



Illiberal Memory across Borders: Russian Conceptualizations and Uses of History Abroad

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Abstract

This article provides a typology of Russian memory practices in the international sphere and traces them to Russian foreign-policy doctrine. Drawing on primary sources, it argues that Russian uses of history abroad exemplify a growing transnational illiberal memory, in reaction to the liberal teleological formulation of history and reconciliation. The second section examines how the Russian state uses the politics of history within its own foreign policy and public diplomacy, drawing on an original dataset of Russian international memory activities. The findings are grouped into four categories: (1) memory exports, (2) alliances, (3) offense, and (4) defense. Memory exports and alliances inform memory diplomacy and are ways of promoting Russia, using its history as a soft-power resource. Memory offense and defense are practices within memory wars that indicate the geopolitical value placed by the Kremlin on protecting perceived historical resources. However, the findings also demonstrate that Russia does not prioritize the political threat posed by antithetical memory when there is no apparent political will to use the memory to challenge Russian geopolitical ambitions. It concludes that Russian memory engagement is defined by geopolitical competition against the West and then weighted against national security concerns and/or the potential to gain influence.

Keywords: Russia, memory, foreign policy, illiberalism, geopolitics

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History is a social resource: the ways it is written, what is remembered, what is forgotten, and what is distorted, help to construct cultural and national identities. In an increasingly internationalized memory space, where states and other actors promote and contest historical narratives across borders, history also becomes a geopolitical resource, and a means of enhancing status, attracting allies, and undermining rivals. These rising tendencies are global rather than specific to one nation, but Russian memory politics provides an intense example, with the state and affiliated actors frequently using historical narratives, policies, and commemorations to influence geopolitics and the international arena in Russia's interest.¹

Discussions of political uses of history connote a certain instrumentality that perhaps overshadows the significance politicians afford to national historical myths. The justifications steeped in historical grievance and martyrology that accompanied Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 warn against dismissing historical politics as empty propaganda and reiterate that collective memory and the historical narratives it cherishes are in themselves contributing and complicating factors in inter-state relations and conflicts. The undermining of important historical narratives for a state's identity present, or are at least perceived as, a threat to the nation's ontological security and, relatedly, to its geopolitical status.² Russian officials take this threat seriously, as reflected in Russian security and foreign policy documents and in the voluminous literature on Russia's memory wars with its Eastern European neighbors.³

In comparison to Russia's memory conflicts with the Baltic States, Ukraine, UK, USA, Poland, and others, Russian use of the past as a form of soft power or public diplomacy, especially in states that never came within the Soviet sphere of influence, is under-researched. This article attempts to provide a typology to understand varying types of Russian memory practices in the international sphere and to root these practices in Russian doctrine as being at least partly ideationally-driven. To do so, it poses two research questions:

- How is global memory politics conceptualized within Russian strategy and doctrine?
 - * Sources: doctrines and government statements relating to a wide range of cultural, security, and foreign policy issues.
- How does the Russian state use the politics of history within its own foreign policy and public diplomacy abroad?
 - * Sources: original dataset of 3,682 examples of Russian memory activities abroad identified in official sources, spanning government initiatives. Russian embassy social media accounts and websites around the world, presidential addresses, official visits, and state-owned foreign-language media and state-funded organizations (such as

1 Agnė Grigas, *The Politics of Energy and Memory between the Baltic States and Russia*, Post-Soviet Politics (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).

2 Maria Mälksoo, "'Memory Must Be Defended': Beyond the Politics of Mnemonical Security," *Security Dialogue* 46, no. 3 (June 2015): 221–237.

3 Jade McGlynn and Jelena Đureinović, "The Alliance of Victory: Russo-Serbian Memory Diplomacy," *Memory Studies*, 5 (March 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1177/17506980211073108>; Konstantin Pakhalyuk, "Myagkaya Sila i Politika Pamyati v Kontekste Vneshney Politiki Sovremennoy Rossii," *AshPI* (blog), July 26, 2018, <http://ashpi.asu.ru/jc/?p=4772>.

Rossotrudnichestvo, Russkii mir, International Movement of Russophiles).⁴

The Russian conceptualization and practice of memory politics abroad are intensified by the strong relationship between Russian geopolitical permanence and historical memory. The Russian claims to Kyivan Rus, imperialist tsarist-era expansion, and the Soviet victory over Nazism are employed to legitimize Russian civilizational identity and great-power status, rendering any challenges to these historical interpretations potentially dangerous to Russian identity and geopolitical ambitions.⁵ The significance of what in Russian historiography is referred to as the Great Patriotic War (1941–1945) to Russian memory culture only widens the scope for agitation, in both senses of the word. World War II memories lie at the heart of national and regional identities, rendering them convenient instruments for mobilizing political and national sentiments.⁶ When the post-Yalta order crumbled, and the archives across Eastern Europe opened, World War II became a symbolic resource not only in post-Communist identity construction, but also in geopolitical struggles.

The current memory wars in Europe are accompanied, if not caused, by national efforts to consolidate memory regimes based on specific and competing narratives about World War II.⁷ In turn, this competition exacerbates conflict between opposing narratives, leading to further radicalization and the intractability of memory wars. Aleksei Miller has argued that Russian uses of history are a response to the nationalization of Baltic and Eastern European memory, which in turn militarized Russian official politics of memory. According to this argument, the past is a shared resource and relates to power, in that Russia is fighting those who seek to deplete its power resources.⁸

Memory does function as a resource and source of power, but Russian memory acts abroad are not purely retaliatory in nature, nor can they be reduced to defending Russian memory alone. There is a clear ideational basis behind Russian memory politics as targeted at foreign audiences that derives from domestic conceptualizations of Russia as a civilizational state, with a special awareness of its own history, unique path, and great-power status. Since 2014, official doctrines have increasingly narrated international relations in civilizational and cultural terms, with Russia positioned as an anticolonial force, defending the world against Western hyper-liberalism that destroys countries' true identities. While not universal, this approach has potential as a "non-universalistic soft power on the international

4 This article foregrounds the Russian state as an actor in order to elucidate the range of activities and methods employed to promote the country's interests and undermine those of perceived opponents.

5 Igor Torbakov, "History, Memory, and National Identity: Understanding Politics of History and Memory Wars in Post-Soviet Lands" *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 19, no. 3 (2011): 209–232. https://demokratizatsiya.pub/archives/19_3_J773U5477844263L.pdf; Jade McGlynn, *Memory Makers: The Politics of the Past in Putin's Russia* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023).

6 Olga Malinova, "Politics of Memory and Nationalism," *Nationalities Papers* 49, no. 6 (November 2021): 997–1007. <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2020.87>

7 Milan Subotić, *Napred, u Prošlost* (Belgrade: Fabrike knjiga, 2020); Nikolay Kaposov, *Memory Laws, Memory Wars* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

8 Aleksei Miller, "Politika Pamyati v Postkommunisticheskoy Evrope i Eë Vozdeystvie Na Evropeyskuyu Kul'turu Pamyati," *Politiya*, no. 1 (2016): 111–121; Aleksei Miller, "Russia and Europe in Memory Wars" (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2020).

scene” through the promotion of “conservative values as well as rebellion against the so-called liberal world order.”⁹

Internationalizing Illiberal Memory

“Russia has finally passed through the confused ‘Adam Smith’ views of the 1990s and become conscious (*osoznali*) of how much depends on the way history is told, including how society is constructed, the level of culture in society, and on what is being used to educate children.”¹⁰ Speaking in 2013, Vladimir Medinsky, former Culture Minister and head of the influential Russian Military History Society (RMHS), set out his case that Russia had reached a new level of understanding of itself, of the world, and of the laws that govern history.¹¹ His specific reference to the economic hyperliberalism of the 1990s accompanied and reinforced his cultural rejection of liberalism and specifically the liberal memory paradigms that divisive historical legacies can be mastered by coming to terms with the past and that accepting guilt will lead to redemption and peace.¹²

As liberal politics has suffered a backlash in the form of illiberalism, so too have its frameworks for interpreting the past, via the rise of illiberal memory.¹³ Marlene Laruelle theorizes illiberalism as not necessarily “a coherent ideology but more an interconnected set of values that come together in country specific patterns.”¹⁴ It is not a synonym for non-liberalism, but rather a “form of post liberalism that is as an ideology whose exponents are pushing back against liberalism after having experienced” it.¹⁵ In keeping with this definition, of illiberalism as a kind of post-liberalism, or a reaction to it,¹⁶ illiberal memory can be seen as a reaction against the “teleological mantras that accompanied the memory boom of the late 80s and early 1990s.”¹⁷

If illiberal democracy can be seen as a protectionist reaction against the globalization of liberal economic and social policies, illiberal memory can be viewed as a protectionist reaction against the globalization of liberal remembrance. The latter was made possible by the hegemony of post-Cold War liberalism’s assertions that ideological conflict had been overcome, and that so too could painful historical legacies be resolved.¹⁸ Given that Russia, the legal successor to the USSR, was the

9 Marlene Laruelle, “Russia’s Niche Soft Power: Sources, Targets and Channels of Influence,” Institut Français des Relations Internationales, April 2021, https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/laruelle_russia_niche_soft_power_2021.pdf.

10 Nikolai Uskov, “Vladimir Medinskiy: Ya russkiy evropeets,” Snob.ru, November 1, 2013, <https://snob.ru/magazine/entry/66861>.

11 Uskov, “Vladimir Medinskiy.”

12 Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, “The Rise of Illiberal Memory” *Memory Studies* 16, no. 4 (August 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698020988771>

13 Jasper Theodor Kauth and Desmond King, “Illiberalism,” *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 61, no. 3 (December 2020): 365–405, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003975620000181>

14 Marlene Laruelle, “Making Sense of Russia’s Illiberalism,” *Journal of Democracy* 31, no. 3 (July 2020): 115–129, <https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein:journals/jnlodmcy31&i=524>

15 Laruelle, “Making Sense of Russia’s Illiberalism,” 115.

16 Benjamin Moffitt, “Liberal Illiberalism? The Reshaping of the Contemporary Populist Radical Right in Northern Europe,” *Politics and Governance* 5, no. 4 (December 2017): 112–122, <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v5i4.996>

17 Rosenfeld, “The Rise of Illiberal Memory,” 821.

18 Berber Bevernage, “The Past Is Evil/Evil Is Past: On Retrospective Politics, Philosophy of History, and Temporal Manichaeism,” *History and Theory* 54, no. 3 (October 2015): 333–352, <https://doi.org/10.1111/hih.10763>; Jan-Werner Müller, *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

target of many countries' accusations of imperialism, crimes, terror, repression, and genocide, it is perhaps unsurprising that illiberal memory should prove compatible with a broader Russian view of the world and its past.¹⁹

As it is by its very nature a rejection of the new and a desire to return to a previous state of governance, and because illiberalism focusses on traditional values, exuding nostalgia, there is a close correspondence between illiberal politics and the use of history and memory within domestic politics.²⁰ This is only strengthened by the inherent populism of illiberal politics, whereby leaders claim to defend "the people," who are defined in opposition to an array of dangerous others.²¹ Domestically and internationally, phantasmagorical liberal elites present a constant, simultaneously deracinated and impossible to uproot, threat due to their dominance of national and supranational institutions. These enemies supposedly undermine authentic national identity by alienating people from their roots and deliberately diluting people's traditional ways of life, including by engaging in social engineering. Illiberal politicians promise to fight these shadowy liberal forces and to take back control on behalf of the people.

Illiberalism is deeply concerned with the nation and authenticity, which informs the rejection, via illiberal memory, of cosmopolitan memory and the need to formally acknowledge one's own national guilt and past crimes. The ability of states to overcome the obstacles between national historical memories has largely been studied within a liberal framework of globalization, as transnational memory, or how memories transcend certain boundaries and "travel."²² But illiberal memory travels too, and with historical memory increasingly used as a geopolitical marker of values, it is adopting many of the tactics of liberal remembrance, even while rejecting the core values inscribed in this approach. Instead, illiberal memory actors present defending correct historical memory and battling bad memory or the destruction of memory as existential security issues. In this Manichean worldview, national identity, underpinned by shared memory of one's own triumphs and tragedies, functions as an anchor for meaning, values, and common identity in an increasingly globalized world. Russian official uses and conceptualization of memory as a status resource and security issue provide exemplary insights into what this looks like in theory and in practice.

Russian Memory in Doctrine

State actors need to "construct policies with public justifications that enact the identity and moral purpose of the state,"²³ meaning that Russia's use of history in foreign policy must account for its own official identity discourse, for that of the target state(s), and for globally-resonant events. Such demands dictate both flexibility of approach and stability of reasoning. Russian official narratives of the past appear, at least superficially, incoherent given the shifting narratives deployed, but they are at base supported by three core and unchanging messages: (1) Russia needs a strong

19 Malgorzata Pakier and Joanna Wawrzyniak, *Memory and Change in Europe: Eastern Perspectives* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015).

20 Simone Benazzo, "Not All the Past Needs to Be Used: Features of Fidesz's Politics of Memory," *Journal of Nationalism, Memory & Language Politics* 11, no. 2 (December 2017): 198–221, <https://doi.org/10.1515/jnmlp-2017-0009>

21 Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

22 Jenny Wüstenberg, "Locating Transnational Memory," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 32, no. 4 (December 2019): 371–382, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-019-09327-6>

23 Laura Roselle, *Media and the Politics of Failure: Great Powers, Communication Strategies, and Military Defeats*, Palgrave Macmillan Series in Political Communication (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 13.

state; (2) Russia has a special path of development; and (3) Russia is a messianic great power.²⁴ Whether the celebration of the state in question relates to Soviet leader Joseph Stalin or Tsar Nicholas I is less important than that the state being celebrated is evidently strong. As in other countries where illiberal memory is practiced, the history is a bricolage,²⁵ with “recurrent temporal themes of war, alternative politics and revolution activated and embedded into an alternative transcendental national memory.”²⁶ Illiberal memory activism cannot and does not rely on linear stories of national greatness. Rather, to mobilize support, the government engages with a complex reality of narratives at home and abroad.

One way Russian actors achieve this is through the securitization of history, achieved by the interconnection, even conflation, of national identity and historical memory: “The basis of the general Russian identity of the nations of the Russian Federation is a system, established through history, of united spiritual, moral and cultural and historical values.”²⁷ Russia’s 2014 Military Doctrine describes culture (including history) as an integral part of national security, even placing it on the same level as domestic threats from terrorism.²⁸ The 2021 National Security Strategy cites the defense of historical memory as a strategic priority and describes the people (*narod*) as the carrier of Russian sovereignty and statehood, the foundation of which rests on their cultural and historical values.²⁹

The 2021 National Security Strategy also warns that Russian historical values are under active attack by the USA and its allies as well as transnational corporations and foreign nongovernmental organizations. These alleged attacks consist of increased efforts to falsify Russian and world history, pervert historical truth, and destroy historical memory to weaken those who form the core of the state (that is, ethnic Russians). The strategy sets as a goal the defense of historical truth, the preservation of memory, and historically-informed unity, countering the falsification of history, promoting the patriotic formation of the nation’s youth through “historical examples,” and defending the population from the dissemination of foreign ideas and values.³⁰

The 2023 Foreign Policy Concept provides a nearly identical analysis, albeit with the strategy transposed onto the global stage. A strategic planning document, the Concept sets out Russia as a “sovereign center of global development with a historically unique mission” to maintain multipolarity and the balance of power.³¹ Russia’s status is explicitly derived from the Soviet victory in World War II, its role in shaping the postwar order, and its contribution to “eliminating the global system

24 McGlynn, *Memory Makers*, 206–207.

25 Thomas D. Sherlock, *Historical Narratives in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia: Destroying the Settled Past, Creating an Uncertain Future* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

26 Julian Göppfarth, “Memory and Illiberalism,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Memory Activism*, ed. Yifat Gutman and Jenny Wüstenberg (Abingdon: Routledge, 2023): 5.

27 Vladimir Putin, “Utverzhdena Strategiya Natsional’noy Bezopasnosti Rossii,” Kremlin website, Prezident Rossii, December 31, 2015, <http://kremlin.ru/acts/news/51129>.

28 Rossiyskaya Gazeta, “Voennaya Doktrina Rossiyskoy Federatsii,” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, December 30, 2014, <https://rg.ru/2014/12/30/doktrina-dok.html>.

29 Pravo.gov.ru, “Utverzhdena Strategiya Natsional’noy Bezopasnosti Rossii,” *Pravo*, July 3, 2021, <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202107030001>.

30 *Pravo*.

31 Vladimir Putin, “Ukaz ob Utverzhdenie Kontseptsii Vneshney Politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii,” Kremlin website, Prezident Rossii, April 5, 2023, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70811>.

of colonialism.³² The Concept sets forth the following measures to meet Russia's strategic foreign policy goals: preserving abroad historical truth and memory of Russia's role in world history; countering falsification of history; strengthening the moral, legal, and institutional foundations of contemporary international relations based on the outcomes of World War II; disseminating information abroad about Russia in world history and the formation of a just world order, including the decisive contribution of the Soviet Union to the victory over Nazi Germany, the founding of the UN, and decolonization and the formation of statehood in Africa, Asia, and Latin America; counteracting the distortion of information about significant events in world history relating to Russian interests; countering foreign states, associations, officials, organizations, and citizens that commit unfriendly acts against Russian sites of historical and memorial significance abroad; and promoting constructive international cooperation to preserve historical and cultural heritage.³³

Through these acts of history politics, Russia intends to cultivate a system of international relations that “preserves cultural and civilizational identity” and to “counter attempts to impose pseudo-humanistic or other neo-liberal ideological views that undermine traditional spiritual and moral values and integrity.”³⁴ This is an explicit rejection of teleological liberalism, or the “end of history” thesis,³⁵ which Russian officials frequently mock and criticize.³⁶ The civilizational tenor—in the Concept and other documents—assigns to Russia the right, and mission, to defend authentic identity. In this depiction, Russia is a beacon to the world, possessing a special consciousness of historical truth and its own self such that it can now lead a counter-hegemonic international campaign to allow other countries to be true to themselves, their history and heritage.

Russian Use of History Abroad

The doctrines above list several specific practical aims and methods for the practice of Russian memory politics abroad. These include exporting Russian versions of the past, forming or attempting to form alliances with those with potentially complementary narratives, criticizing and attacking memories inconsistent with Russian narratives, and defending Russian narratives as well as defending memory for its own sake as an apolitical good and path to national self-realization. These four practices—memory exports, memory alliances, memory wars, and memory defense—can be further amalgamated into two groups: memory diplomacy (exports and alliances) and memory wars (offense and defense). Such categorizations cannot be sharply distinguished from one another, however. There are several shared tactics, or at least entangled methods, used in all four memory practices.

1) Memory Exports

Memory exports are one of the two core practices of memory diplomacy, with the latter defined as “political actors’ identification, creation and development of

³² Putin, “Ukaz ob Utverzhenie Kontseptsii Vneshney Politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii.”

³³ Putin.

³⁴ Putin.

³⁵ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, reprint edition (New York: Free Press, 2006).

³⁶ TASS, “Lavrov Hits out at US Pursuit of Attaining ‘End of History’ through Domination,” Russian News Agency TASS, accessed 7 August 2023, <https://tass.com/politics/1555915>.

commonalities of memory for geopolitical purposes and/or bilateral relations.”³⁷ Memory diplomacy shares attributes with diplomacy with memory insofar as it is a strategic diplomatic action but the latter is focused on post-conflict reconciliation and coming to terms with the past.³⁸ By contrast, memory diplomacy is an outright rejection of that vision of memory and remembrance; instead, it pertains to promoting one’s own version of history, commemorative traditions, and memory products and culture to foreign audiences.

Perhaps Russia’s most famous memory export is the Saint George ribbon: since 2009, Russian embassies around the world have organized so-called Volunteers of Victory, largely comprising the Russian diaspora, to hand out Saint George ribbons and historical marketing materials. In 2023, Volunteers of Victory claimed to have more than 30,000 volunteers outside Russia and to be active in 30 countries.³⁹ Admittedly, this number is greatly reduced from 2019, when the Volunteers were active in more than 90 countries,⁴⁰ including in 23 cities in the USA, where they distributed some 10,000 ribbons alongside brochures telling the selective history of both this symbol and the Soviet role in the Second World War.⁴¹ It did not mention the widespread use of Saint George ribbons to symbolize and justify Russia’s 2014 aggression against Ukraine. Russia’s continued instrumentalization of the Saint George ribbon, which adorned the uniforms of many Russian soldiers as they reinvaded Ukraine in February 2022 (figures 1 and 2), is a striking reminder that uses of history are about politics, not history.⁴²

37 McGlynn and Đureinović, “The Alliance of Victory”: 228; Jade McGlynn, “Russia is Using Memory Diplomacy to Export its Narrative to the World” *Foreign Policy*, June 25, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/06/25/russia-puting-vw2-soviet-ussr-memory-diplomacy-history-narrative/>.

38 Kathrin Bachleitner, “Diplomacy with Memory: West German and Austrian Relations with Israel” (DPhil diss., University of Oxford, Social Sciences Division; Department of Politics and International Relations; Saint Antony’s College, 2018), <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:8e9b772b-704c-4db0-af96-2fe7c65bf4ee>.

39 RAPSİ, “Bolee 150 Tys Volontërov Pobedy v RF i za Rubezhom Pomogli” RAPSİ, May 11, 2022, https://rapsinews.ru/incident_news/20220511/307941224.html.

40 RIA Novosti, “Aktsiya Georgievskaya Lentochka,” RIA Novosti, accessed September 12, 2023, <https://ria.ru/20190425/1553043351.html>.

41 TASS, “V SShA Nachalas’ Aktsiya Georgievskaya Lentochka,” Russian News Agency TASS, April 25, 2019, <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/6395243>.

42 Pål Kolstø, “Symbol of the War—but Which One? The St. George Ribbon in Russian Nation-Building” *Slavonic and East European Review* 94, no. 4 (October 2016): 660–701, <https://doi.org/10.5699/slaveasteurorev2.94.4.0660>.

FIGURES 1 and 2. Saint George ribbons on Russian uniforms, displayed at the “Ukraine–Crucifixion” exhibition, Museum of Ukraine in the Second World War, Kyiv, July 2023. Photo—author.



Another prominent Russian memory export is the Immortal Regiment procession, where the ancestors of those who contributed to the victory over Nazism march with portraits of them. The Immortal Regiment was launched by three independent journalists in the Siberian city of Tomsk who envisaged the procession as an apolitical

way to honor and remember all those who contributed to the Great Patriotic War effort, including those traditionally excluded from official narratives, such as former prisoners of war or those who lived in occupied territory. The idea became very popular, growing from one city in Russia in 2012 to 1,200 cities across 20 countries by 2015.⁴³ Its popularity drew the attention of the authorities and, in 2015, government officials based in Moscow launched a hostile takeover of the movement, which has since become heavily politicized.⁴⁴ Putin now traditionally walks at the head of the procession, where state leaders have joined him, including Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. While largely aimed at compatriots (Russian-speaking immigrants), the parade has also been “glocalized” to broaden its appeal.⁴⁵ Ironically, in 2023 the annual Moscow Immortal Regiment parade was called off due to “security concerns,”⁴⁶ but went ahead in dozens of other countries, including Germany, Italy, and Bulgaria.⁴⁷

Many Russian memory exports are aimed at Russian expatriates and the nations of the former Soviet Union, including Victory Dictation, which is a test of one’s knowledge of World War II,⁴⁸ and the Waltz of Victory, a dance competition performed to World War II songs.⁴⁹ While the former is a means to maintain cultural memory among the Russian diaspora, the latter cultivates nostalgia among post-Soviet migrants and wider audiences in the post-Soviet space.⁵⁰ As Saari notes, there are meaningful differences in the practices of public diplomacy depending on whether they are targeted at the former Soviet Union or at the West.⁵¹ In the latter, the aim is to involve and recruit more people to Russia’s view of history and, in turn, the worldview predicated upon it. Russian memory actors pay particular attention to content aimed at young people, such as the government-backed initiative Roads of Victory, which organizes tours across Eastern Europe of important Red Army battle sites. In 2019, then-Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev attended the opening of the inaugural Belgrade tour, using his remarks to underscore hopes that the initiative would promote a heroic vision of Russia’s past to younger generations abroad.⁵²

Russian expatriates are often an essential tool in exporting Russian memory to those without links to the USSR or Russia. They form local clubs and work with Russian cultural organizations like Rossotrudnichestvo to “reveal” forgotten Russian feats to target populations. For example, they helped to organize a tour for members of the Young Diplomats club in Patras, Greece, to places of “military glory” from the time of

43 Sergei Lapenkov (founding member of Bessmertnyy Polk, the Immortal Regiment commemorative procession), in discussion with the author, Moscow, August 27, 2018.

44 Jade McGlynn, “Memory Makers,” 171–175.

45 Daniela Koleva, “The Immortal Regiment and Its Glocalisation: Reformatting Victory Day in Bulgaria,” *Memory Studies* 15, no. 1 (February 2022): 216–229, <https://doi.org/10.1177/17506980211037280>

46 This was reported to be linked to officials’ fears that the high losses in Ukraine would become apparent if, as was the case in 2022, relatives of those who died in Ukraine attended the procession with portraits of their loved ones. Ministry of Defence 🇷🇺 [@DefenceHQ], “Latest Defence Intelligence Update on the Situation in Ukraine - 22 April 2023,” Twitter, April 22, 2023, <https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1649660040515559425>.

47 Lenta, “Aktsiya Bessmertnyy Polk,” Lenta.ru, May 9, 2023, <https://lenta.ru/news/2023/05/09/bessmertnyi/>.

48 Diktant Pobedy website, accessed November 5, 2021, <https://xn--80achcepozij4ac6j.xn--p1ai/>.

49 “Val’s Pobedy,” Val’s Pobedy, accessed August 6, 2023, <http://valsobedy.ru/ob-aktsii>.

50 Moritz Pieper, “Russkiy Mir: The Geopolitics of Russian Compatriots Abroad” *Geopolitics* 25, no. 3, Europeanisation versus Euroscepticism: Do Borders Matter? (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2018.1465047>

51 Sinikka Saari, “Russia’s Post-Orange Revolution Strategies to Increase Its Influence in Former Soviet Republics: Public Diplomacy Po Russkii,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 66, no. 1 (January 2014): 50–66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2013.864109>

52 Rossotrudnichestvo, “V Belgrade Startovala Aktsiya ‘Dorogi Pobedy’ Kotoraya Okhvatit Shest’ Evropeyskikh Stolits” Rossotrudnichestvo website, October 21, 2019, accessed April 2023 <http://rs.gov.ru/news/56746>.

World War II, replete with narratives of “historical falsification” and warnings about present-day “glorification of Nazis.”⁵³ Some groups are made up of non-Russians who have close political ties to Russian officials and work to export its memory. In Finland, the Finnish Anti-Fascist Community is a small, radical organization whose activities are largely directed at Estonia and Lithuania, which it deems “apartheid states” with no right to exercise sovereignty independently from Russia.⁵⁴ It focuses on reinterpreting and playing down Soviet deportations from Estonia during the reign of the USSR: “Deportation was not a mass murder but saving people from war.”⁵⁵

Various prominent domestic Russian cultural and historical institutions, such as the RMHS, have also tried to promote Russian popular history content abroad, especially through films. At home, the RMHS has funded numerous Russian war films with the aim of dislodging Hollywood’s cinematic hegemony in the genre, which RMHS Chairman Vladimir Medinsky has blamed for destroying the USSR. In a discussion about the 1998 Steven Spielberg film *Saving Private Ryan* and the ideological consequences of Western cultural dominance, Medinsky claimed, “That is how they brainwashed us, and the PR ideological organs of the [Soviet] state machine were broken then.”⁵⁶ To internationalize the fightback, in conjunction with Rosstrudnichestvo, the RMHS has organized showings of Russian modern-day World War II films, including free screenings around the world, from Brasília to Luxembourg, of *Sobibor*, a graphically violent film that Russified the Jewish uprising in the eponymous Nazi extermination camp.⁵⁷

A more physical manifestation of Russian memory exports are the memory sites government bodies fund and/or construct to mold the landscape of target countries. In 2014, the Russian government donated a statue of Tsar Nicholas II to the city of Belgrade. The purpose of the statue was to reassert the debt of gratitude owed by Serbia to Russia and reinforce the narrative of Russia as Serbia’s protector against an unreliable West.⁵⁸ In 2018, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov traveled to Luanda to unveil a monument, largely funded by the Russian Embassy, to the Soviet, Cuban, and Namibian fighters who took up arms for Angolan independence.⁵⁹ These are visual reminders of Russian historical sacrifice for Serbia and Angola, respectively, but they are also about reviving, or strengthening a sense of historical partnership, upon which a memory alliance can develop.

53 Nadya Kel'm and Oleksii Nabozhnyak, “Spivvitchyzyky trymayut’ udar” *Texty*, May 15, 2023, <https://texty.org.ua/articles/109625/spivvitchyzyky-trymayut-udar-yak-orhanizaciyi-rosiyan-u-yevropi-pracyuyut-na-propahandu-ta-zovnishnyu-rozvidku/>.

54 Jyrki Jantunen, “Leena Hietanen Sättii Taas Virolaisia: ‘Viro, Fasistinen Apartheid-Valtio,’” *Suomen Kuvalehti*, June 16, 2008, <https://suomenkuvalehti.fi/jutut/ulkomaat/leena-hietanen-sattii-taas-virolaisia-viro-fasistinen-apartheid-valtio/>; Antifasistit, “Manifest of Antifascists in Helsinki” Finnish Antifascist Committee, March 23, 2009, <http://antifasistit.blogspot.com/2009/03/manifest-of-antifascists-in-helsinki.html>.

55 Delfi, “Bäckman: Kiiuditamine Oli Päästmine Sõja Eest,” Delfi, 2009, <https://www.delfi.ee/artikkel/21937317/backman-kuuditamine-oli-paastmine-soja-eest>.

56 Aleksey Sochnev, “Gastello Promakhnul'sya” *Lenta*, October 10, 2015, <https://lenta.ru/articles/2015/10/10/medinskiy/>.

57 “Casa Russa no Brasil – Posts | Facebook” Facebook, May 10, 2018, accessed 6 August 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/674103505967113/posts/1920184854692299/>; “Russkiy dom v Lyuksemburge” Facebook page, April 26, 2018, accessed August 6, 2023, https://www.facebook.com/CCSR.Lux.Ru/photos/gm.1322025161231718/1700620010022765/?type=3&paipv=0&eav=AfaG1dIZALdmeqO87C4CEfOnAvSwuUZOrY1RF6DPY15PQDNiyIw-CPUyKhWHTalV_Y&rdi.

58 BIRN, “Belgrade Gets Statue of Russia’s Last Tsar,” *Balkan Insight* (online newspaper), April 8, 2014, <https://balkaninsight.com/2014/04/08/belgrade-gets-russian-tsar-romanov-statue/>.

59 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID) of the Russian Federation, “Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s Address at the Opening Ceremony for a Memorial to Soldiers Performing International Service in Angola, in Luanda on March 5, 2018,” MID website, March 5, 2018, <https://www.mid.ru/tv/?id=1565401&lang=en>.

FIGURE 3. “[Nikolaj II Beograd](#),” by [Gmihail](#), licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 RS DEED.



2) Memory Alliances

Exporting one’s own national myths and memory will limit the reach and appeal of history-based soft power. Any successful political messaging requires both a platform and resonance.⁶⁰ In order to acquire this resonance among non-Russians, the Russian government creates memory alliances that insert Russia or recall Russia’s role in a target audience’s popular narratives of the past. For example, in November 2022, a local Greek organization called Soyuz and the Institute of Intercultural Relations in Greece held a series of events in conjunction with the Association of Russian Diplomats entitled “Russia’s Contribution to the Creation of the Modern Greek State: History and Future of Relations.”⁶¹ As a memory alliance is an effort to engage with and promote positive historical narratives of a second country,⁶²

60 Svetlana Erpyleva, “Why Russians Support the War against Ukraine,” openDemocracy, April 16, 2022, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odt/russia-ukraine-war-support-interviews-opinion/>.

61 Kel’m and Nabozhnyak, “Spivvitchyzyky trymayut’ udar.”

62 Jade McGlynn, “Constructing Memory Alliances: How Russia Uses History to Bolster Its Influence and Undermine Rivals Abroad,” in *The Diversity of Russia’s Military Power: Five Perspectives*, ed. Mark F. Cancian and Cyrus Newlin (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies [CSIS], 2020), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep26533>.

this practice can contribute to achieving influence, reinforcing relationships, and bolstering a country's reputation. The vision of the past must be considered valid in both the producer country and the recipient country, which often requires Russian compromise with, or even prioritization of, the target audience's preferences and idiosyncrasies for remembering the past.⁶³

Memory alliance-building is often productive rather than destructive, insofar as it calls upon semi-shared memories or it attempts to converge and cohere distinct memories into a shared story. Russian memory actors draw on memory deposits, that can be reactivated when you want.⁶⁴ For example, in France, the Russian Foreign Ministry has built on memory deposits by celebrating the Normandie-Niémén fighter pilots of World War II who fought within the Red Army. It has released documentaries and organized exhibitions in France and Russia.⁶⁵ In 2016, at the first (and only) National History Assembly, participants included State Duma Speaker Sergei Naryshkin, Culture Minister Vladimir Medinsky, representatives of public organizations, the academic community, search movements that retrieve the remains of soldiers from World War II, and Anne-Marie Guido, the daughter of a French pilot in the Normandie-Niémén regiment, who donated her father's medals to the RMHS museum.

Localizing their approach, in the United Kingdom the Russian Foreign Ministry has celebrated the Arctic Convoy veterans who brought supplies to the blockaded Soviet port of Murmansk on the Barents Sea coast near the northern Finnish border. In 2015, the Russian Foreign Ministry organized a trip for Arctic Convoy veterans to occupied Crimea, in which the convoy men praised Russia's hospitality, comparing it negatively with the UK's treatment of its veterans.⁶⁶ In a limited way, these efforts, combined with digital Ministry of Foreign Affairs #WeRemember social media campaigns in honor of British World War II veterans, have cohered the structural similarities in the ways the UK and Russia remember World War II, even if they do not remember the same things.⁶⁷

Memory alliances can be simultaneously constructive and destructive, containing within them negative or denigratory narratives of geopolitical rivals as well, exemplified in those used by Russian-funded media in relation to Kosovo and the 1999 bombing of the former Yugoslavia, which is reduced to being seen as an unprovoked NATO attack on Serbian civilians protested at the highest levels by Russia.⁶⁸ Supported by Russian state-owned media in Serbia, Russian officials and cultural organizations in Belgrade work hard to remind the Serbian government of Russian resistance to Western aggression; in 2019, they even presented Serbian

63 McGlynn and Đureinović, "Alliance of Victory."

64 Georges Mink and Paul Bonnard, *Le Passé au Présent: Gisements Mémoires et Actions Historicisantes en Europe Centrale et Orientale* (Paris : Houdiard, 2010).

65 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID) of the Russian Federation, "O Pamyatnoy Tseremonii Posvyashchennoy Letchiku Aviapolka Normandiya-Neman," MID website, December 7, 2017, https://www.mid.ru/web/guest/maps/fr/-/asset_publisher/g8RuzDvY7qvV/content/id/2980681.

66 Igor Rozin, "British War Veterans Travel to Crimea to Visit Black Sea Naval Port" *Russia behind the Headlines*, October 14, 2015, https://www.rbth.com/society/2015/10/14/british_war_veterans_travel_to_crimea_to_visit_black_sea_naval_port_50055.html.

67 Nataliya Danilova, *The Politics of War Commemoration in the UK and Russia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

68 Ruski dom, "Byust Evgeniya Primakova Torzhestvenno Otkryt v Predstavitel'stve Rossotrudnichestva v Serbii," Ruski dom (blog), November 5, 2019, accessed April 2023, <https://ruskidom.rs/2019/11/05/бюст-евгения-примакова-торжественно-открыт-в-представительстве-россотрудничества-в-сербии/>; Jade McGlynn, "Why Putin Keeps Talking about Kosovo," *Foreign Policy*, March 3, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/03/putin-ukraine-russia-nato-kosovo/>.

Prime Minister Ana Brnabić and President Aleksandar Vučić with a bust of former Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeniy Primakov, who famously had his plane, on its way to Washington DC, perform a U-turn over the Atlantic when he learned of the NATO campaign.⁶⁹ Russian officials have cultivated similarly anti-Western memory alliances in a number of African countries by appropriating as Russian the Soviet support for decolonization and anti-imperial struggles for independence.⁷⁰ Since 2022, Russian officials have maneuvered these alliances to increasingly conflate the USSR's liberating mission with Russia's current "anti-colonial" "special military operation" (that is, its full-scale invasion of Ukraine) against US hegemony in the area.⁷¹

In contrast to the alliances described above, the Russo-Chinese memory alliance is more a partnership of equals, with both wishing to present World War II as a common victory and memory.⁷² For example, at a joint news conference following talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi in Beijing, Lavrov claimed that "one of the cementing foundations of our partnership is the holy memory of the wartime brotherhood in the fight against common evil [in World War II]."⁷³ Likewise in 2015, Lavrov published an article entitled, "History Lessons and New Frontiers," in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and in China's *The People's Daily*, in which he argued that "Tens of thousands of Soviet soldiers gave their lives for the freedom and independence of China. We are glad that the memory of our compatriots is carefully preserved in Beijing."⁷⁴ Central to why this works is both a willingness to bend the truth and to center not so much the memory itself but the act of remembering, juxtaposed against the West's supposed forgetting, the war. This was exemplified in a joint article written by the Ambassadors of Russia and China to the United States, Anatoly Antonov and Cui Tiankai, for the Washington-based *Defense One* entitled, "Honor World War Two for a Better, Shared Future." The ambassadors argued that historical truth was in grave danger and could only be defended by fighting the supposed rehabilitation of Nazism and fascism. It portrayed Russia and China as partners in the vanguard in the fight against historical denialism with respect to World War II.⁷⁵

69 Sputnjik Srbija, "Srbija Pamti" Sputnjik Srbija, 2020, <https://rs-lat.sputniknews.com/godisnjica-agresije/>; Ruski dom, "Byust Evgeniya Primakova Torzhestvenno Otkryt v Predstavitel'stve Rossotrudnichestva v Serbii."

70 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID) of the Russian Federation, "O Konferentsii na Temu o Rolii SSSR v Dekolonizatsii" MID website, February 21, 2020, https://archive.mid.ru/web/guest/maps/ao/-/asset_publisher/NUdadoS8xEBg/content/id/4055260; Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID) of the Russian Federation, "Article by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov 'Russia-Zimbabwe: Time-Proven Friendship,' Published by Zimbabwean Newspaper The Herald on February 18th, 2021," MID website, February 18, 2021, https://archive.mid.ru/web/guest/maps/zw/-/asset_publisher/vHPZjwZ7gII/content/id/4580510?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_vHPZjwZ7gII&101_INSTANCE_vHPZjwZ7gII_languageId=en_GB.

71 Jade McGlynn, "Why Russia Markets Itself as an Anti-Colonial Power to Africans," *Foreign Policy*, February 8, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/02/08/russia-ukraine-colonialism-diplomacy-africa/>.

72 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID) of the Russian Federation, "Joint Statement by the Foreign Ministers of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China, Moscow, September 11, 2020," MID website, September 11, 2020, https://archive.mid.ru/web/guest/maps/cn/-/asset_publisher/WhKWb5DVBqKA/content/id/4335948?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_WhKWb5DVBqKA&101_INSTANCE_WhKWb5DVBqKA_languageId=en_GB.

73 "Speech and Answers of Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation S. V. Lavrov to the Questions of Mass Media during Joint Press Conference at the Outcomes of Talks with Yang Jiechi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of China, Beijing, 10 May 2012," MID website, May 12, 2012, https://archive.mid.ru/web/guest/maps/cn/-/asset_publisher/WhKWb5DVBqKA/content/id/157330?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_WhKWb5DVBqKA&101_INSTANCE_WhKWb5DVBqKA_languageId=en_GB.

74 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID) of the Russian Federation, "Sergey Lavrov's Article for Rossiyskaya Gazeta and Renmin Ribao 24 August 2015," MID website, August 24, 2015, https://archive.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJEo2Bw/content/id/1679408?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJEo2Bw&101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJEo2Bw_languageId=en_GB.

75 Anatoly Antonov and Cui Tiankai, "Honor World War II with a Better, Shared Future" *Defense One* (website), September 2, 2020, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2020/09/honor-world-war-ii-better-shared-future/168191/>.

Russia and China's memory alliance also depends on mutual restraint, given differing and even contentious historical narratives, such as the Sino-Soviet split and the imperial era.⁷⁶ Building on the concept of restraint in international politics, memory restraint is understood here as an action "going against or resisting something we would otherwise expect to prevail."⁷⁷ This might include not commenting on an ally's decision to honor a historical group or person denigrated in the Russian official narrative, as with the Kremlin's support for People's Party Our Slovakia, which glorifies the Nazi collaborationist government that ruled Slovakia from 1939 to 1945. Even when the former's party leaders and members have dressed up in collaborator uniforms, the Russian government has refrained from comment or condemnation, displaying a restraint that would be unimaginable were Baltic or Ukrainian nationalist groups to engage in identical behavior.⁷⁸ One could also cite lack of Russian reaction to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's praise for independence leader Subhas Chandra Bose—who collaborated with the Nazis during World War II and even met with Chancellor of the German Reich Adolf Hitler—as he unveiled a new statue to the revolutionary. It is hard to argue that such acts should not qualify as the rehabilitation of Nazi collaborators according to Russia's own parameters.⁷⁹

Memory restraint is integral to memory alliances insofar as it allows Russia to respect the target countries' own historical preferences and cultural idiosyncrasies, such as not mentioning Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito in celebrations of World War II with Serbia. Memory restraint—or the lack thereof—proves a useful litmus test of the limitations of memory politics and historical narratives as a decisive factor in Russian foreign relations. The breakdown of restraint in such places as it traditionally appears is often a consequence, and signal, of worsening or tense relations. For example, when the Turkish authorities downed a Russian fighter pilot that had crossed into Turkey on his way to Syria, state-aligned Russian media recalled Turkish support for the Wehrmacht and even attempted to rekindle Soviet support for the Kurds.⁸⁰ More starkly, Putin has twice invoked the memory of Srebrenica, where Bosnian Serbs massacred Bosnian Muslim men and boys. He made both references following Serbian criticisms of Russia for illegal intelligence operations on Serbian territory.⁸¹ Memory alliances are for allies. Russian officials reserve different practices for their geopolitical rivals and opponents.

3) Memory Offense

Memory offense is part of memory wars, which pertain to how countries or actors contest historical relations and roles.⁸² Among those scholars who have explored the

⁷⁶ Ryan Ho Kilpatrick, "Don't Mention the Russians," China Media Project (website), March 24, 2023, <https://chinamediaproject.org/2023/03/24/on-national-humiliation-don-t-mention-the-russians/>.

⁷⁷ Brent J. Steele, *Restraint in International Politics*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 12.

⁷⁸ Miroslava German Sirotnikova, "Far-Right Extremism in Slovakia: Hate, Guns and Friends from Russia," Balkan Insight (online newspaper), January 20, 2021, <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/01/20/far-right-extremism-in-slovakia/>.

⁷⁹ France 24, "India Unveils Statue to Nazi-Allied Independence Hero," France 24, September 8, 2022, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220908-india-unveils-statue-to-nazi-allied-independence-hero>.

⁸⁰ Dar'ya Aslamova, "Siriyskie kurdy: Islamisty—eto deti d'yavola! Mi pokonchim s nimi!" Komsomolskaya pravda (website), originally published November 30 2015, <https://www.kp.ru/daily/26464/3334852/>.

⁸¹ RIA Novosti, "Rossiya ne Dopustit v Donbasse Povtoreniya Sobytyi v Srebrenitse," RIA Novosti, October 20, 2017, <https://ria.ru/20171020/1507215371.html>; Interfax Ukraine, "Lack of Amnesty Law in Ukraine Could Turn Donbas into Srebrenica," Interfax-Ukraine, December 10, 2019, <https://en.interfax.com.ua/news/general/629658.html>.

⁸² Richard Ned Lebow et al., *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

use of historical narratives as a Russian foreign policy tool, many have focused on memory wars within Russian bilateral relations with Poland, the Baltic States, and Ukraine.⁸³ Russia also engages in frequent memory conflicts with other geopolitical rivals, such as the UK and US.⁸⁴ The worldwide nature of World War II has enabled Russia to engage in memory wars on several fronts, brandishing practices of memory offense, defined here as criticizing another country's historical role, in an effort at undermining prevalent historical narratives within that country.

In targeting opponents' historical narratives, Russian memory actors engage in historical falsification, decontextualization, exaggeration, and/or denialism. For example, in a 2020 extended article on the causes of the Second World War published in the American magazine *The National Interest*, Putin blamed Poland for starting the war, following on from numerous comments and diplomatic conflicts on this topic,⁸⁵ and also claimed the West had deliberately sought to "bleed out" the Soviets by refusing to open a second front before 1944.⁸⁶ As at home, Russian officials take to foreign platforms to use history in a presentist fashion, discrediting Western "hypocritical" criticism of Russia and of the target countries' own human rights records by using historical whataboutism. For example, during his first ever visit to the Republic of Congo and his meeting with President Denis Sassou Nguessou in the summer of 2022, Lavrov spent considerable time discussing how the West colonized Africa for its own benefit.⁸⁷

Russia also interferes directly in international remembrance of other countries' tragedies where the Soviet Union or Russia is deemed a perpetrator. The Russian denial of Stalin's perpetration of the Holodomor famine as a specific Ukraine-targeted crime, and as a genocide, represents one such element. In response to the EU recognition of the Holodomor as a genocide, against which Russia has long railed, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs called it "another example of their ignorance of history or a deliberate gross distortion of historical facts," and claimed, "the myth of the 'genocide of the Ukrainian people' emerged long ago and has been exploited, including by the West, ever since," putting Russians first among the victims.⁸⁸

Russia's treatment of the Katyn massacre, near the border with Belarus, is a similar story, but also an indicative example of the difference between liberal and illiberal memory practices in the foreign policy sphere. In 2010, Moscow acknowledged responsibility for the massacre, in which Soviets killed 22,000 Polish officers, and issued a formal apology. However, since 2012, there have been efforts to rescind the acknowledgement, culminating in 2023 in an article by the state media agency, RIA Novosti, citing a specially declassified FSB document that showed "the Katyn case was a provocation by the Third Reich's secret services to divide Poland and prevent the Red Army from crossing the country to the German border." Despite going to the

83 Bjornar Sverdrup-Thygeson, "The Chinese Story: Historical Narratives as a Tool in China's Africa Policy," *International Politics* 54, no. 1 (January 2017): 54–72, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-017-0014-3>

84 Torbakov, "History, Memory and National Identity"; Julie Fedor et al., *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

85 Vladimir Putin, "CIS Informal Summit," Kremlin website, President of Russia, December 20, 2019, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62376>.

86 Vladimir Putin, "The Real Lessons of the 75th Anniversary of World War II," *The National Interest*, June 18, 2020, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/vladimir-putin-real-lessons-75th-anniversary-world-war-ii-162982>.

87 Sergey Lavrov, "Russia and Africa: A Future-Bound Partnership," Fana Broadcasting Corporate, July 25, 2022, <https://www.fanabc.com/english/russia-and-africa-a-future-bound-partnership-russian-fm-segey-lavrov/>.

88 Russian Permanent Mission to the EU, "On the Resolution Regarding the 'Holodomor' Adopted by the European Parliament," Russian Mission to the EU, December 15, 2022, <https://russiaeu.ru/en/news/comment-russian-permanent-mission-eu-resolution-regarding-holodomor-adopted-european>.

effort of releasing “archival discoveries,” a longstanding Russian and Soviet method of historical disinformation, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs later clarified that the new historical denialism over Katyn was at least partly motivated by the poor state of Russo-Polish relations: “The debate in Russia over the unclear circumstances of the Katyn case continues. This is partly because of the openly hostile position Poland has taken towards Russia in recent years and the destruction of monuments to Red Army soldiers who died during the liberation of that country from the Nazis.” In July 2023, the Russians removed the Polish flag from the Katyn monument⁸⁹ and they have removed several other monuments to Polish and other victims killed by the NKVD (Soviet secret police), intending to remove the legitimacy of recognition.⁹⁰

This all contributes to a situation in which Russia engages in historical denialism regarding its own crimes and exaggeration of, or at least an undue fixation on, other countries’ past crimes as markers of their current political illegitimacy. In May 2014, to coincide with Victory in Europe day, the Russian Federation released a white paper on human rights violations in Ukraine during the Euromaidan and Revolution of Dignity mass protest movement. Once again, this Russian white paper drew on supposedly recently released archives⁹¹ to demonstrate the crimes of far-right World War II-era Ukrainian nationalist movement leader Stepan Bandera, his contemporary followers, and his “modern-day heirs.” The white paper was translated into several languages, presented at the European Commission, and widely disseminated via Russian social media.

In addition to denying and distorting historical experience, Russian officials appropriate the deaths of other nations’ countrymen to fuel their own martyrology. Such is the process underway in Sandarmokh, Karelia, near the border with Finland, where the FSB insists that a local mass grave filled with Stalin’s victims, executed during the Terror, are mass graves of Soviet prisoners of war slaughtered by Nazis. On top of pursuing local historians such as Yuri Dmitriev for providing evidence that disproves their claims, Russian officials are using the victims, which include Finns, Poles, and several Ukrainian writers and artists from the so-called executed renaissance, as evidence in an international campaign “Without Statute of Limitations” to recognize World War II as a genocide of the Soviet people.⁹²

Beyond attacking its perceived rivals directly and openly, Russia also seeks to fuel memory wars and divisive interpretations of the past within societies. In the UK, the Russian government has attempted to fuel existing memory wars around the denigration of Winston Churchill, which became an emotive issue in 2020, when far-right groups descended on Whitehall to defend the Churchill statue on Parliament Square. Russian state-funded English-language media promoted both pro- and anti-Churchill narratives.⁹³ Likewise, in the USA, Russia has simultaneously courted and promoted opponents on both sides of controversies surrounding historical

89 TVP, “Poland Protests Removal of Polish Flags from Katyn Memorial,” TVP, June 26, 2022, <https://tvpworld.com/60961020/poland-protests-removal-of-polish-flags-from-katyn-memorial>.

90 TVP, “Poland Reacts to Polish Victims of Repression Monument Being Removed in Russia,” TVP, May 15, 2023, <https://tvpworld.com/69858873/poland-reacts-to-polish-victims-of-repression-monument-being-removed-in-russia>.

91 Russian Permanent Mission to the EU, “White Book on Human Rights Violations in Ukraine,” Russian Mission to the EU, May 10, 2014, <https://russiaeu.ru/en/news/white-book-human-rights-violations-ukraine>.

92 Vera Ageeva, “1111 zhertv Sandarmokhu: rozstril pid richnitsyu bil’shovits’koï revolyutsii,” BBC News Ukraïna, November 3, 2017 <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/blogs-41734955>.

93 Sputnik UK, “Sputnik YouTube,” Sputnik UK, accessed August 2, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC14kxoretCL7_cBmmceEQ8g; Russian Embassy London [@RussianEmbassy], “#OTD in 1945 Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill Met at #YaltaConference in #Crimea to Negotiate on Post-#WWII Organisation of Europe,” Twitter, February 4, 2020, <https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy/status/1224701451584274432>.

grievances. While condemning the “mayhem and rioting,” Putin expressed his sympathy for the Black Lives Matter arguments, recalling Soviet support for racial minorities in the US and elsewhere.⁹⁴ At the same time, state-linked organizations have funded and organized pro-Confederacy rallies.⁹⁵ Once again, memory appears subjugated to Russia’s geopolitical ambitions, at least when Russia is not the target of historicized ire.

4) Memory Defense

As a practice, memory defense seeks to limit or prevent damage to Russia’s own core historical narrative and comprises both the defense of Russia’s own perceived historical resources and a general defense of illiberal memory and remembrance. Memory defense intersects with offense and the two are difficult to disentangle in many cases. However, doing so is important insofar as Russian memory defense is not the same as Russian memory offense, which covers elements like creating divisions over treatments of the past abroad.

One of the most common acts of memory defense covers accusations of historical falsification. The intense focus on other countries’ alleged or real historical falsification legitimizes Russia’s obsessive invocation of historical parallels by creating the impression that Russian historical truth—and by extension, Russian national identity—is under threat.⁹⁶ As Lavrov has argued: “Today, when we are witnessing the attempts to falsify the history of World War II and to revise its results, we must not let anyone make us forget our common memories and our common truth.”⁹⁷ It is not enough for the Kremlin to have a diplomatic or political dispute with someone; the opponent has to be characterized as a Russophobic heir to Russia’s historical enemies, seeking to rewrite history to justify their ancestors’ past crimes.⁹⁸

To legitimize their “defense” of World War II, and Russian, memory, Russian officials use multilateral and international bodies. As with domestic laws against “rehabilitation of Nazism” or “offending the honor of veterans,”⁹⁹ the proposals and resolutions appear uncontroversial: “every year since 2012, Russia has submitted before the UN General Assembly a vote on the draft resolution on combating glorification of Nazism. The resolution’s co-authors deem it unacceptable to glorify

94 Peter Rutland, “Do Black Lives Matter in Russia?” PONARS Policy Memo no. 662, July 13, 2020, <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/do-black-lives-matter-in-russia/>.

95 Special Counsel’s Office, *Report on the Investigation into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election (Mueller Report)*, US Department of Justice, April 18, 2019, <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/GPO-SCREPORT-MUELLER>.

96 Jade McGlynn, “Reliving the Past: How the Russian Government and Media Use History to Frame the Present,” (DPhil diss., University of Oxford, 2020), 188–190.

97 MFA Russia [\[@mfa_russia\]](https://twitter.com/mfa_russia), “Today, When We Are Witnessing the Attempts to Falsify the History of World War II and to Revise Its Results, We Must Not Let Anyone Make Us Forget Our Common Memories and Our Common Truth,” Twitter, October 26, 2019, https://twitter.com/mfa_russia/status/1188099244500160512.

98 RIA Novosti, “Krym Nikogda Ne Budet Banderovskim, zayavil Putin” RIA Novosti, March 18, 2014, <https://ria.ru/20140318/1000037870.html>; Jolanta Darczewska and Piotr Zochowski, *Russophobia in the Kremlin’s Strategy: A Weapon of Mass Destruction* (Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia, 2015).

99 Meduza, “Russian Lawmakers Approve Second Reading of Legislation Making It a Felony to ‘Insult WWII Veterans,’” Meduza (online newspaper), March 16, 2021 <https://meduza.io/en/news/2021/03/16/russian-lawmakers-approve-in-second-reading-legislation-making-it-a-felony-to-insult-wwii-veterans>; Ivan Kurilla, “The Implications of Russia’s Law against the Rehabilitation of Nazism,” PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo no. 33, August 2014, https://www.ponarseurasia.org/wp-content/uploads/attachments/Pepm331_Kurilla_August2014_o.pdf.

the Nazi movement and former members of the SS.”¹⁰⁰ In practice, however, this is a form of denigrating those who lament the Soviet occupation or Putin’s cult of the Great Victory. Similarly, in 2015, on Russia’s initiative, the Serbian representative office of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) hosted a conference dedicated to learning the “lessons of World War II.”¹⁰¹ It was hosted by Serbia’s then-foreign minister, Ivica Dačić, and a representative of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs who used his speech to argue that Russia is defending and preserving the memory of World War II, especially the sacrifices and feats of the Red Army, to restore the valuable lessons, including the Yalta system, gained from the war.¹⁰² In particular, he praised Serbia for its support in defending the memory of World War II.

For those countries less amenable to Russian memory politics, Russia often deploys historical whataboutism to deflect from criticisms of, or references to, darker spots of its past. There are numerous set patterns now, where criticism of a specific Russian or Soviet historical crime leads to a reference to a specific historical crime committed by the other party. For example, if Poland criticizes the Soviet occupation, Russian officials decry how “German and Polish troops annex(ed) parts of Czechoslovakia” in 1938.¹⁰³ If Western countries mention the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of nonaggression between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, Russian diplomats will respond with, “What about Munich?” to highlight their naive prewar policy of appeasement toward Hitler.¹⁰⁴

A central threat to Russia’s Great Patriotic War narrative, on which its right to great-power status is predicated, rests on the uses of the memory and Communist legacy of terror and occupation, with many former Soviet and Warsaw Pact countries rejecting the view that the Russian Soviets liberated their territories during World War II. As Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Maria Zakharova has stated: “To claim that the USSR ‘occupied’ Estonia is untrue to the memory of liberation from the

Nazi threat during [World War II].”¹⁰⁵ Domestically, Russia has prosecuted people for discussing the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and its secret protocols on social media.¹⁰⁶

A flashpoint of such memory conflicts is the removal of Soviet commemorative structures and place names, which has occurred during various de-Communization waves. By way of example, see the Russian government’s disputes with Poland’s

100 MFA Russia 🇷🇺 [@mfa_russia], “In a Few Days, the UN General Assembly Will Vote on the Draft Resolution on Combating Glorification of Nazism Submitted Annually by Russia,” Twitter, November 16, 2017, https://twitter.com/mfa_russia/status/931089158021500928.

101 OSCE, “Lessons of the Second World War: Memories and Public Policies,” Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), September 8, 2015, <https://www.osce.org/cio/179511>.

102 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID) Russian Federation, “Kommentarii v Svyazi s Konferentsiyey OBSE,” MID website, September 7, 2015, https://www.mid.ru/kommentarii_predstavatelya/-/asset_publisher/MCZ7HQumdqBY/content/id/1737765.

103 Maria Zakharova, “Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, Moscow, August 19, 2021,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID) of the Russian Federation website, August 19, 2021, https://www.mid.ru/en/press_service/spokesman/briefings/1774096/.

104 Vladimir Putin, “CIS Informal Summit,” Kremlin website, President of Russia, December 23, 2019, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62376>.

105 MFA Russia 🇷🇺 [@mfa_russia], “Zakharova on Estonian Foreign Minister’s Statements on the Country’s Right to Claim Damages for the ‘Soviet Occupation’: We Find It Unacceptable to Even Use the Notion of ‘Soviet Occupation,’ a Jesuit Construct Used to Interpret European Peoples’ Liberation from Nazi Enslavement,” Twitter, September 20, 2019, https://twitter.com/mfa_russia/status/1174966563734077444.

106 SOVA Issledovatel’skiy Tsentr, “Zhitel’ya Orenburgskoy oblasti obvinayut po st. 354.1 UK za repost o roli SSSR vo vtoroy mirovoy,” SOVA Tsentr website, May 23, 2023 <https://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/news/persecution/2023/05/d48148/>.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2019 over the start of World War II,¹⁰⁷ or the Kremlin's threats to begin legal proceedings against the Czech Republic following the Prague authorities' removal of a statue to Soviet war hero (and Prague Spring aggressor) Marshal Ivan Konev.¹⁰⁸ The Russian authorities have supported a Polish NGO, named Kursk (after the largest Soviet victory on the Eastern Front on World War II), which has made it its mission to renovate and protect Soviet-era monuments across Poland. They have restored dozens of monuments using Russian funds, but their work has been complicated by the Polish government's de-Communization laws that mandate the removal of more than 200 Soviet-era monuments.¹⁰⁹

As in Western discussions around controversial statues and monuments, Russian officials and their allies present these removals as an act of historical destruction and part of a wider negative trend toward rejecting the foundational historical narratives upon which national identities, the international system, and universal moral values have been built. This creates a dichotomy of remembrance, in which countries are either in touch with their memory and traditions or they are subjugated to supposed cultural colonization. Underpinning these activities, as discussed in the first section, is an idea of memory multipolarity fueled by illiberalism, or the rejection of liberal memory and a liberal way of remembrance in favor of anti-liberalism, tradition, and of course Russian influence. The preservation or defense of history easily merges with Russian discourses around traditional values, in which the Russian Orthodox Church plays an important role, as with Russkiy Mir, a foundation established in 2007 to promote Russia's cultural heritage and role in history as a civilizational benefit to the world. Less inclusively, bodies such as the Imperial Orthodox Palestinian Society (IOPS), which boasts of extensive government connections around the world, are designed to preserve "traditional Christian values in an increasingly decadent age" and to promote Russia's foreign policy aims, especially around questions of memory and heritage.¹¹⁰

More recently, the International Movement of Russophiles has taken on an active role with new branches opening across Africa, where they intend to open outposts in half of the countries on the continent.¹¹¹ The point of the Russophiles movement is, according to its chairman, that "Russia is the only country that provides an alternative to the unipolar world."¹¹² To strengthen this, the organization focuses not only on building historical monuments and spreading Russian culture and language, but also leads others in defending their traditions, memory, and "right to be oneself"

107 BBC, "Russia-Poland Row over Start of WW2 Escalates," BBC, December 31, 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-50955273>.

108 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID) of the Russian Federation, "Comment by the Russian Foreign Ministry's Information and Press Department on the Act of Vandalism Committed in Prague on the Monument to Soviet Marshal Ivan Konev," MID website, accessed August 7, 2023, <https://www.mid.ru/en/maps/cz/1570630/>; Reuters in Moscow, "Russia Opens Criminal Case after Czech Officials Remove Soviet Statue," *Guardian*, April 10, 2020, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/10/russia-opens-criminal-case-after-czech-officials-remove-soviet-statue>.

109 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID) of the Russian Federation, "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's Remarks at the 32nd Meeting of the Foreign Ministry's Council of the Heads of Constituent Entities of the Russian Federation, Moscow, December 11, 2018," MID website, December 11, 2018, <https://www.mid.ru/tv/?id=1580038&lang=en>; Matthew Luxmoore, "Why Russia Accuses Poland of Monumental Ingratitude," Coda Story (online newspaper), December 18, 2017, <https://www.codastory.com/rewriting-history/why-russia-is-accusing-poland-of-monumental-ingratitude/>.

110 Andrew Gilligan, "Establishment Flocks to Dine at Kremlin-Linked Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society," *Times*, March 3, 2019, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/establishment-flocks-to-dine-at-kremlin-linked-imperial-orthodox-palestine-society-zmg8dbkb>.

111 Russkiy Mir Foundation, "Russophile Movement to Open New Branches in Africa," Russkiy Mir website, accessed August 7, 2023, <https://russkiymir.ru/en/news/316153/>.

112 Russkiy Mir Foundation, "Russophile Movement to Open New Branches in Africa." A'

from a West that seeks to destroy or distort others' authentic national identities.¹¹³ Notably, former French President Charles de Gaulle's grandson, Pierre de Gaulle, was a participant at the launch of the International Movement of Russophiles in March 2023.¹¹⁴

In this way, memory defense forms part of a broader illiberal trajectory in which Russia supposedly defends religions and traditions under assault by Western powers. Prominent pro-Kremlin foreign affairs analyst Oleg Barabanov has characterized Western academia as overseeing "large strata of historical knowledge being erased from social memory. The fact is that entire histories of individual countries and peoples that are now on the 'wrong' side for one view or another are being crossed out and become a direct target for 'cancel culture.' Thus, here we see the struggle between the universalist and the national concept, not only in the sphere of identity and patterns of behavior, but also in relation to history, and within the emerging universalist canon of rules, where national historical identities can become victims."¹¹⁵ Elsewhere, national identity is depicted "as a form of geopolitical struggle," as can be seen in the title of a Valdai Club talk with Serbian political philosopher Miša Đurković.¹¹⁶

If in the liberal memory paradigm, reconciliation is achieved by confronting the past to learn the lessons it has to offer and thereby create space for different relations in the present, then in Russia's example, reconciliation is not *over* the past but *of* the past—repairing that which was broken. As evidence of this reparative approach to the past, Russia celebrates its return to countries it had metaphorically left, as in Lavrov's 2021 article, "Russia-Zimbabwe: Friendship Tested by Time," in the Zimbabwean newspaper *Herald*. The Russian foreign minister wrote about the historical dimension of the relationship and the importance of rekindling it, as if the intervening period, from 1991 to 2015, had been an anomaly now resolved.¹¹⁷ The Russian state-aligned media also reinforced this message during their coverage of the first Russia-Africa Summit, which took place in Sochi in 2019, and more recently the second summit, in 2023, held in Saint Petersburg. The pro-Kremlin tabloid quoted one Russian businessman in Africa named Sasha as follows: "Russia is on the way back! ... Our guys are coming as military and political consultants—serious guys. And they are here not only as bodyguards. It's an all-round approach, free of Soviet ideology. That was our mistake ... Africa is waiting for us, and we will be idiots if we are afraid to come back."¹¹⁸

113 Alla Shelyapina, " 'A Child Was Born, Now Our Task Is to Raise Him,' Moscow Establishes the International Russophile Movement," *Russkiy Mir* website, March 19, 2023, accessed August 6, 2023, <https://russkiymir.ru/en/publications/311418/>.

114 Russkiy Mir Foundation, "A Child Was Born."

115 Valdai Club, "History and Tasks of Geopolitics," Valdai Club website, accessed August 8, 2023, https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/history-and-tasks-of-geopolitics/?sphrase_id=1548797.

116 Valdai Club, "National Identity as a Form of Geopolitical Struggle: An Expert Discussion," Valdai Club website, accessed August 6, 2023, <https://valdaiclub.com/events/own/national-identity-as-a-form-of-geopolitical-struggle-an-expert-discussion/>.

117 Sergey Lavrov, "Stat'ya Ministra Inostrannykh Del Rossiyskoy Federatsii S.V.Lavrova 'Rossiya-Zimbabwe: druzhba, ispytannaya vremenem,' opublikovannaya zimbabviyskoy gazetoy 'Gerald,'" Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID) of the Russian Federation website, February 18, 2021, https://archive.mid.ru/web/guest/maps/zv/-/asset_publisher/vHPZijwZ7g1/content/id/4580510.

118 Dani Madrid-Morales, "How China, Turkey and Russia Influence the Media in Africa," Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Docslib: July 20, 2018: 124, <https://docslib.org/doc/5547151/how-china-turkey-and-russia-influence-the-media-in-africa-dani-madrid-morales> (original source in Russian: <https://www.kp.kz/daily/27070.4/4139322/>).

Conclusion

Russia's external uses of the past are rooted in its security and foreign policy doctrine, which places historical memory at the core of Russia's national identity and right to great-power status. Rather than just promoting its own historical narratives, Russia has adapted its approach to identify and tap into complementary foreign narratives, or at least exacerbate divisive ones that undermine its rivals. Russian memory actors use a wide range of tactics to support Russia's priorities in the sphere of geopolitical memory politics, which can be grouped into those pertaining to memory exports, alliances, offense, and defense. Memory exports and alliances inform memory diplomacy and are ways of promoting Russia, using its history as a soft-power resource. Memory offense and defense are practices within memory wars that indicate the geopolitical value placed by the Kremlin on protecting its own perceived historical resources.

Beyond attempting to police and influence which versions of history can and cannot be told, Russian doctrine also underscores the importance of historical memory in and of itself. The Russian government arrogates to itself a broader civilizational mission to not only preserve historical memory of the origins of the post-World War II international order, but also to assist others in defending their own historical renderings, and thus their identities and sovereignty. In this vision, Russia is defending countries' rights to remember differently and resist the "colonization" of the past by the West. This anti-liberal position allows Russia to appeal to a wide range of means of persuasion to reach various target audiences: those who decry cancel culture and those who decry American cultural hegemony, those who do not want to face the dark pages of their own countries' pasts and those who are angry about this very refusal to do so.

Propagating illiberal memory as an anti-colonial defense of the right to be oneself, to remember one's past, forms the ideational basis of Russia's conception of memory politics, both at home and abroad. However, it does not follow that memory is the sole power resource considered, nor is it the driving force behind Russian foreign policy. As depicted by memory restraint, and contained within the Foreign Policy Concept's assertion that the priority consideration is to be given to the level of friendliness of a target country or audience toward Russia, realist foreign policy demands can override any historical connection, and Russia's political uses of history change in accordance with the country's political relations. Episodes of Russian memory restraint suggest that Russia does not prioritize the political threat posed by external actors' embrace of antithetical narratives where there is no apparent political will to use the memory to challenge Russian geopolitical ambitions and/or identity. Russia's eventual memory engagement appears to be defined first and foremost by geopolitical competition against the West and the possibility of gaining influence, namely by targeting select groups or engaging with prominent narratives that either cause division within hostile states or encourage parts of their populations to sympathize with Russia.

The ability of one country to tap into the emotive power of another country's historical analogy, and the cultural memory upon which it draws, is a useful and widespread tool of public diplomacy. The use of history in this way is primarily a political act, whether liberal or illiberal, but Russia's use of history carries all the hallmarks of illiberal memory: there is no move towards reconciliation, no acceptance of crimes committed, no learning from its own past. Instead, there is an accusatory aggression towards geopolitical rivals whose memory cultures diverge

from Russia's, as well as consistent efforts to insert Russia or Russian interests into others' positive recollections of the past. This is not a normative distinction, but rather a differentiation between liberal and illiberal memory actors' attitudes towards remembrance.

Regardless of Russia's successes or failures in its own efforts, the internationalization of illiberal memory forms and practices is likely to grow in prominence due to their wide-ranging appeal to various political and national groups. With the rise of identity politics, history, or rather one's interpretation of history, becomes an important tool in terms of defining one's values, beliefs, belonging, and position in relation to the world around us. The growing political importance assumed by identity and memory, especially in secular and European societies, where memory plays a parabolic or even ideological role, will create opportunities for illiberal memory practices.¹¹⁹ As in Russia's case, these will take similar but distinct forms, "local variation[s] on the global trend of post-ideological political culture predicated on the backward glance at history."¹²⁰ In a relatively disrupted and disruptive era of memory politics, there is more to come from the past, or at least from the uses of it.

119 Margaret MacMillan, *The Uses and Abuses of History*, Main edition (London: Profile Books, 2009); Kopolov, *Memory Laws, Memory Wars*.

120 Kevin Platt, "A Backward Glance at a Backward Glance," in *Post-Soviet Nostalgia: Confronting the Empire's Legacies*, ed. Otto Boele, Boris Noordenbos, and Ksenia Robbe (London: Routledge, 2019), 232.