

## "With tears upon our eyes?": Commemorations of Victory Day in the Great Patriotic War in the school practice in the Soviet Union and Russia

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- The article describes the history of the appearance and origin of Victory Day in the Soviet era and the transformation of its ritual content in the conditions of the new Russia.
- The results of a comparative analysis of the main practices and rituals of Victory Day commemoration in the Soviet and Russian schools are described.
- It is shown that the commemorations of Victory Day in the modern Russian school are characterized by performativity, temporal inversion, repressive nature of some events.

**Purpose:** This article is devoted to the description and comparative analysis of the commemorations of Victory Day in the Great Patriotic War in the practice of Soviet and Russian school education, based on the example of the two regions of Central Russia (Tambov and Lipetsk region). The purpose of the article is to study the features of the transformation of the content and forms of organization of festive events and rituals of the holiday at the level of the school system.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The article was prepared on the basis of a wide range of the sources: educational and methodological materials, materials of social networks and school websites, legislative acts and normative documents of school institutions connected with patriotic education, and also qualitative observations of the authors with the support of several visual materials.

**Findings:** The analysis has shown that the activation of the patriotic rhetoric in modern Russia has transformed Victory Day into a central element of the official politics of memory, one of the most important resources of which is the system of school education and upbringing. At the same time, while preserving most of the external attributes and Soviet symbols of the holiday, the commemorative practices and rituals of celebrating Victory Day in the Russian school differ significantly from the Soviet era. This is due both to demographic and political causes, and to the growing influence of local practices of family memory. The performativity, temporal inversion, repressive nature of some events are typical of some commemorations of Victory Day in modern Russian school.

### **Keywords:**

National holidays, Victory Day, school rituals

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## 1 Introduction

National holidays are not just "national commemorative practices" (Gillis, 1994). National holidays outline the chronologically significant moment of the formation of a certain community - not so much as real as it seems for later generations. In this sense, the holiday is an important attribute of cultural memory, as it becomes a reason for the actualization of social ties and the maintenance of the existence of the community itself. In modern Russia there are several holidays that claim to be "national": Day of Russia (June 12), National Unity Day (November 4), Victory Day (May 9). However, only the last of them successfully carries out the tasks of transferring the necessary images of the state identity for the formation and is the most popular among the population.

Huge human sacrifices, decades of Soviet commemoration, and mass nostalgia for the Soviet times are the most important reasons for the enormous popularity of Victory Day in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945 in modern Russia. However, the transformation of Victory Day into the main national holiday started back in the Soviet times. The Victory Parade, which traditionally takes place on Red Square on May 9, is approaching the New Year's Eve celebrations according to television popularity ratings. In one of the most popular Soviet songs, which is a national anthem of Victory Day, there are the lines that Victory Day is a "holiday with tears upon our eyes". This phrase has always meant that the joy of the end of the war is accompanied by the sorrow for millions of the dead. However, does it remain so in the new Russia? Despite the great similarity of the official ceremonies and commemorative practices with the Soviet era, the semantic content and the set of ideas embedded in them have changed significantly. We will try to specify this thesis, using the comparative analysis of the commemorative practices of celebrating Victory Day in the system of school education in the Soviet era and in modern Russia. We illustrate the identified trends on the example of schools in the Tambov and Lipetsk regions.

The regions were chosen due to a number of factors. Tambov and Lipetsk regions are two bordering regions, which are located in Central Russia, about 500 km from Moscow. However, despite the same geographical location and natural conditions, they differ sharply in economic development and living standards (54 and 19 place, respectively, among 85 regions according to 2018), have a different history (Tambov is an old provincial city, Lipetsk is a relatively new city, which became the regional center only 64 years ago), the demographic and social situation. Based on these data, one would suggest serious differences in educational practices. However, the strategy of patriotic education in general is determined in Russia by the federal center. Thus, a comparison of the practices of celebrating national holidays in the two specified regions allowed us to identify general trends of change.

The article was prepared on the basis of a wide range of the sources: 1) educational and methodological materials: methodological recommendations, scenarios of different activities to celebrate Victory Day, published both in specialized methodological literature (pedagogical journals for teachers) and in forums and communities for teachers in social networks. In order to analyze Victory Day in the Soviet school the journals issued during that period were used; 2) the programs of State Patriotic Education (2000-2020), as well as local acts issued by the regional and school administration in accordance with the provisions of the Programs; 3)



special attention was paid to 4 schools of the Tambov region and 2 schools of the Lipetsk region. We chose schools that aren't similar to each other: two schools in the regional center, one of which is located in a new district and is currently the largest school in the city of Tambov (school №36), the second one is a classical gymnasium located in the historic center of the city, whose students are selected for admission (gymnasium №12). Among the rural schools of the Tambov region, we chose the school in the village of Dmitrievschina of the Rasskazovsky district (a small junior high school that meets the needs of only this village) and a school in the village of Degtyanka of the Sosnovsky district (the central school for several villages, one of the largest regional rural schools). In Lipetsk, Lyceum №44 and Secondary School №4 were chosen. Lyceum №44 is the best school in the city and it appeared two decades ago. School 4 is one of the oldest schools in the city, but at the same time it is a typical secondary school. Choosing the most dissimilar schools, we sought to identify the common and different in the celebration of Victory Day in these educational institutions and to analyze the possible causes of differences. Throughout 2016 - 2018 the authors of the article attended various patriotic events in these schools, communicated with the teachers and parents.

## 2 National Days in School: the case of Russia

National holidays continue to be one of the most important factors in the construction of social solidarity of communities and the national identity of states (McCrone, D., & McPherson, G. 2009). Despite the presence of a number of global trends, talking about post-national identity requires caution. Post-national identity is not opposed to national one, but they are interdependent. We are dealing with some elements of post-national identity, arising in addition to and within our usual forms of national identification. Moreover, the postnational elements penetrate the very practices of national identification, complementing, combining or transforming them. These trends contribute to the transformation of national holidays. At the same time, as many studies show, while maintaining external forms the very content of national holidays changes (Schall, 2014; Buxrud & Fangen, 2017; McCrone & McPherson, 2009). The controversial situation is observed in the framework of the national holidays' celebration at schools. However, while maintaining the external forms of the national holiday at school the content transformation can be associated not only with post-national trends, but also with the influence of the political context (Acikalin & Kilic, 2017). A similar situation is observed in Russia where the activation of patriotic rhetoric after 2014 has become a powerful factor of social consolidation in the conditions of the people's deteriorating economic situation in the country. Politics has always interfered in staging and carrying Victory Day. The first practices of Victory Day celebration completely repeated the scenarios of the Soviet pre-war holidays and included folk festivities on the streets, the sale of food, drinks and holiday symbols. They also included the decoration of public buildings and houses with portraits of party leaders and relevant thematic posters. Thus, the rituals that had been approved by the celebration of the October Revolution and were a specific form of "social choreography" (Hewitt, 2005) were used.

The holiday was supposed to broadcast live experience of the participants of the events, solidarity of pupils, teachers, members of their families. That is, the festive rituals of



celebrating Victory Day derived from the celebration of the revolution with the preservation of their symbolic value. An exception was the festive firework, which would later become an obligatory element of the main holidays in the post-Soviet period. After 1965, a ritual of "minute of silence" appeared in all cities of the Soviet Union, as well as a ritual of laying floral tribute at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was a memorial complex in the center of a Soviet city, with the names of its residents who died in the war and the flame of "Eternal fire" (Photo 1).



Photo 1. Soviet and English schoolchildren laid floral tribute at the memorial "Eternal fire" in Sochi, 9 May 1990

The Parade on Red Square, which included the passage of columns of military and armored vehicles of those military units that had taken part in the war played symbolic significant role. Some changes appeared only in the era of Gorbachev on the Victory Day parade on May 9, 1985. Not only representatives of military schools and combat arms, but also the veterans of the war (Photo 2).



Photo 2. The Parade on Red Square, 9 May 1985

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Victory Day was one of the few public holidays in Russia, preserved from the Soviet era. In modern Russia, Victory is the transferring and reproduction of the corresponding ontological status, the people-winner. The public manifestation of the status acts as a certain symbolic defense and the desire to recall the military might of Russia. The participation in the events is devoid of reflection, any reflection, especially doubt, is perceived as a desecration of memory of Victory (Торговцам одеждой, 2015; Серенко, 2012; Романова, 2012). The adoption of Victory Day as the main national holiday is considered by the political power in Russia as the basis for the formation of civil identity and patriotism.

In general, the place of the Victory cult in modern Russia fully corresponds to the ideas of the civil religion in the interpretation of E. Durkheim (Durkheim, 1965). He stressed that contract relations are not enough to preserve social cohesion, rituals that transfer values recognized as sacred by communities are also needed. Citizens need to feel connected with something "sacral", regardless of whether secular or religious is an event. For our research, three themes will be of fundamental importance. They are connected with the substantiation of rituals in E. Durkheim's works: ritual has something to do with sacred; ritual contributes to feelings of social solidarity; ritual works to maintain the social order. These three aspects will be used by us as criteria for comparing the Victory Day commemoration practices in the Soviet and Russian schools. Following Richard A. Quantz, we will interpret the rituals as "formalized, symbolic performance" (Quantz, 1999, 506). This definition, according to the author, allows us to consider a ritual not only as a static object, having a structure (extremes of E. Durkheim's approach), but also as a dynamic, multivocal, symbolic process (V. Turner approach). It is important to note that this approach to the definition of a ritual, as well as the E. Durkheim criteria outlined above have already been applied to the analysis of the rituals in the modern school (Quantz, 1999).

### 3 Rituals of Victory in School Commemoration

Like the Soviet schools, Russian schools have always fulfilled not only the function of education, but also the function of upbringing. The main rituals and commemorative actions of Victory Day, which passed from the Soviet school to the Russian one, did not undergo significant changes. At the same time, despite the preservation of most of the external attributes and symbols of the holiday, the semantic component and narratives of the commemorative practices in the Russian school are significantly different. We identified the most important commemorative practices of Victory Day in the Soviet and Russian schools and compared them in the light of three aspects of the understanding ritual in the theory of E. Durkheim. Such a comparison will allow us to fix the transformation of the essence and basic meanings of the commemorative actions.

#### The sacred in the rituals of Victory Day

According to E. Durkheim, the separation of reality into the "sacred" and the "profane" plays a key role in both civil and religious rituals. This division is, for Durkheim, one of attitude. Those objects toward which we maintain an attitude of "respect" belong to the sacred realm. Those



objects toward which we feel no such sentiments belong to the profane realm: "We get the impression that we are in relations with two distinct sorts of reality and that a sharply drawn line of demarcation separates them from each other: on the one hand is the world of profane things, on the other, that of sacred things" (Durkheim, 1965: 243). The image of Victory is central to the understanding of the sacred in the commemorative rituals of the Soviet and Russian times. The most striking manifestation of Russian schoolchildren's participation in sacral rituals is the practice of the guard of honor at the "Eternal fire".

In every big city of Russia since the Soviet times there is a special place, which is consisted of a memorial to soldiers and victims of war, marble sculptures and the "Eternal fire". Every year on May 9 flowers are laid and solemn and memorable speeches are pronounced around this memorial. Moreover, even now in Lipetsk, graduates of schools on the school prom day in late June, that is not related to Victory in the war at all, bring bunches of flowers to this particular memorial. That's why the honor guard duty near the "Eternal fire" has always been considered an extremely responsible and important act of memory of the war. In 1977, in Lipetsk and Tambov, "Watch of Memory of the Guard of Honor" (Пост № 1 у монумента «Вечная слава»; Пост № 1 на Площади Героев) was officially created, and the place for carrying the guard of honor was called Post No. 1 (Photo 3). The emergence of the commemorative practice was characteristic of the late 70's.

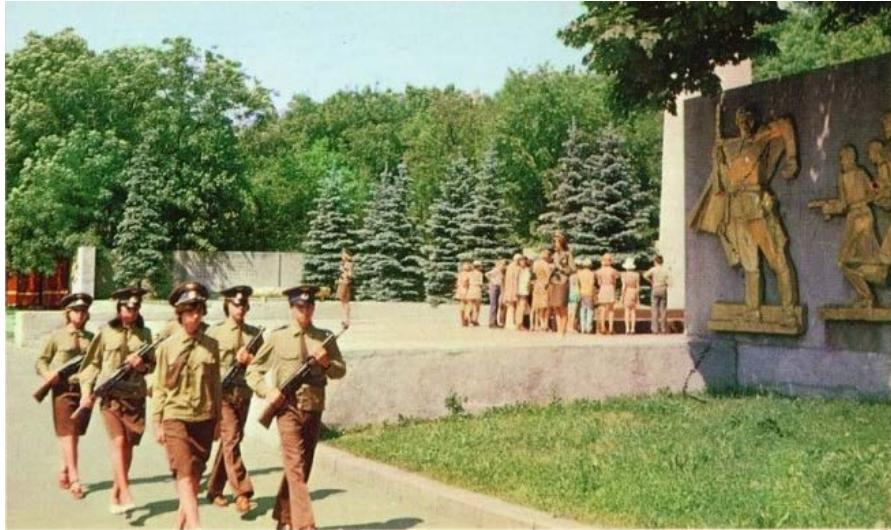


Photo 3. The Guard of Honor in Lipetsk at Heroes Square (1978)

The practice included the presence of three schoolchildren, dressed in the military uniform of the armed forces of the USSR and holding fake small arms. Every hour the guard changed, which fully corresponded to the practice of the guard of honor at the "Eternal Fire" in Moscow. The commemorative practice involving schoolchildren was obligatory for the whole territory of the Soviet Union. It presupposed the same ritual and has remained unchanged until today. The only difference between the regions of Russia is the architecture of the memorial itself the new uniform. Schoolchildren make the same oath. The order of guarding has the same time

intervals and strictly corresponds to the samples approved in the Soviet era. At the same time, the transformation of the semantic contents of the ritual is important. During the Soviet times, only the best pupils of the school who had excellent academic achievements and who were active members of the pioneer organization had the right to take part in carrying the Guard of Honor. In modern Russia, the honor guard duty is the responsibility of all high school students and is formalized by the order of the Head teacher of a school (photo 4).



Photo 4. Common soldier Igor Pecherikin at the Post No. 1, Heroes Square, Lipetsk (2018)

Schools receive a formal request from the authorities and allocate a certain number of students in accordance with the plan. Moreover, in the Soviet era flowers were laid at the "Eternal Fire" only on May 9, but today flowers are also laid on the memorable dates related to other conflicts, the Afghan war and the two Chechen wars. It shows that the significance of the Great Patriotic War is used as a common symbolic platform for the theme of continuity of the heroic experience in Russia. However, this diminishes the experience of participating in various wars of different historical significance. Post No. 1 turns out to be the guard of honor in the name of the heroism of all Soviet and Russian soldiers of all wars that Russia led. It should also be noted that the laying of flowers to the memorial is also preserved in small towns (Photo 5), and the care for the monuments by the schoolchildren is either absent or includes formal things, as they are regularly painted. Restoration no longer corresponds to the norms of school labor education.



Photo 5. Laying the floral tribute at the memorial of the victims,  
v. Dmitrievschina, Tambov region, 9 May 2018

### Social Solidarity in Victory Day Rituals

Social solidarity is the reverse side of the sacred in the theory of E. Durkheim. The feelings of solidarity are created in the process of joint actions of individuals, which are integrated by special symbols of group identity. Moreover, "what is frequently lost in these studies is Durkheim's recognition that the key to understanding ritual lies in the noncognitive effects of participation rather than in the cognitive meanings per se of the symbols around which rituals are performed" (Quantz, 1999: 497). It is the values of solidarity that are consonant with the principles of communism that were the reverse side of the sacred status of Victory Day in the Soviet school. Solidarity is an essential element of commemorative rituals in the Russian school. At the same time, the transformation of the sociopolitical system, as well as the dynamics of generations in the modern one, led to a change of some elements of the solidarity rituals' content. We'll consider this on the example of such practices as a meeting with veterans, participation in a demonstration on May 9 and the action "St. George's Ribbon".

Historically, the first commemorative event that was held at schools in the 60s - 70s and directly related to the Victory is the practice of meetings with veterans. This practice has always been of particular importance, despite the contradictory attitude towards the veterans throughout the Soviet history (Edele, 2008). Since Victory Day is a day off, meetings with the veterans during the Soviet era were held at schools a few days before the holiday or directly on the squares on May 9. The veterans came to the lessons, which were named "lessons of courage" (Сохраняя память, 2018) in the Soviet school. The lesson was not included in the number of educational subjects and acted solely as a patriotic event. During the lesson the veterans talked about the events, hardships and personal experiences during the war. Despite the fact that there are fewer and fewer war participants every year, the veterans in modern

Russia continue to remain, as in the Soviet school, a central element of commemorative practices (Photo 6).



Photo 6. «The lesson of courage» at primary school, Tambov, 7 May 2018

However, the practice of working with them has changed not only because of the age of the veterans, but also because of the transformation of some commemorative strategies. First, the place of the passing veterans of the Great Patriotic War is occupied by the participants of other military operations, who perform the same functions. They talk about the need to defend the Motherland and provide examples of heroism. Moreover, in the modern Russian school, the veterans of other wars, servicemen and even veterans of the Ministry of Emergency Situations come to meet with the veterans of the Great Patriotic War on May 9 (Photo 7).



Photo 7. The veterans of the Ministry of Emergency Situations together with the veterans of the Great Patriotic War on the Victory Day celebration in one of Tambov schools, 2017

The veterans of the local conflicts (in Afghanistan, Chechnya) talk about their victories, promoting courage and readiness for heroism. It is interesting that the narrative of this discourse is in many respects similar to the narrative of the veterans of the Great Patriotic War. It shows that the very structure of the stories about the Victory in the war of 1941-1945 serves as a delineating, semantic framework for any other stories about the wars of Russia and the courage of its soldiers. The veterans have no other language of description than the one formed by the Soviet discourse on Victory. Thus, even if there are no survivors of the living memory of the war, the broadcast of the discourse, characteristic of "meetings with the veterans" as an indispensable attribute of the celebration of Victory Day, will be preserved. If possible, the participation of the veterans is even intensified. It is not limited to meetings, concert visits, but includes their presence at other events that have appeared only in modern Russia. For example, in the Tambov region the annual sports contest "Marathon of Victory" has been held for several years already, where the veterans act as a jury (Photo 8).



Photo 8. The annual sports contest of schoolchildren "Marathon of Victory" in Tambov in the presence of the war veterans

Secondly, personal communication with the veterans gradually gives way to indirect methods of communication. Instead of the veterans, meetings with schoolchildren are attended not only by the participants in other later wars, but also by the "children of war", witnesses of military operations. The proposed scenarios for the celebration of Victory Day at school continue to insist on the need to appeal to the living memory if not of the war participants, then at least of the remaining witnesses of that time in order to avoid "distorting the image of the war of 1941-1945 and leveling the heroic deed of our people" (Картушина, 2005: 4). Because of the shortage of real witnesses (especially in small towns), there is a change in commemorative strategies. For example, students are encouraged to record the memories that they have heard from their relatives previously. The indirect ways of communication with the veterans include common cases when schoolchildren give flowers to the people who carry portraits of the veterans during the "Immortal Regiment". The tradition of giving flowers to the

veterans (mostly red carnations) has derived from the Soviet times as a tribute to their feat. Now, the person who carries the portrait of the veteran acts as a mediator between him and the giver. The flowers are not offered to him, but to the veteran.

The action "Immortal Regiment" became the most widespread event of recent years. Since less and less veterans can take part in the parade, the organizers, relying on the tradition to come with the porters of the relatives who took part in the war to the Victory memorials, decided to arrange a procession with photos of the war veterans, rear workers, blockade workers, children of war (Charter of the organization "Immortal Regiment", 2017). In 2012, 15 cities took part in the action, in 2013 - 120 cities, in 2014 the number was more than 500. As for 2018, the action is supported by "Ruspatriotcentre" and the Federal Agency for Youth Affairs ("Rusyouth"), is financed from the federal center.

The appearance of the action "Immortal regiment" had not only political significance, but also a demographic meaning. It is associated with the death of most veterans of the Great Patriotic War. Such a transformation of the memory of the war from a communicative to a cultural one puts not the veterans but their descendants in the center of attention within the framework of the all-Russian commemorative action "Immortal Regiment" (Бессмертный полк России, 2018). On the morning of May 9, in every Russian city, central roads are closed and thousands of Russians marched on them. They carry portraits of their deceased relatives, symbolizing the continuity of the Victory in the war and the memory of the victims of the Soviet people (Photo 9).



Photo 9. "The Immortal Regiment" in St. Petersburg on May 9, 2018

The appearance of this event allowed to build a certain relationship between the communicative and cultural memory of the war in Russia. It also contributed to the greater influence of the official politics of memory on local memories of the family memory of Russians, which were often in opposition to the images of the past broadcast by the state. It is the family memory that provided for decades the spiritual space, where the theme of war was presented from the point of view of the enormous sacrifices of the people and personal losses.

Despite the fact that the "Immortal Regiment" is not officially connected with school education, the resource of educational institutions is usually involved in the event. If in large cities (Tambov, Lipetsk) the participation of schoolchildren in it is encouraged (free production of a banner with a photo of a veteran, the organization of thematic columns), it is not obligatory, but at rural schools the participation of all pupils and their families is strictly obligatory. The refusal leads not only to reprimanding the student, but also to public censure, the consequence of which is further problems in learning and communication. Children and their parents are the central participants of the rural processions of the "Immortal Regiment" (Photo 10).



Photo 10. Schoolchildren with the portraits of their relatives in the "Immortal Regiment", 9 May 2018 (v. Dmitrievschina, Tambov region)

As a rule, the school administration does not explain the need for participation, considering it is unnecessary. At the heart of this position is the idea of the sacred Victory. However, if comments are necessary, they speak about the correct upbringing of children and the fact that only teachers and parents can protect the memory of ancestors from distorting and rewriting history by "our enemies". Speaking about enemies, they mean the entire Western world. The processions of the "Immortal Regiment" themselves often resemble religious processions, in which the photos of the veterans are sometimes mixed with icons of saints (Обухов, 2016). Thus, the participation of schoolchildren in the procession is not only a tribute to memory, but also a ritual of the civil religion in the treatment of Durkheim, the consequence of which should be the strengthening of solidarity. If traditional meetings with the veterans are designed to transfer the image of the winning nation from the past (veteran) through the present to the future (the children), then the "Immortal Regiment" is an inversion of time in which the past is in the present, and the future is beyond the continuing moment . It is curious that the obligatory nature of participation in the action "Immortal Regiment" has already

caused several conflict situations. So, on April 22, 2018 schoolchildren from the city of Korolev (Moscow region) wrote a complaint about coercion to take part in the "Immortal Regiment" on May 9. The complaints led to numerous conversations of the school administration with the students of the class and their parents. At first, the school administration refused to organize its own column in the "Immortal Regiment". But then it was decided that the school column would still be there but without the "complainants" (Литой, 2018).

The concept of conformity is very important in order to participate in all events. People should wear parade dress, the St. George ribbon is pinned to the left of the chest, any conversations during the festive concert or procession "Immortal Regiment" are perceived as a display of disrespect for the heroic deed of veterans, disregard for Victory. The participation in the action "Immortal Regiment" is not strictly regulated, however, more claims are made to schoolchildren than to ordinary participants (clothing, organization, etc.). The appeal "to be worthy of memory" is the main theme of the scenarios dedicated to Victory Day in schools, which are included in thematic books for schoolchildren (Казаков & Шорыгина, 2011: 44).

Another key Soviet commemorative practice that exists in Russian schools from the Soviet times is the participation of schoolchildren in the Victory Parades, which are held on May 9 in every major Russian city. If there are military personnel in the city, then the servicemen of local garrisons and troops must take part in the parade. For example, in Lipetsk, the military pilots take a key part in the parade, while in Tambov the parade participants are traditionally the soldiers of the local garrison and servicemen of internal troops and police. Usually the parade is held on the morning of May 9 in the central square of the cities near the Victory Memorials. The officials read speeches, after which the columns of soldiers, police officers and other security services march on the square. The schoolchildren dressed in the uniform of the Great Patriotic War finish the festive parade (photo 11).



Photo 11. Pupils of primary school take part in the Victory Parade  
Lipetsk, 9 May 2018

After the main official events, there are open field kitchens in the city's parks where everyone can try the food of the war years and where the music of the war time plays. In general, the participation of primary school pupils, dressed in the uniform of the war of 1941-1945 is an important element in the conduct of patriotic actions that are not related to the celebration of the victory over Germany. So, on April 17, 2018 in the 4th school of the city of Lipetsk within the framework of the project "The Living Memory of Generations" memorial plaques were erected for the Lipetsk citizens who died in the Afghan war (Торжественное открытие, 2018). The children, dressed in the uniform of the Great Patriotic War, opened the event (photo 12).



Photo 12. The participants of the event on April 17, 2018. School 4, Lipetsk

However, since 2017 the participation of schoolchildren in the general columns of the festive procession has been supplemented by the participation of the representatives of the "Unarmy" (Young Army) in the parades. This children's non-governmental organization was established on the basis of the Ministry of Defense and actively uses the resources of schools in every region of Russia. The organization's goal is to prepare young people for military service and to promote patriotic traditions. On May 9, 2017 in Red Square in Moscow the students of the Unarmy marched in the parade like other servicemen (Парад Победы!, 2018). After that, in all Russian cities they also became a part of the festive parade (photo 13). The Unarmy is an attempt to rehabilitate the Soviet organization RAAFNVS (Russian Army, Air Force and Navy Volunteer Society), which was also engaged in the active development of young people's military skills and was one of the elements of patriotic education in the USSR. The key difference between the Unarmy and the RAAFNVS is that the Russian analogue does not have a significant ideological platform, and patriotic education generally consists of military training, learning military history and the development of a sense of collectivism among pupils.



Photo 13. The "Unarmy" students as the participants at the rehearsals of the Victory parade in Tambov, April, 2018

The most noticeable commemorative practice that has affected all spheres of Russian society and caused a wide response in the world is the action "St. George's ribbon". This action has taken place in Russia since 2005 in all educational institutions. Despite the fact that the ad itself is a recommendation, most teachers and people who work in education insist that the ribbons must be worn by all schoolchildren. As a symbol of memory of the feat of the Russian people in the Great Patriotic War, the action is positioned as a non-profit and non-political one (Опубликован Кодекс "Георгиевской ленточки", 2006). However, the use of St. George's ribbon as one of the main symbols denoting the supporters of the pro-Russian side in the conflict between Russia and the Ukraine and the general patriotic rise in Russia led to the fact that the St. George's ribbon became an identification indicator and lost its symbolic significance of memory. Teachers say in an interview that until 2014 its wearing was welcomed (and among teachers, not schoolchildren), but there were no attempts to make schoolchildren wear the ribbons. At some schools in the Tambov region, according to the parents, the child was threatened with dismissal if he came to school without a ribbon, although there were no such real cases in our research. The refusal to wear a ribbon is perceived by the teachers and the school administration as a refusal to be a citizen. You can pay attention that on most of the photos used in the research, students wear St. George's ribbon during all the commemorative events on May 9 (photo 14).



Photo 14. Students with St/George's ribbons give flowers to the veterans  
9 May 2018 (Tambov)

It is interesting that the space of the war commemorations is not limited only to May 9 in school life. The action "Candle of Memory" has become equally important in recent years. It is held late in the evening on June 21 and has already become official in Lipetsk. The pupils of the senior classes of all schools and universities are obliged to come to Sobornaya Square by 22.00 and follow the Parade to the Victory Memorial in Heroes Square with lighted candles (21 июня в Липецке, 2018). The participation in the action is obligatory for all schools in the city of Lipetsk, it is formalized by the relevant orders of educational authorities (Участие в акции «Свеча памяти», 2018). The action gathered more than 2,5 thousand people. In addition to schoolchildren, citizens, students, 200 employees of law enforcement agencies, representatives of patriotic public associations and government bodies took part in it and carried candles (photo 15).



Photo 15. Lipetsk citizens and schoolchildren take part in the "Candle of Memory" 21 June 2018

### Social order and the rituals of Victory Day

To understand the transformation of the Victory Day rituals, the theme of maintaining social order is no less important. Applying the ideas of E. Durkheim to the educational practice of Basil Bernstein pointed to ritual as a structure that serves the status quo: "Here [in education], the symbolic function of ritual is to relate the individual through ritualistic acts to a social order, to heighten respect for that order, to revivify that order within the individual and, in particular, to deepen acceptance of the procedures which are used to maintain continuity, order and boundary and that control ambivalence towards the social order" (Bernstein, 1977: 54). Commemoration of Victory in the Soviet and Russian schools also involves practices that develop activity and patriotism among schoolchildren. In this regard, we turn to holiday concerts, sports and military events.

Comparing the repertoire of festive concerts in the Soviet era and in the modern Russian school, it is difficult to talk about any significant changes. A festive concert is held at a school and includes songs by the choir and various theatrical performances, dances. But earlier the main spectators at such concerts were the veterans, now at most schools the concert is an amateur performance for other teachers and the school administration. In the primary classes of major schools, a cultural program is usually limited to attending a performance or a concert organized by professional performers. In the villages, parents and representatives of the rural administration are often invited to the concert. If there are veterans, then they are given flowers and postcards. We can provide an example of a concert in one of the best lyceums in Lipetsk, Lyceum No. 44, which took place on May 7, 2018 (Состоялся праздничный концерт, 2018). The honorary guests of the event were the veterans of pedagogical work, former teachers, deputy directors of the school. Lyceum students, a choir of high school students performed vocal and dance numbers. (photo 16). It is important to note that most of the concert programme items were not directly related to the theme of the war. These were traditional Russian songs, choreography, theatrical performances of the past years, which had been highly appreciated at other competitions. Thus, in this case too, the theme of Victory Day turned out to be a kind of worldview framework that includes various events of different meaning and character.



Photo 16. The choir of senior pupils of the lyceum No. 44 in Lipetsk at a festive concert on May 7, 2018.

However, the traditional events of the celebration of Victory Day at Russian schools don't include only a concert. The Russian school inherited the practice of organizing various sports competitions devoted to May 9. As in the case of concerts, these sporting events can be held at any other time of the year and are only a part of the general activity program of the school. It needs to organize intensive activities within the general sense framework Victory Day. So, for example, in the Tambov region the annual sports contest "Marathon of Victory" has been held for several years. This event is a sporting event in a short distance race for primary school students (photo 17). Accordingly, a fairly simple sports event receives a special status, since it is held on May 9 or on the eve of the holiday.



Photo 17. Primary school students at the annual sports contest "Marathon of Victory" (9 May 2018, Tambov)

The surviving Soviet attribute of the Victory Day celebrations is the military game "Zarnitsa". The game was invented in 1964 by a rural teacher, and we returned to it in 2001 in accordance with the ideas, written in the first Program of patriotic education. "Zarnitsa" is a military sports game in which students should show the ability to march in ceremonial step, reach qualifying sports standards (running, jumping, obstacle course, strength exercises) and dismantle the Kalashnikov assault rifle (Photo 18).



Photo 18. A school student dismantles the Kalashnikov assault rifle,  
9 May 2018

However, modern schoolchildren in the Tambov region are more likely to answer questions about the history, which, as a rule, test the knowledge of the most striking facts of the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945, then to demonstrate the ability to defend the Motherland. Moreover, as in the case of other commemorations there is no ideology behind the game "Zarnitsa" in the Russian version like the one in the USSR. This is a set of practices demonstrating military skills, the ability to obey orders and know the generally accepted set of facts about the history of the Great Patriotic War.

The social order, transmitted through the Victory Day rituals in the Russian school like in the Soviet era, does not tolerate ideological dissension. Everything connected with a different interpretation of the war or Victory is subjected to harsh criticism and public censure. An example of the recent years was the story of the public harassment of a schoolchild, Nikolai Desyatichenko. On November 19, 2017, he gave a speech in the Bundestag and spoke about visiting the graves of Wehrmacht soldiers in Russia. In his speech there was sympathy for those Wehrmacht soldiers who did not want to fight and died in Russia (Мерзликин, 2017). It was perceived in Russian social networks as "betrayal". A number of officials and bloggers came out with a demand to "check the validity of the statements of the Russian schoolchild." The schoolboy had to delete all the accounts in social networks because of the huge number of negative comments and threats. Despite the positive comments which were made by Dmitry Peskov, Vladimir Putin's spokesman, the school of Nikolay Desyatichenko was checked.

#### **4 Memory of Victory in the Modern Russian School: Toward a Predictable Past?**

Patriotic education in the modern Russian school is regulated by the programs of patriotic education, which have been adopted in Russia since 2000. The actions of each program are extended for 5 years. It is interesting that the anniversary of Victory becomes a kind of indicator of the fulfillment of the program. The First Program declared the goal of creating a system of patriotic education (special centers, movements, organization of extracurricular



activities, etc.), while the whole Russian society was the target of the impact. Then the authors' ambitions decreased, and the second Program (2005-2010) focused on young people (the main funding was received by the education authorities). The goal was the need to create tolerance and actualize the Soviet idea of friendship among nations. The Third Program (2011-2015) stated "the formation of a patriotic education system". Since 2011 the growth of the conservative trend has been observed, within which the Program promotes continuity of the Soviet system of patriotic upbringing. The Fourth Program (2016-2020) speaks about the need for a modern and scientific approach. However, some conservative trends remain (Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation, 2015). The regional and municipal programs that determine the plan of activities in educational institutions, as well as the procedure for financing are adopted, relying on the federal programs. Until 2015 the main activity on May 9 was a festive concert and military sports game "Zarnitsa", which did not directly link to Victory Day. But while implementing the third Program of patriotic education, and especially after the patriotic turn of 2014, the inclusion of schoolchildren in the celebration was intensified.

It should be noted that while some Soviet practices have become a part of the Russian celebration of Victory Day in schools, there is one important difference between them. The Soviet commemorative strategy was not aimed at fostering patriotism through the memory of Victory Day. The veterans talked about their deeds, "Zarnitsa" prepared "for work and defense." However, these rituals were based on the desire to emphasize the difference between the present day and the military one. The Soviet school broadcast the need for peace and showed a desire for it. The veterans were thanked for "a peaceful sky over our heads", and Victory Day was presented as a holiday of the end of the war. With the help of this distinction, the successes of the socialist system were emphasized. According to the official propaganda, it was possible to defeat fascism, to restore the country after the war and "to convince half of Europe of the correctness of the socialist path".

In today's Russian school there is an identification of present time with a stereotyped image of the military period. The formation of patriotism turned into militaristic tendencies. It is difficult to imagine an answer "We can do it again!" (a refrain of modern commemorative practices) to a veteran in the Soviet era after he had told his story. The readiness to "do it again" is a consequence of the formed notion of war as a place of heroism and deeds, but not pain and suffering. The basic constructed emotions in the modern Russian school are not gratitude, but pride. The further the Great Patriotic War is, the more actively the fact that schoolchildren have the right to pride is inculcated in their minds. The reason for it is that the events of 1945 are presented as a common Victory of the Soviet (Russian) people and they belong to the state-winner. That is, pride turns out to be a duty, like wearing a St. George's ribbon (its motto is "I remember, I'm proud") or participation in the "Immortal Regiment". Some modern methodological books advise, "Even before going to school, it is necessary to form the children's initial ideas about the heroism of our people in the Great Patriotic War, to awaken pride of belonging to Russia" (Картушина, 2005: 2) It is interesting that not only the majority of the Soviet practices are preserved, but the discourse itself, which accompanies the narrative of the celebrations in modern schools. The children are invited to tell about "the price of Victory, fearless heroes of the war" (Казаков & Шорыгина, 2011: 3). The children are told that



"at the cost of huge losses, our people and the Red Army managed to save not only Europe but the whole world from the fascism" (Казаков & Шорыгина, 2011: 3).

Modern commemorative practices are directed to the maximum possible identification. Their main feature is the increased performativity, which is characteristic of modern commemoration in general, and is required from schoolchildren. Now it is not enough just to remember, it is necessary to show and prove that "I really remember". It is achieved by the participation of school students in various rituals. And such performativity and fusion of rituals are represented by teachers as one of the ways to avoid the distortion of history.

The performativity of modern practices increases the relevance of the ideas of biopolitics. A memorial in modern practices becomes the body of a descendant, which is used to wear a St. George's ribbon or a portrait of a veteran. These practices, declared as a tribute to memory, in fact ensure transferring the sacred concept of the accomplished feat, to which now every Russian citizen has relation through this collective body, that includes the veterans and their descendants. Taking into account the dominant place of Victory in the symbolic pantheon, the inclusion of schoolchildren in the Victory celebration practices can be considered as the introduction of young citizens to the collective body of Leviathan.

## 5 Conclusions

Thus, the activation of patriotic rhetoric in modern Russia has transformed Victory Day into a central element of the official politics of memory, one of the most important resources of which is the system of school education and upbringing. The place of the cult of Victory in modern Russia fully corresponds to the ideas of the civil religion in the interpretation of E. Durkheim. Participation of schoolchildren in the commemorations of Victory Day acts in modern Russia not only as a tribute to memory, but appears as rituals of the civil religion, the consequence of which should be the strengthening of solidarity, the sacred and social order. At the same time, while preserving most of the external attributes and symbols of the holiday, the commemorative practices of celebrating Victory Day in the Russian school are significantly different from the Soviet era. It is due both to demographic and political causes, and to the growing influence of local practices of family memory. Performativity, temporal inversion, repressive nature of some events are typical of the commemorations of Victory Day in modern Russian school.

## 6 Acknowledgements

The article was prepared with the financial support of the Russian Science Foundation, the grant No. 17-78-20149 "The cultural memory of Russia in the situation of global migration challenges: conflicts of representations, risks of oblivion, transformation strategies".



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## Pictures

Picture 1: Семейный фотоархив семьи Экштут [Retro View of Mankind's Habilitat], 8 Августа [August] 2017 [www.pastvu.com/p/641682](http://www.pastvu.com/p/641682)

Photo credit: Semen Ekhtout

Picture 2: Мир тесен [The world is small], 10 Мая [May] 2015

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Photo credit: Ivan Petrov

Picture 3: Липецк. Каким он был в 70-80 годы XX века. Найдете знакомые улицы и районы? [Lipetsk. What it was in the 70-80 years of the twentieth century. Can you find familiar streets and districts?], 1 Июня [June] 2015 <https://www.colors.life/post/25686/>

Photo credit: Snezhana Denisovna

Picture 4: Пост № 1 на Площади Героев в г. Липецке [Post number 1 on the Heroes' Square in Lipetsk], 15 Мая [May] 2018 <https://vk.com/club9079476>

Photo credit: Igor Pecherikin

Picture 5: Фотография из личного архива Оксаны Головашиной [Photo from Oksana Golovashina's personal archive], 9 Мая [May] 2018

Photo credit: Oksana Golovashina

Picture 6: Фотография из личного архива Оксаны Головашиной [Photo from Oksana Golovashina's personal archive], 7 Мая [May] 2018

Photo credit: Oksana Golovashina

Picture 7: Фотография из личного архива Оксаны Головашиной [Photo from Oksana Golovashina's personal archive], 7 Мая [May] 2018

Photo credit: Oksana Golovashina

Picture 8: Фотография из личного архива Оксаны Головашиной [Photo from Oksana Golovashina's personal archive], 8 Мая [May] 2018

Photo credit: Oksana Golovashina

Picture 9: Шар. Журнал для ума и сердца [Ball. Journal for the mind and heart], 10 Мая [May] 2016 <http://svo.spb.ru/kartinki/den-pobedy-v-sankt-peterburge-foto.html>

Picture 10: Фотография из личного архива Оксаны Головашиной [Photo from Oksana Golovashina's personal archive], 9 Мая [May] 2018

Photo credit: Oksana Golovashina

Picture 11: Фотография из личного архива Андрея Линченко [Photo from Andrei Linchenko's personal archive], 9 Мая [May] 2018

Photo credit: Andrei Linchenko

Picture 12: Торжественное открытие мемориальной доски [Official site of the school No. 4 in Lipetsk named after L.A. Smyk], 17 Апреля [April] 2018 <http://lipetsk-school4.ucoz.ru>



Picture 13: Фотография из личного архива Оксаны Головашиной [Photo from Oksana Golovashina's personal archive], 20 Апреля [April] 2018

Photo credit: Oksana Golovashina

Picture 14: Фотография из личного архива Оксаны Головашиной [Photo from Oksana Golovashina's personal archive], 9 Мая [May] 2018

Photo credit: Oksana Golovashina

Picture 15: Без формата.RU [Without formalities], 22 июня [June] 2018

<http://lipeck.bezformata.ru/listnews/lipetcke-zazhgli-svechi-pamyati/67836533/>

Picture 16: Состоялся праздничный концерт, посвящённый Дню Победы [Official site of the lyceum 44], 7 Мая [May] 2018 <http://www.liceum44.ru/news/12433/>

Picture 17: Фотография из личного архива Оксаны Головашиной [Photo from Oksana Golovashina's personal archive], 9 Мая [May] 2018

Photo credit: Oksana Golovashina

Picture 18: Фотография из личного архива Оксаны Головашиной [Photo from Oksana Golovashina's personal archive], 9 Мая [May] 2018

Photo credit: Oksana Golovashina

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