakaz.com/catalog/razvitie_sistemi_patrioticheskogo_vospitaniya_shkolnikov_v_sovremennih_usloviyah_kraynego_severa.html, accessed on July 15, 2011.

²¹ As Floriana Fossato has noted in a paper on the media, Putin explicitly referred to the "family" of those involved in television journalism on the 75th anniversary of that media, implicitly pointing to his own role as father of that family: "Vladimir Putin and the Russian Television 'Family,'" *Cahiers Russia/ Russia Papers*, 1 (2006); http://www.internews.eu/IMG/pdf/Floriana_Fossato_Russia_Papers.pdf, accessed on June 13, 2011.

²² Vladimir Shlapentokh and Vera Bondartsova, "Stalin in Russian Ideology and Public Opinion: Caught in a Conflict Between Imperial and Liberal Elements," *Russian History*, 36 (2009): 302-25; Orlando Figes, "Putin vs. the Truth," *New York Review of Books*, April 30, 2009; http://www.pasadena.edu/files/syllabi/fphoppe_8779.pdf, accessed on July 10, 2011.

²³ The best source on this is Maya Eichler, *Militarizing Men: Gender, Conscriptio, and War in Putin's Presidency* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, forthcoming fall 2011); my thanks to Dr. Eichler for allowing me to see this material in manuscript form. On Putin's use of the war in Chechnya as a legitimation for his primeministership and then for the presidency, see, inter alia, Sergei Kovalev, "Putin's War," *New York Review of Books*, Feb. 10, 2000; <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2000/feb/10/putins-war/>, accessed on November 10, 2010. As Kovalev notes, the "patriotic" war effort in the Caucasus has allowed the Putin administration to brand the human rights community and other alternative movements as "unpatriotic."

famous comments about beating the Chechen terrorists “in the shithouse.” In an interview during the campaign period between January 1 and March 26 (when he insisted he was not campaigning) he told faithful Kremlin followers Natalia Gevorkian and Andrei Kolesnikov in an article they chose to call “Iron Putin” that he alone was in charge of prosecuting that war, basically on his own initiative with only minimal approval from Yeltsin, as it was necessary to “shoot up those bandits” [*razbabakhit’ etikh banditov*].²⁴ He also made a point of appearing several times in military planes to mark in visual terms his machismo. He also visited Chechnya on January 1, 2000, in his first act as officially acting President, just hours after Yeltsin had nominated him.

In 2000 when Putin began campaigning for President (while still denying that he was campaigning), one of his key campaign stops was Volgograd (or Stalingrad, as it was known during World War II). In stopping there, Putin was following in Boris Yeltsin’s footsteps. Although Yeltsin had mostly eschewed references to World War II in the first half of his presidency, during his reelection campaign in 1996 he staged a virulent campaign against Communist challenger Gennady Zyuganov by appealing to the latter’s traditional constituency among the elderly, many of whom were veterans. On May 9, 1996 Yeltsin visited Volgograd and on June 22 he attended ceremonies on the 55th anniversary of the Nazi invasion held in Brest in Belarus. He appeared in advertisements with veterans trying to convey the message that he would protect their interests better than the Communists would.²⁵

Despite his best efforts, however, Yeltsin’s efforts failed to stem the contentious nature of his relationship with veterans. They criticized him for the state of the economy and the loss of their pensions.²⁶ They voted with the

²⁴ “Zheleznyi Putin,” *Kommersant*, March 10, 2000; <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/142144>, accessed on July 2, 2011. On Putin’s pretence that he was not campaigning, see Vladimir Boxer and Henry Hale, “Putin’s Anti-Campaign Campaign: Presidential Election Tactics in Today’s Russia,” *AAASS NewsNet*, 40, 3 (May 2000):9-10.

²⁵ Richard Boudreaux, “Stumping Yeltsin Tries out Guise of ‘Good Czar,’” *Los Angeles Times*, May 13, 1996; http://articles.latimes.com/1996-05-13/news/mn-3640_1, accessed on Nov. 11, 2010. Kurilla, “Symbolic Politics,” pp. 259-60. Helen Womack, “Buoyant Yeltsin woos war veterans: Confident of youth vote, the President targets the elderly,” *The Independent*, June 24, 1996; <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/buoyant-yeltsin-woos-war-veterans-1338568.html>, accessed on June 30, 2011. Michael McFaul, *Russia’s 1996 Presidential Election: The End of Polarized Politics* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1997), p. 30.

²⁶ John-Thor Dahlburg, “Yeltsin Denounced in Moscow Victory Parade,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 10, 1993; http://articles.latimes.com/1993-05-10/news/mn-33617_1_world-war-ii-veterans; Arthur Kent, “Victory Day rallies become forum for political dueling,” *CNN*, May 9, 1996; <http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9605/09/russia.parades/>

Communists. On May 9 in 1996 and in 1998 the Communists and others held counter-demonstrations to the official demonstrations organized by the government.²⁷

Putin's stop in Volgograd in the middle of his election non-campaign fell on February 22, 2000, the eve of the holiday known as Defender of the Fatherland Day, which he described as "a red-letter day" (i.e., the equivalent of a saint's day in the Russian calendar). While visiting the war memorial Mamaev Kurgan, he met with World War II veterans, followed by visits to veterans from more recent conflicts in military hospitals. He made a point of calling any comments that the Russian army was disintegrating "a barefaced lie."²⁸ "Patriotism and the well-being of citizens," he said, were the core components of the Russian "national idea."²⁹ On March 9 (2000), Putin announced in a widely reported Cabinet meeting that he would "protect all soldiers" who took part in World War II "no matter where they live," and strive to raise their standard of living.³⁰ Putin here seems to have been attempting to create what one author has recently called a "paternal populism," where without campaigning (at least not officially) and without appearing too demagogic, he nonetheless promised benefits to the veterans, thus marking himself as the new tsar or at least the new paternal authority who was taking care of his

²⁷ Valeria Korchagin, "Veterans Come Out for Their Victory Day," *Moscow Times*, May 12, 1998; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/searchresults/article.jsp?art=0&cid=241415>, accessed on June 30, 2011.

²⁸ Vyacheslav Bantín and Sergei Trofimov, "Putin calls talk about army disintegration a lie," *Izar-Tass*, Feb. 22, 2000; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/searchresults/article.jsp?art=59&cid=2842357>, accessed on July 1, 2011. For an image of Putin at Mamaev Hill, "To the Heroes of Stalingrad," see http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/04/Vladimir_Putin_22_February_2000-4.jpg. On February 4, 2008, the anniversary of the famous liberation of Stalingrad, Dmitry Medvedev also made a campaign stop in Volgograd. Viktoria Prikhod'ko, "Strana uznala kak Medvedev p'et vodku," *Moskovskii komsomolets*, Feb. 4, 2008; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/searchresults/article.jsp?art=1&cid=13381295>, accessed on Nov. 13, 2010.

²⁹ Ekaterina Grigor'eva, Andrei Serenko, "Patriotizm i blagopoluchie grazhdan," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, Feb. 23, 2000; http://www.ng.ru/politics/2000-02-23/1_sitizens.html, accessed on July 2, 2011. For a longer account of the manipulation of Putin's election with its accent on "patriotic" and "democratic" themes, see Vasily Avchenko, *Teoriia i praktika politicheskoi manipuliatsii v Rossii* (diplomnaia rabota, Vladivostok, 2002), esp. ch. 2, section 3, "Vybory Prezidenta RF v 2000 god: s tochnost'iu do millimetra (Vladimir Putin kak shedevr kremlevskikh polittekhologov)," <http://psyfactor.org/polman5.htm>, accessed on July 1, 2011.

³⁰ Jen Tracy and Catherine Belton, "Luzhkov, Putin Turn to Veterans," *Moscow Times*, March 10, 2000; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/searchresults/article.jsp?art=1&cid=225464>, accessed on July 1, 2011.

people.³¹ Invoking his dedication to the veterans in this period allowed him to act in a political fashion (wooing older voters from the Communists) without appearing “political” or self-serving.³²

At the same time Putin was consciously attempting to raise the prestige of the military in general by returning to an apparently “manly” ideal. On the Day of the Defender of the Fatherland [*Den’ Zashchitnikov Otechestva*], February 23, 2000, Putin gave a speech to veterans, military leaders, and leaders of veterans’ organizations: “Since time immemorial Russia has respected military labors [*ratnyi trud*]:

With his mother’s milk every boy imbibes pride in the victories of Suvorov and Kutuzov.[...] From birth every boy is already a future defender of the Motherland [*Rodina*] and knows that it is a man’s affair [*muzhskoe delo*] to defend the Motherland, his family and his loved ones. Therefore we recognize February 23 as the holiday of all Russian men.³³

Although these comments do not relate to the memory of World War II, they do demonstrate the degree to which Putin was attempting to appeal specifically to Russian men (with women as their supporters) in support of a renewed military ethic.

The Central Election Commission (with advice from the Kremlin, I am certain) established Putin’s inauguration so that it fell on May 7, 2000, two days before Victory Day (May 9), which then became his first official

³¹ Anna Arutunyan, “Cinderella and the Tsar,” *The Moscow News*, July 7, 2011; <http://themoscownews.com/russia/20110707/188820505.html>, accessed on July 8, 2011. Numerous Russian journalists have commented as well on the tsar-like qualities of Putin, a topic unfortunately beyond the scope of this article. It is also interesting to note that at least one scholar has referred to the elevation of WWII veterans as privileged above all others during the years since Putin came to power: Natalia Danilova, “The Development of an Exclusive Veterans’ Policy: The Case of Russia,” *Armed Forces & Society* 36, 5 (2010), p. 909; originally published online 29 October 2009; <http://afs.sagepub.com/content/36/5/890>, accessed on Jul 14, 2011.

³² The notion of being “above politics” has a long pedigree in Russian history. It was the fondest dream of Tsar Nicholas II to be loved by his people without engaging in crass politics. The Cadets in 1917 also strove to adopt a position above politics.

³³ “My obiazatel’no vosstanovim prestizh Vooruzhennykh Sil,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, Feb. 25, 2000; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/sources/article.jsp?id=3313048>; “Iz Kremli. Vstrecha s veteranami,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, Feb. 25, 2000; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/sources/article.jsp?issueId=96044&pager.offset=4>, both accessed on July 15, 2011. N.B.: The Russian language has two words for nation or homeland: *otechestvo*, which is usually translated as “fatherland” since its root comes from the word “father”; and *rodina*, which is usually translated as “motherland” since its etymology is close to the word for “mother tongue” [*rodnoi iazyk*], although technically its etymology comes from the word for clan [*rod*].

working day.³⁴ In his inaugural speech (on May 7), in addition to his opening comment about Yeltsin's commandment that he take care of Russia, he also declared: "I consider it my sacred duty to unite the people of Russia[...] and to remember [...] that we are one nation and one people."³⁵ The whole event was drenched in history. The guards wore uniforms from 1812; the Patriarch gave a speech afterwards on the steps of Great Kremlin Hall; and the menu for the banquet was chosen by the staff of the Historical Museum.³⁶

May 9 was then more elaborately celebrated than it had been in years. Several army units in the Red Square parade wore WWII uniforms. Veterans marched in columns arranged by their old battlefronts. Putin himself described the war as "a test of our statehood and national spirit" and "a genuine achievement of great power status [*derzhavnost*]."³⁷ He made an effort to reach out

³⁴ The Central Election Commission announced the results of the March 26 election of Putin on April 7, which automatically meant that the inauguration would be held on May 7. Although they did not have enormous room for maneuver, it is likely that they chose May 7 deliberately because of its proximity to May 9 and to Easter Sunday. On Sunday April 30 Putin attended the Easter Service in St. Isaac's Cathedral in St. Petersburg where Metropolitan Vladimir welcomed him during his sermon. Since Holy Week (the week after Easter) has become more and more of a holiday, many Russians were able to enjoy vacation for the whole week. Will England, "A renewed passion for holidays," in Johnson's Russia List, #4277, April 30, 2000; <http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/4277.html##4>, accessed on July 5, 2011; Fred Weir, "Calendar clash: Candles and sickles and flags, oh my!" *Christian Science Monitor*, May 3, 2000; <http://www.csmonitor.com/2000/0503/p7s2.html>, accessed on Nov. 13, 2010.

³⁵ "Putin's Inaugural Address: 'We Believe in Our Strength,'" May 8, 2000; <http://partners.nytimes.com/library/world/europe/050800putin-text.html>, accessed on July 1, 2011; http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2000/05/07/0001_type63381type82634_28711.shtml. A clip of the inauguration is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6uz-wLPEz6I>. One note: the handpicked audience present in the Andrew's Hall in the Kremlin during the ceremony appears to have been almost entirely male with only a single woman photographer or two. Of the 1500 people present almost 650 were officials from the Duma and the Supreme Court. Nonetheless, it is interesting that the remaining individuals were virtually all male as well. Planning for Putin's inauguration was also clearly designed to distinguish it from Yeltsin's: "Inauguratsia Putina – eto vam ne inauguratsiia Yeltsina. No pokhozhe," *Kommersant*, April 15, 2000; <http://kommersant.ru/doc/145526>, accessed on July 1, 2011. On the tsarist precedents consciously demonstrated in Putin's two inaugurations in 2000 and 2004, as well as in Medvedev's in 2008, see "Inauguratsiia ili koronatsiia?" *Mir novostei* [2008], <http://www.mirnov.ru/arhiv/mn750/mn/02-1.php>, accessed on July 1, 2011.

³⁶ Kirill Andreev, "Khlopoty pervoi stepeni," *NG: Figury I litsa*, April 27, 2000; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/searchresults/article.jsp?art=0&cid=2799001>, accessed on July 10, 2011.

³⁷ V. Putin, "Vystuplenie na parade" (May 9, 2000); <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgy9sNUM-sA>, accessed on July 5, 2011. Perhaps coincidentally a new website devoted to

to every possible constituency, greeting the crowd as “Comrades soldiers and seamen, sergeants and sergeant-majors; Comrades officers, generals and admirals; Respected war veterans and citizens of Russia.”³⁸ In so doing, he quoted word for word one of Stalin’s most famous opening lines, adding only the address to the veterans and citizens.³⁹ In succeeding years (2001–7) he used the very same opening language every year on May 9. President Dmitry Medvedev has used the same opening phrase in 2008–2011.

In this opening period of spring 2000 Putin as the newly elected president signed a decree giving veterans a lump sum special remuneration. But he also made a number of moves showing his emulation of Stalin: he authorized Russia’s Central Bank to issue 500 special silver coins bearing Stalin’s portrait, unveiled a plaque honoring Stalin for his “heroic” leadership in the war, approved the installation of a bust of Stalin at the famous war memorial Poklonnaia Gora, and on May 8 opened a new war memorial in Kursk, the scene of the famous World War II tank battle.⁴⁰ Initially it

Russian soldiers with an emphasis on those of World War II lists its opening date as May 9, 2000: <http://www.soldat.ru/about.html>; accessed July 6, 2011.

³⁸ “Vladimir Putin vystupil pered uchastnikami voennogo parada, posviashchennogo 55-i godovshchine Velikoi Pobedy,” May 9, 2000; <http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/112423>, accessed July 12, 2011. The English version is Vladimir Putin, “Speech at the Military Parade and the Parade of War Veterans Held to Celebrate the 55th Anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945,” *Military News Bulletin*, May 1, 2000; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/searchresults/article.jsp?art=0&cid=136488>, accessed on September 18, 2010.

³⁹ I. V. Stalin, “Prikaz Vooruzhennykh sil Soiuza SSSR no. 10,” *Pravda*, Feb. 23, 1947, *Sobranie sochinenii*, v. 16, ch. 55; <http://www.iosif-stalin.su/pages/16/55/>, accessed July 12, 2011. In September 2004 in the aftermath of the Beslan tragedy, Putin again used text from Stalin, this time quoting an entire passage on the dangers to Russia if the country should prove itself weak (“We have shown weakness; the weak get beaten.”)

⁴⁰ Sarah Karush, “Putin’s Inauguration Heralds Start of New Era,” *Moscow Times*, May 11, 2000; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/searchresults/article.jsp?art=15&cid=226400>, accessed on Nov. 11, 2010; Ian Traynor, “Russia’s New Strongman Puts Stalin Back on a Pedestal,” *The Guardian*, May 13, 2000, cited in Benjamin Forest and Juliet Johson, “Unraveling the Threads,” p. 41. On Feb. 26, 2000, Russian Federation Acting President V. Putin signed a decree “On the Lump sum in connection with the celebration of the 55th anniversary of the victory in the 1941–1945 Great Patriotic War,” <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/searchresults/article.jsp?art=8&cid=3519270>; Vyacheslav Bantin, “Two million WW vets to receive lump sums by 55th V-Day,” *Itar-Tass*, Feb. 27, 2000; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/searchresults/article.jsp?art=48&cid=2843041>, accessed on July 1, 2011. Charles Gurin, “Russian Historians Denounce Re-Stalinization,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 2, 89 (May 6, 2005); [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=30367](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=30367) accessed on November 8, 2010.

seemed he was heading toward rehabilitating Stalin, while trying to please the veterans.⁴¹

Personalizing Putin's Connection to World War II

Putin's early references to World War II and Victory Day, while astoundingly frequent, were nonetheless fairly clichéd affairs that did not relate to him personally. Every event that could possibly be connected with the 60th anniversary of the war was celebrated (from the anniversary of the invasion of Russia in 1941, to the battles of Kursk and Stalingrad, to the lifting of the blockade in Leningrad, to final victory in 1945). As each 60th anniversary came up, Putin made a public speech, spoke of the unity of the nation, the victory over the barbarian enemy, and "the sacred duty to respect the memory of our fathers."⁴² He congratulated the veterans, promised them money and housing (especially if it was an election year), honored the memory of the fallen, and called for unity in the country. If there was a personal touch in these general meetings, it was his careful attention to the issues that veterans brought to the table, his promise to look into most of their complaints. Often he asked rather coyly, "Is it okay if I get back to you on this?" These were matters, he claimed, that Parliament should decide, not the president. Once he was reelected (in 2004), he again acted modestly, saying that hearing their input would make it "easier for me to orient myself in conversation with the big bosses."⁴³

⁴¹ For a broader discussion of some of the contradictory views of Putin and Medvedev toward the Stalinist past, see Thomas Sherlock, "Confronting the Stalinist Past: The Politics of Memory in Russia," *The Washington Quarterly* (Spring 2011), http://www.twq.com/11spring/docs/11spring_Sherlock.pdf, accessed on July 12, 2011. To his credit Putin did not support a proposal made by the administration of the city of Volgograd to rename that city Stalingrad after its heroic wartime role. Michael Mainville, "Stalingrad '03: The battle over a name," *Toronto Star*, Feb. 1, 2003, reprinted in *Johnson's Russia List*, no. 7043, Feb. 1, 2003; <http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/7043.cfm#16>, accessed on July 14, 2011.

⁴² "Speech of President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin at the Military Parade and the Parade of War Veterans Held to Celebrate the 55th Anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-45," Moscow, May 9, 2000, *Military News Bulletin*, May 1, 2000; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/searchresults/article.jsp?art=0&id=136488>, accessed on June 16, 2011.

⁴³ His comment in Russian was "Mne budet legche sorientirovat'sia v razgovore s bol'shimi nachal'nikami." Viktor Matveev, "Vy ch'e, starich'e? Vladimir Putin poobeshchal, chto skoro takoi' vopros zadavat' ne budut," *Vremia novostei*, No. 13, January 28, 2004; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/browse/doc/5826711>, accessed on April 29, 2011;

In 2004, however, Putin and his handlers began personalizing the holiday, bringing Putin's own family's experiences into the mix. There are several key moments in which we see Putin personally relating to this national holiday.

In the first such moment, on January 27, 2004, Putin visited the spot in Petersburg known as Nevsky Piatyok (known sometimes in English as the Neva Nickel or the Neva Bridgehead) where Soviet troops were finally able to break through to begin the liberation of the city in 1943. In a classic ceremony Putin placed dark roses on the memorial there. Right next to the memorial, he spoke of his own father's injuries during the blockade and his selfless donation of much of his hospital rations to his starving wife (Putin's mother). The newspapers immediately began copying whole paragraphs from Putin's autobiography *First Person* on the sufferings of his father and mother and their young son (Putin's older brother whom he never saw because he died during the blockade).⁴⁴ Journalists were shown the list of those receiving medals where it was noted that "Vladimir Spiridonovich Putin was wounded with shrapnel in the left shin and sole of the foot."⁴⁵

Natal'ia Melikova, "Putin vyslushal veteranov. No pomochi' ne obeshchal," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 15, January 28, 2004; Stable URL: <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/browse/doc/5825795>, accessed on April 29, 2011. Interestingly, in 1994 newly elected President Clinton apparently also made a point of approaching WWII veterans as a younger son asking for guidance: Maureen Dowd, "THE D-DAY TOUR: REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK; Commander in Chief In the Role of Protégé," *New York Times*, June 7, 1994; <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/06/07/world/the-d-day-tour-reporter-s-notebook-commander-in-chief-in-the-role-of-protege.html>, accessed on June 10, 2011.

⁴⁴ Video of Putin's visit: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWr_mLP2mn0. Over 20 different newspapers covered the event. For one example, see Elena Rotkevich and Mikhail Vinogradov, "Peterburg stal Leningradom," *Izvestiia*, Jan. 29, 2004; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/searchresults/article.jsp?art=0&cid=5829869>, accessed on Nov. 11, 2010; reprinted in *Leningradskaiia Pravda*, <http://www.lenpravda.ru/today/252112.html>. In 2002 Putin had awarded a prize to author Pavel Gladkikh for his book *Zdravookhranenie i voennaia meditsina v bitve za Leningrad*, which discussed the battle of the Nevsky Nickel. According to Richard Bidlack, no expenses were spared in producing Gladkikh's book, which includes 240 glossy photos with captions, 42 tables of statistical data, and a 37-page chronology of events. Richard Bidlack, "Lifting the Blockade on the Blockade: New Research on the Siege [sic] of Leningrad," *Kritika*, 10, 2 (Spring 2009): 333-51.

⁴⁵ "Vladimir Spiridonovich Putin poluchil oskolochnoe ranenie v levuiu golen', stopu, stopa ne gnetsia." Il'ia Sverdlov, Aleksandr Bystrykh, "Pamiat'. Vsem srochno spustit'sia v bomoubezhishche," *Gazeta*, Jan. 28, 2004; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/browse/doc/5827619>, accessed on May 23, 2011.

After the visit to Nevsky Piatachok Putin met with veterans and then attended a meeting of the Presidium of the St. Petersburg City Soviet which *inter alia* discussed housing subsidies and health care for veterans. The government once again promised to index the pension rate but made no concrete promises.⁴⁶ This was all done five weeks before the next presidential elections when, of course, once again Mr. Putin was not officially campaigning.

Perhaps it was a coincidence, though it seems unlikely, that Leningrad television that very month (January 2004) showed a film by Kirill Nabutov, *Blokada Leningrada* [The Blockade of Leningrad]. Who should have been a leading character in the film? Vladimir Putin the elder, of course.⁴⁷ A year and a half later on May 8, 2005, NTV showed a film called *Rozhdenie Pobedy* [The Birth of Victory]. Putin now repeated the story of his father's wounding, his giving his rations to his mother, the death of his older brother, then a toddler. This time he added a new detail – how his father returned from the hospital, allegedly to find his mother in a pile with the bodies of the dead. Realizing she was not in fact dead, he took her into the house and cared for her. He added that half of his extended family had died in the war.⁴⁸

On May 10, 2010, Putin again recalled the meaning of the war for his family on Russian TV. His conclusion was that the war had to be understood in terms of the dedication of ordinary citizens even when no one was watching out for them.⁴⁹ His own family's contribution to the war was now in line with

⁴⁶ Aleksandr Gamov, "Vizit nedeli. Putin poklonilsia blokadnikam," *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, Jan. 30, 2004; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/searchresults/article.jsp?art=1&cid=5831747>, accessed on April 29, 2011. Natalia Alekseeva, "Gossoviet ushel napensiiu," *Izvestiia*, Jan. 28, 2004; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/searchresults/article.jsp?art=13&cid=5825677>, accessed on May 23, 2011; Andrei Kolesnikov, "Protokol. Vladimir Putin poluchil veteranskii zakaz," *Kommersant Daily*, Jan. 28, 2004; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/browse/doc/5826779>, accessed on June 29, 2011.

⁴⁷ "Peizazh posle prazdnikov. Televizionnye zhurnalisty otsenivaiut glavnye sobytiia proshedshego mesiatsa," *Izvestiia*, Jan. 31, 2004; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/searchresults/article.jsp?art=20&cid=5837710>, accessed on May 23, 2011; Anna Novikova, "Martyshki i ochki," *Russkii' kur'er*, 13, January 26, 2004; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/searchresults/article.jsp?art=0&cid=5825846>, accessed on May 24, 2011.

⁴⁸ "Putin's Father Heavily Wounded on Nevsky Patch," RIANovosti, May 8, 2005; <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20050508/39950276.html>, accessed on May 24, 2011. For a stenogram of his comments on the program, "Rozhdenie Pobedy: Istoriia," <http://www.pobeda.ntv.ru/tales.jsp?p=1190>, accessed on May 24, 2011. "V gody voiny mat' Putina edva ne umerala," *newsru.com*, May 8, 2005; <http://www.newsru.com/russia/08may2005/dgw.html>

⁴⁹ <http://rt.com/news/ww2-anniversary-putin-memories/>; accessed on July 6, 2011; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6PrWu_LDWXA, accessed on November 11, 2010.

that of the nation. He was also using the story as a teaching moment, reminding young people in particular of the importance of heroism and valor: “I [have] had occasions to make sure that our young people, when they find themselves in an extreme situation, behave in keeping with the circumstances in which they have been placed by life, and display, strange though it may seem and unexpected for present-day young people, heroism, and courage, and patriotism.”⁵⁰

In April 2011, Putin, now the Russian Prime Minister, gave his personal reading list on the war to the American journal, *World War II*, commenting on the fact that every Russian family had lost members in that war. Any falsification or distortion in the portrayal of the war was therefore looked on as “a personal insult, a sacrilege.”⁵¹ Although this article is not the place to consider the Russian committee on the falsification of history known as Commission to Counteract Attempts to Harm Russia’s Interests by Falsifying History which was signed into law on May 19, 2009, it is interesting in the context of Putin’s establishment of personal connections to this war that he should announce his own reading list (which consists only of certain novels, ignoring the work of historians and the novels of Vasily Grossman and Viktor Nekrasov).⁵²

Sanctifying Putin’s Connection to World War II

The topic of Putin’s relations with the Orthodox Church is far too large to consider in this article. Nonetheless, it seems worthwhile to explore briefly the several times when he has used his presence in churches to sanctify the war dead from World War II and to present himself, once again, as the dutiful son of the church.⁵³

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* Strangely, none of the print media seemed to have carried this interview with Prime Minister Putin.

⁵¹ Vladimir Putin, “The Reading List,” *World War II*, 25, 6 (Mar/Apr 2011): 16, <http://proquest.umi.com.libproxy.mit.edu/pqdweb?did=2264489671&Fmt=3&VInst=PROD&VTy pe=PQD&RQT=309&VName=PQD&&cfc=1>; also <http://www.historynet.com/vladimir-putins-world-war-ii-reading-list.htm>, accessed July 15, 2011; discussion on the official Kremlin website: <http://premier.gov.ru/events/news/14013/>, accessed on July 6, 2011.

⁵² For more on this issue see Dmitry Gorenburg, special editor, “The Politics of Russian History,” *Russian Politics and Law*, 48, 4 (July-August 2010).

⁵³ For an excellent discussion of Putin’s use of the Orthodox Church to bolster both Russian nationalism and the Russian state, see Beth Admiraal, “A Religion for the Nation or a Nation for

On the eve of his inauguration in 2000, on May 3, president-elect Putin traveled to the town of Prokhorovka to inaugurate a new Chapel of Unity on the site of the most important tank engagement of WWII (and of world military history), the famous battle of Kursk in 1943. At the invitation of Patriarch Alexy II, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Putin joined the presidents of Ukraine and Belarussia, Leonid Kuchma and Alexander Lukashenko, to jointly ring a giant bell known as the Bell of Unity. In his speech Putin stressed the fraternal nature of the three states' relations: "We are one family. We vanquished [our enemies] when we stood together."⁵⁴ "Brotherly peoples can have no obstacles toward uniting our efforts," he said at another point, "to make life happier."⁵⁵

Putin's most important visit to a holy site in conjunction with WWII was undoubtedly his joint consecration of a new Orthodox Church at the site of the Katyn massacre in Western Russia with Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk on April 7, 2010.⁵⁶ Putin spoke of Katyn as a place of tragedy, yet now a sacred place because of the building of the church:

It will be a place where people will come to lay flowers, to pray, to remember[...], and to do anything possible for the tragedy never to be repeated[...]. It is a symbolic act that we begin to build the church on Easter days of the year in which the Orthodox and the Catholics celebrate Easter on the same day. With the blessing of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, Orthodox icons will be brought here, which are venerated by the Orthodox and the Catholics, especially in Poland. This will be another symbol uniting our nations.⁵⁷

On May 29, 2010 Putin again visited Nevsky Piatachok, once again placing red roses on the memorial stone there, but this time also visiting the Church of Our Lady, known as The Seeking of the Lost [*Vzyskanie padshkikh*]. In front

the Religion? Putin's Third Way for Russia," in Marlene Laruelle, ed., *Russian Nationalism and the National Reassertion of Russia* (Routledge, 2009).

⁵⁴ "Russia, Ukraine, Belarus Leaders Recall WW2 Unity," Reuters, 3 May 2000; <http://www2.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/0005a.html>, accessed on July 18, 2011.

⁵⁵ Sergei Shargorodsky, "Slavic Presidents Ring Bell for Unity," Associated Press; <http://www2.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/0005a.html>, accessed on July 18, 2011.

⁵⁶ "At Katyn Memorial, Putin Calls For Poland, Russia To 'Move Toward Each Other,'" *RFE/RL*, April 7, 2010; http://www.rferl.org/content/Putin_Speaks_At_Joint_Commemoration_Of_SovietEra_Massacre/2005357.htm, accessed on July 18, 2011.

⁵⁷ "Church representatives take part in the events dedicated to the Katyn tragedy," *Russian Orthodox Church Official Website*, April 8, 2010; <http://www.mospat.ru/en/2010/04/08/news16206/>, accessed on July 15, 2011.

of the television cameras he publicly examined a book listing the names of all soldiers who defended the Nevsky Piatachok and found his father's name. Putin and the church rector then chanted the *Memory Eternal* prayer and lit candles for the peace of the dead. Putin presented the church with an icon painted in the 19th century.⁵⁸ In this context Putin identified himself with memorializing the dead, with the soldiers who defended Nevsky Piatachok, and also with the Russian Orthodox Church. The Russian television footage made a point of focusing in on the book listing those who had died so that viewers could see the name of his father.⁵⁹

One interesting possibility in connection with these stories of Putin's family, especially those in 2004, concerns two attacks on Putin's parentage (a rough equivalent of the birther claims against American President Barack Obama). One attack claimed that Putin had actually been raised in Georgia until the age of ten, that his "real" mother was a Russian-Georgian woman in a small village.⁶⁰ The second story alleged that Putin's Leningrad father had actually been captured by the Nazis in WWII and had worked for the anti-Soviet general Andrei Vlasov.⁶¹ The first story seems to have been successfully refuted, while the second was retracted by its author, Russian émigré historian Viktor Suvorov.⁶² They might not be worth mentioning except that the new

⁵⁸ "Putin posetil 'Nevskii piatachok' byvshevo Leningradskogo fronta," (May 29, 2010), <http://www.rian.ru/society/20100529/240140500.html>; accessed on July 6, 2011; "Putin posetil Dubrovku," <http://www.ndubrovka.ru/news.php?extend.222>. "Putin prays in the church at the battlefield where his father fought," *Interfax*, May 31, 2010; <http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=7319>, accessed on November 15, 2010. "Visits in Russia" May 29, 2010; <http://www.премьер-министр.рф/eng/visits/ru/10771/events/10793/>, accessed on May 24, 2011.

⁵⁹ "V. Putin posetil Nevskii Piatachok," May 29, 2010; <http://rutube.ru/tracks/3285722.html?v=0841911ebb921347bc3298b8af0f6aed>, accessed on July 6, 2011. In December 2008 religious authorities even placed a cross on the church in St. Petersburg where Putin's father allegedly learned to work on submarines as part of his military training in the Baltic Fleet from 1932 to 1937, thus again sanctifying a connection to the president's family. Aleksandr Beliaikov, "Ustanovlen krest na meste, gde sluzhil otets Putina," *Pravoslavnoe russkoe agentstvo Russkaia liniia*, Dec. 20, 2008; <http://rusk.ru/st.php?idar=180275>, accessed on Nov. 15, 2010.

⁶⁰ "Sensatsiia: Mama Putina zhivet v Gruzii," *Pravda*, Nov. 29, 2004; <http://www.pravda.ru/news/society/29-11-2004/28683-0/>, accessed on 11/12/10; <http://forum.russianamerica.com/fl/archive/index.php/t-6223.html>, accessed on June 13, 2011.

⁶¹ *Angora*, no. 31, August 3, 2008, p. 11; under the heading "Secrets of History"; <http://www.revolucia.ru/le030.htm>, accessed on May 23, 2011.

⁶² A refutation of Putin's mother in Georgia can be found in Irina Bobrova, "Spetsial'nyi reportazh. Gruzinskaia rodnia prezidenta Putina," *Moskovskii komsomolets*, June 13, 2006; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/browse/doc/9610423>, accessed on May 23, 2011.

stories about Putin's soldier father at Nevsky Piatyachok took great pains to show concrete evidence of his service: the list of medals with the annotation about Putin senior's wounds, and the book shown in the Church of Our Lady. Mentioning Vladimir Putin's father's wartime service in these contexts serves to confirm the son's legitimacy as Russian and patriotic.

Putin, Parades and Military Uniforms, 2005-2008

From the very start of his administration newly elected President Putin established parades and military uniforms as a high priority. In the summer of 2000 he created a special Victory Committee that was tasked with planning the events that would be associated with the 60th anniversary of May 9, 1945 in 2005.⁶³ The 2005 parade was intended to be a key one, not only because it was a proverbial round number, but also because of the terrible humiliation of the 50th anniversary D-day celebrations in Normandy in June 1994, when President Boris Yeltsin and the Russians were not even invited to participate. The next year (1995) Yeltsin had made a special effort to invite U.S. President Bill Clinton and French President Francois Mitterand to the May 9 parade, but Yeltsin had conceded to Clinton's request that the parade have no military hardware because of the sensitivity of the Americans to the question of appearing to approve the war in Chechnya.⁶⁴

The Putin administration now invited all the foreign leaders of countries involved in WWII, including even Angela Merkel from Germany. The troop convoys in the parade stretched for miles, having practiced their entrance into

For the refutation of the attacks on the father, see Aleksandr Gamov, Aleksandr Samozhnev, "Otsa Putina zapisali v predateli a on vzryval fashistskie eshelony," *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, Aug. 8, 2003; <http://www.kp.ru/daily/23089/5494/>. Dar'ia Kirillova, "Avtor skandal'nykh knig, byvshii ofitser GRU Viktor Suvorov: Eto podlost', rasschitannaia ochen' khitro," *Komsomolskaia pravda*, August 15, 2003; <http://www.kp.ru/daily/23094/5638/>, accessed on Nov. 15, 2010.

⁶³ Pavel Polian, "Iubilei a la Glavpour? Rossiiskii organizatsionnyi komitet 'Pobeda' kak estvennaia monopolia," «Неприкосновенный запас» 2005, №2-3(40-41), <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2005/2/pp18-pr.html>. In this article Polian shows convincingly how Putin's Pobeda (Victory) Committee is a direct descendant of the Main Political Administration of the Soviet Red Army. For the founding and history of that organization, see *inter alia*, Mark von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship: The Red Army and the Soviet Socialist State, 1917-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

⁶⁴ Bernard Gwertzman, "Yeltsin to Alter V-E Day Parade to Draw Clinton," *The New York Times*, March 17, 1995; <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/03/17/world/yeltsin-to-alter-parade-on-v-e-day-to-draw-clinton.html>, accessed on July 14, 2011.

Red Square on alternate days for weeks before the actual parade. Over it all President Putin presided as the symbol of Russia's resurgence.⁶⁵ In his speech he spoke of May 9, saying it "has always been and will forever remain a sacred day." He spoke as well about the emotional dimension of the holiday, commenting on it as "a festive day which not only inspires us all and makes us all better, but also fills our hearts with the most complex feelings, both joy and sorrow, both compassion and nobility":

It calls for the most noble actions, presents us with another opportunity to bow our heads in honour of those who gave us freedom, the freedom to live, to work, to be happy, to be creative and to understand each other.

Victory Day is the dearest, the most emotional and the most inclusive holiday in our country. For the people of the former Soviet Union, it will forever remain a day of the people's great heroic deed, and for the countries of Europe and the entire planet – the day on which the world was saved.⁶⁶

The other May 9 parade in which Putin and his administration most visibly planned great pageantry was that of 2008, which had the most massive demonstration of military hardware since the breakup of the Soviet Union and was also the most costly parade in the history of post-Soviet Russia. With everything from T-90 tanks to rocket and missile systems and Topol ICBMs, the parade was considered by many to be a serious example of muscle flexing.⁶⁷ On May 5 Putin, now about to become the Prime Minister (since Dmitry Medvedev had been elected President), denied this, but made a point of stating that Russia was newly in a position to defend itself, thus distancing himself once again from the Yeltsin administration and emphasizing Russia's return to great power status. At a meeting with Cabinet and top Kremlin administration officials, Putin announced:

For the first time in many years, military hardware will be involved in the parade. This is not saber-rattling. We threaten no one and do not intend to do so. We have

⁶⁵ For mention of how Mr. Putin overshadowed U.S. President George W. Bush, see "Bush Marks V.E. Day in Moscow," http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/05/09/politics/main693908_page2.shtml, accessed on July 17, 2011.

⁶⁶ "Full Text of Putin VE Day Speech," *BBC News*, May 9, 2005; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4528999.stm>, accessed on July 14, 2011.

⁶⁷ For a list of the armored fighting vehicles that took place in the parade, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2008_Moscow_Victory_Day_Parade, accessed on July 10, 2011. In 2010 the May 9 parade on the 65th anniversary of the victory not only displayed an enormous quantity of Russian military hardware, including the latest Topol ICBM missiles, but also for the first time in Russian and Soviet history included foreign military units from the countries allied with Russia during the war.

everything we need. This is a simple display of our growing defense capability, the fact that we are now able to protect our citizens, our country and our riches, which we have in great quantity.⁶⁸

Yet in 2008 there was an aspect of the pageantry that was much more surprising, and much more modern. The soldiers in Red Square were now wearing new uniforms, some of which were inspired by the first Victory Parade of 1945, while others were a completely new design. Putin's handpicked general Anatoly Serdyukov had set in motion the process of creating the new uniforms in May 2007.⁶⁹ This was no small endeavor: one hundred million rubles (almost four million \$US) were allocated for the samples of the new uniforms.⁷⁰ Then on January 28, 2008 President Putin personally reviewed the designs created for the military by Russia's leading fashion designer Valentin Yudashkin at a fashion parade in the Ministry of Defense.⁷¹

The background on this is instructive, showing how Putin's team had considered fashion design to be important from the outset of his administration. In November 2001 Putin had nominated Yudashkin to his new Presidential "Council on Culture and Art."⁷² At the time commentators could not

⁶⁸ RIA-Novosti, May 5, cited in Pavel Felgenhauer, "Old Weapons on Red Square," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 5, 88 (May 8, 2008), [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=33617](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=33617), accessed on July 14, 2011.

⁶⁹ "Fashion Designer Yudashkin to Make Uniform Design for Russian Army," *Russian Spy*, June 6, 2007; <http://www.russianspy.org/2007/06/06/fashion-designer-yudashkin-to-make-uniform-design-for-russian-army/>, accessed on July 10, 2011. Viktor Baranets, "Iudashkin sh'et kal'sony dlia spetsnaz," *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, No. 75, May 26, 2007, <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/browse/doc/12053418>, accessed on July 10, 2011; Nikolaus von Twickel, "From the Catwalks to the Trenches," *The Moscow Times*, No. 3747, Sept. 20, 2007; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/browse/doc/12612571>, accessed on July 10, 2011. Putin himself had passed a decree on the new uniforms on May 8, 2005, "O voennoi forme odezhdy, znakh razlichii voennosluzhashchikh, i vedomstvennykh formakh razlichii."

⁷⁰ "Muscovites bid farewell to VE – Day parade participants," *ITAR-TASS*, May 9, 2008; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/searchresults/article.jsp?art=6&id=14785257>, accessed on July 15, 2011.

⁷¹ "Putin shown samples of new military uniform," *ITAR-TASS Daily*, January 28, 2008; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/browse/doc/13337262>, accessed on July 10, 2011; Tony Halpin, "Dressed to Kill: The Russian Forces are Back in Fashion, 19th-Century Style," *Times Online*, Jan. 30, 2008; <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article3272873.ece>, accessed on July 10, 2011.

⁷² "Sostav soвета pri prezidentе RF po kulture i iskusstvu," *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, Nov. 10, 2001; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/searchresults/article.jsp?art=2&id=1834570>, accessed July 10, 2011; Konstantin Nikolaev, "U Putina novyi sovetnik," *Moskovskii*

understand why Yudashkin, a clothing designer, was on the council. After all, he was not, *sensu strictu*, an artist or a representative of high culture.⁷³ Soon, however, it became clear that Yudashkin was becoming an integral part of what might be called the Russian makeover.⁷⁴ Never mind that the military forces in the country were decaying; hazing, often fatal, was endemic; disgruntled soldiers in Chechnya were selling off their weapons and even their greatcoats to the highest bidders; and the whole military was plagued by inadequate housing. Now instead of addressing those problems the newly appointed Minister of Defense Serdyukov (named in February 2007), was announcing (already in May of that year) that what the armed forces needed most of all were new uniforms.⁷⁵ Not too surprisingly critics immediately charged that new military uniforms were an example of the “military’s new clothes.”⁷⁶ Uniforms, they insisted, should be designed not by someone from a fashion house but rather by someone within the military who knew the military’s needs.⁷⁷

Putin reviewing the new uniforms now evoked a different masculinity, this time one of GQ. Yudashkin praised Putin (the outgoing president but still the commander in chief): “We made this big presentation, very exact and clear. Our president is a very elegant man, and he understood everything. Thank God the army now understands that image is just as important as technical issues.”⁷⁸

Komsomolets, July 22, 2002; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/browse/doc/4229282>.

⁷³ “Prezident naznachil sovetchikov,” *Kommersant Daily*, Nov. 9, 2001; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/searchresults/article.jsp?art=3&cid=3733912>, accessed July 10, 2011.

⁷⁴ On July 25, 2005 Putin awarded Yudashkin the nation’s highest honor, “national artist of Russia” [*narodnyi khudozhnik Rossii*]; Anastasia Kornia, “Prezident nagradil vydaiushchikhsia grazhdan. Glava gosudarstva snova poruchil pravitel’stvu pozabotit’sia o voennykh pensionerakh,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, No. 153, July 26, 2005; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/browse/doc/8002725>, accessed on July 10, 2011.

⁷⁵ Von Twickel, “From the Catwalks to the Trenches.”

⁷⁶ Alexander Golts, “The Military’s New Clothes,” *The Moscow Times*, May 24, 2005; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/searchresults/article.jsp?art=0&cid=7747085>, accessed on July 10, 2011.

⁷⁷ James Kilner, “Interview: Designer says Russian Army should dress to kill,” Reuters, Feb. 7, 2008, cited in Roger N. McDermott, “Russia’s Armed forces: The Power of Illusion,” (March 2009), http://marshallfoundation.org/documents/IFRI_Russian_military_power_McDermott_ENG_mars_091.pdf, accessed June 25, 2011. See also, Alexander Golts, “The Military’s New Clothes.”

⁷⁸ Peter Finn, “Designer to the Russian Military, Dressing to Kill,” *Washington Post*, May 22, 2008; <http://www.lexisnexis.com.libproxy.mit.edu/hottopics/Inacademic/?sf=AC00NBGenSrc h&csi=8075&shr=t>, accessed on July 10, 2011. For a fascinating discussion of Putin as a

A Boarding School for Girls and Putin as Father Figure

In a completely different moment, on May 8, 2009 Putin visited a boarding school for daughters of the military, an institution that was created just in the previous year (it opened its doors on September 1, 2008). TV footage shows Putin visiting the school and helping one of the girl students who had forgotten part of a song she was supposed to sing for him by singing it with her. The song was a popular one from the war, *Zemlianka* (“The Dugout”). When Putin joined her in singing, the AFP correspondent covering this made much of his “surprisingly soft and melodious voice,” a comment spread by other news wires entranced by the idea of Putin letting go of his “tough guy” image.⁷⁹

In the elaborate tea he then had with the schoolgirls and the veterans from the war (at a table covered with rich and varied dishes), Putin referred to the importance of the holiday of May 9, “for every Russian citizen and for me as well because it gives us an opportunity to remember our own parents, to remember the pages of our patriotic history.”⁸⁰ Alluding almost directly to the fact that many of the young girls at the boarding school had lost their fathers in military service while the fathers of others were serving in far away regions, Putin thus linked his own loss of his parents with the girls’ losses and with the national losses.

In singing patriotic songs at the girls’ military boarding school in Moscow, Vladimir Putin, now the Prime Minister, was also giving lessons to the students. First, it should be noted that his apparently impromptu singing lesson took place during a so-called “Memory Lesson.” The other lessons Prime Minister Putin visited are in themselves instructive: a lesson in housekeeping [*domovodstvo*] where the students were learning to serve at table and to prepare food, and a sewing class where the students were learning to sew with computerized sewing machines, as well as lessons in journalism, television reporting,

glamour figure, see “Putinskii glamur,” Jan. 22, 2008, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwsKkxfa-2A>, accessed on July 11, 2011; and Helena Goscilo, “The art of politics, and the politics of art – The ultimate celebrity : VVP as VIP objet d’art,” in Goscilo and Vlad Strukov, eds., *Celebrity and Glamour in Contemporary Russia: Shocking Chic* (Routledge, 2011).

⁷⁹ “Singing Putin rescues nervous schoolgirl,” AFP, May 8, 2008; <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jfsmUj18Oq2S-FQaRIGhnRYwro6g>, accessed on Nov. 15, 2010. In actual fact, it should be noted, the various videos recording the event show that Putin did not know the words to the song; nor was it very easy for him to carry a tune.

⁸⁰ “Vladimir Putin spel s veteranami,” May 8, 2009; <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/160074/video/>, accessed on November 15, 2010.

and foreign languages (English, French and German).⁸¹ In addition to these subjects the girls also study ballroom dancing, ice skating, horseback riding, fencing, and flute. In his speech to the girls, Putin referred openly to the last educational institution created for girls in Russia, the famous Smolny Institute for Noble Girls created by Catherine the Great in the 18th century.⁸²

Putin described the creation of the school as “something significant, good and kind” [*eto iavlenie znakovoe, khoroshee i dobroe*]. It was all these things “not only because here will be educated the future mothers of children [*budut vospityvat'sia budushchie vospitateľnitsy svoikh detei*] but also because women are occupying an ever more worthwhile and noticeable place in the life of our government in all areas, including in such an important area as defense of the Motherland.”⁸³

On July 28, 2008 Putin had signed the order founding the school under the title *Moskovskii kadetskii korpus Pansion vospitannits Ministerstva oborony Rossiiskoi Federatsii* [The Moscow Cadet Corpus, the Boarding School for the Female Wards of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation].⁸⁴ This is the first military boarding school created since the fall of the USSR, joining several leading male cadet schools (Suvorovskii, Nakhimovskii and others). And it is the first one specifically for girls.

From the beginning Yudashkin was delegated to create elaborate uniforms for the young ladies. In their dress uniform (visible on “Vesti,” the state TV program) a white, frilly high collar comes down over a navy blue blazer etched in pink. Under the navy blue skirt one can see white stockings and black high heels. In the words of one TV correspondent, the school girls were to be made into “educated and nice young ladies [*vospitannye i priatnye baryshni*].”⁸⁵

Digging a bit deeper, one finds that there were supposed to be five separate uniforms designed for the girls: dress, everyday, school, special and sports. In the television coverage only two are visible: presumably the dress and school uniforms. In designing these uniforms, Yudashkin reported directly to Defense

⁸¹ “Putin spel v zemlianke,” Korrespondent.net, May 8, 2009; <http://korrespondent.net/russia/830344-putin-spel-v-zemlianke>, accessed on Nov. 14, 2010.

⁸² <http://korrespondent.net/video/world/830347-putin-spel-v-zemlianke>, accessed on Nov. 14, 2010.

⁸³ Vitalii Denisov, “Uroki ot Prem'era,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, May 13, 2009; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/browse/doc/20043656>, accessed on Nov. 13, 2010.

⁸⁴ “Rasporiazhenie pravitel'stva Rossiiskoi Federatsii,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, No. 130, July 25, 2008. For a full history of the school, see Vladimir Drobyshevskii, Sergei Kniaz'kov, “Bez krinolinov,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, No. 150, August 21, 2008, accessed on November 14, 2010.

⁸⁵ “Putin spel frontovuiu pesniu,” May 8, 2009; <http://www.vesti.ru/videos?vid=213326>, accessed on 11/11/10.

Minister Serdyukov. Yudashkin was the one who had designed the fashionable clothes of the elite who attended Putin's inauguration.⁸⁶ And it was Yudashkin who has been overseeing elaborate efforts to make modern uniforms for the military.⁸⁷

In December 2009 the director of the girls' school, Tamara Fral'tsova, was awarded "Person of the Year 2009" "for the creation of a boarding school for officers' daughters."⁸⁸ Theoretically daughters of both enlisted men and officers can attend the school. Nonetheless, it is significant that the director received an award for the creation of a school for *officers'* daughters. The 18th century seems very much in vogue here: Putin's own reference to Catherine the Great's Smolnyi Institute for Noble Girls; the high collars on the girls' dress uniforms; the teaching of ballroom dancing and music so the girls will be accomplished young ladies. No expense was spared – the young ladies' clothes were all sewn in Italy.

In creating this school, Putin has gone beyond personalizing the holiday. He has also personalized his role in supporting the officer class in the military. He has taken on the role of educating their daughters, in loco parentis. By creating the girls' school, Putin may be hoping to at least alleviate two of his most serious problems simultaneously: the demoralization in the military and the falling birthrate in the country. If these young ladies learn housekeeping and flute, perhaps they will marry Putin's male officers and produce the next generation of the military.

Conclusions

Can there be too much of a good thing in Putin's celebration of World War II? That's the question historian Sean Guillory asks in a recent blog, "Putin and the Great Patriotic War Jump the Shark," posted on November 7, 2010.⁸⁹ The question Sean Guillory asks is a good one: Can Putin overdo the World War II connection? So far it seems that it may be a sound byte that still works.

⁸⁶ Kirill Andreev, "Khlopoty pervoi stepeni," *NG. Figura i litsa*, Apr. 27, 2000; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/browse/doc/2799001>.

⁸⁷ Andrei Kolesnikov, "Rukovoditel' po shvam," *Kommersant*, No. 12, Jan. 29, 2008; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/browse/doc/13339576>.

⁸⁸ Anna Potekhina, "Priznanie Rossii," *Krasnaia zvezda*, No. 244, Dec. 31, 2009; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/browse/doc/21128422>.

⁸⁹ <http://seansrussiablog.org/2010/11/08/putin-and-the-great-patriotic-war-jump-the-shark/>, accessed on Nov. 15, 2010.

It is a ritual confirmation of suffering and redemption. It encapsulates core Russian values of empathy, subordination to the greater good, and unity in the face of adversity. It is a holiday where Putin has license to instruct his nation. And it is a holiday that celebrates a war in which a larger-than-life leader led a badly stumbling nation to a universally acclaimed and morally unambiguous “victory” (at least for Russians). Does Putin attain larger-than-life status by association with Stalin and World War II? I don’t think so. But it is possible that in the mind of Russians the mental recourse to modes of thought emphasizing identification with the nation is strong enough to overcome modern doubts and cynicism. The more Vladimir Putin is personally linked to the holiday of the Great Patriotic War, his handlers no doubt conclude, the more he is unshakably identified with Russia’s own greatness.

By making the war a personal event and also a sacred one, Vladimir Putin has created a myth and a ritual that elevates him personally, uniting Russia (at least theoretically) and showing him as the natural hero-leader, the warrior who is personally associated with defending the Motherland. Putin is thus cast as simultaneously populist and autocrat. He has the glamour of the present, but he is also the hero of the past.⁹⁰ He can be associated in the popular mind with the victories of Russia’s greatest moments while ignoring as much as possible the failures of WWII and the morally ambiguous moments. Another entire article could be written about the topics that Putin as head of the country has glossed over or mentioned in ambiguous ways, especially the act of memorializing the World War as a way of conveniently forgetting the Chechen War. Often he makes one set of comments for foreign consumption and another for domestic on topics such as Stalinism itself, the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of 1939, the Katyn tragedy, the national sentiments of the countries that used to be part of the Soviet Union (especially Ukraine and the Baltic States) who feel deeply slighted by Putin’s references to *Russian* victories in World War II.⁹¹

⁹⁰ There are numerous photos of Putin sporting military uniforms in various contexts. He has also shown extremely good taste in his civilian clothing. For a photo of him on May 9, 2002, see the video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mjfqJBQc0wIv>, accessed on July 15, 2011.

⁹¹ For some representative articles, see Steven Lee Myers, “After Violent Night, Estonia Removes a Soviet-Era Memorial,” *The New York Times*, April 28, 2007, A8; “New Stalin Statue Fuels Tension in Ukraine,” *The Moscow Times*, 07 May 2010; <http://service.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/new-stalin-statue-fuels-tension-in-ukraine/405522.html>; and “Nationalists attack WWII veterans and Russian diplomats in W. Ukraine,” May 10, 2011, <http://ramkshrestha.wordpress.com/2011/05/10/nationalists-attack-wwii-veterans-and-russian-diplomats-in-w-ukraine/>, accessed on July 15, 2011.

Memorialization itself becomes sacred, non-political. By enlarging the field of sacred memory, Putin and his Kremlin advisers imperceptibly undermine the potential for the conflict of ideas and positions that would normally be called politics. Because the war is sacred, it cannot be criticized. Because the war is larger than life, any other concerns appear petty.⁹²

Postscript. The St. Petersburg authorities have announced they are planning to erect a white marble chapel on the site of the Nevsky Piatachok on June 22, 2011. A regional organization entitled “Veterans of Military Counterintelligence” [*Veterany voennoi kontrrazvedki*] has apparently been promoting it with, of course, the support of the Russian Orthodox Church. The chapel is intended as a site both for veterans themselves and also for young people. Newlyweds can come to place flowers on their wedding days. Military schools and the Voluntary Society for Assistance to the Army, Air Force, and Navy [*DOSAAF*] can bring students and young people. Here they can learn “courage, resistance, and undying love for the motherland.”⁹³ Doubtless Prime Minister Putin will officiate at the ceremonies, renewing his personal connection to this particular battle and to the personification of this war.

A second postscript. In his bid to maintain his influence over the 2012 presidential elections, Putin recently announced the creation of a Popular Front that would unite several parties. His choice of venue and date are significant: Volgograd, May 7, 2011. Putin explained why he chose Volgograd as the city where he made the announcement: “Where else could the creation of the people’s front be announced but in Stalingrad?”⁹⁴ In making this reference to the wartime name of Volgograd, Putin was clearly hoping to continue to lean on the trope of WWII to establish his own importance. His spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, in fact made it quite clear that the announcement of the new Popular Front must be seen as the “idea of sustained development of the country,” and this in turn means “rallying around Putin rather than rallying together within the party.”⁹⁵

⁹² On Stalin’s enlarging the public space at the expense of the private, see Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin: Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton, 2000), esp. pp. 73–74.

⁹³ Oleg Pochiniuk, “Chastitsa pamiati na Nevskom Piatachke,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, Mar. 31, 2011; <http://dlib.eastview.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/browse/doc/24498340>, accessed on May 23, 2011.

⁹⁴ Victor Davidoff, “A Stalin Slip and Putin Trick,” *The Moscow Times*, May 10, 2011, Johnson’s Russia List, #83, May 10, 2011, no. 15.

⁹⁵ “Putin Proposal Aims to Drum Up Support For Him – Spokesman,” in *ibid.*, #82, May 9, 2011, no. 10.

In opinion polls Russian youth have been showing themselves increasingly skeptical of political advertising. Some 30% of respondents aged 18-30 expressed indifferent or negative views of what they saw as attempts to manipulate them.⁹⁶ Yet those of a more sycophantic variety may still be buying into the Putin's themes of heroism and patriotism. In late May 2011 a rock group called Jukebox issued a new album called "Rodina" [*Motherland*]. Critics claim, apparently without irony, that one cannot listen to the music without tears and "pain in one's soul."⁹⁷ The best part, though, is the cover: Vladimir Putin looks out at the viewer wearing an Astrakhan, the hat worn by officers in World War II. Across the top of the cover next to Putin is the word "Rodina." The association between Mr. Putin, World War II, and the homeland may yet be with us for quite a while.



Figure 1: The cover of "Rodina," http://www.mk.ru/upload/iblock_mk/475/ca/e1/16/DETAIL_PICTURE_591370.jpg

⁹⁶ D. S. Byl'eva, "Rol' politicheskoi reklamy v sovremennom obshchestve" (2008), ftp://lib.herzen.spb.ru/text/byljyeva_32_70_1_104_110.pdf, accessed on July 2, 2011.

⁹⁷ Alla Zhidkova, "Putin i Rodina voshli v modu," *Moskovskii komsomolets*, May 24, 2011; <http://www.mk.ru/culture/article/2011/05/23/591370-putin-i-rodina-voshli-v-modu.html>, accessed on July 11, 2011.