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“Uncle Vova, we are with you!” The use of childhood semantics in Russian political propaganda

Summary

The presented article focuses on the analysis of the semantic field of childhood in the propaganda of Soviet and modern Russia. Using a semantic analysis inspired by the works of A. Wierzbicka and J. Lakoff, the author analyses the historical semantic sources of propaganda and the use of the category of childhood in them. An example of an analysed propaganda product is the song “Uncle Vova, we are with you!” published online in 2017. The analysis proves that the semantics of the Russian propaganda message is based on patterns from previous eras with an invariant element – World War II, which is a kind of myth about the beginning of the Russian world. The war in Ukraine today additionally updates the meanings related to the armed conflict and patriotism. The analysis shows that childhood implies patriotism that invokes military meanings and is deeply immersed in the historical context of the war.

Keywords: war, Russia, children, propaganda, militarization

Słowa kluczowe: wojna, Rosja, dzieci, propaganda, militaryzacja

Introduction

Paradoxically, war may be a chance for a social or worldview opening, an opening to the outside world, and thus a chance for a different view of the familiar reality. From the point of view of political regimes such an opening may be perceived as a threat, which is especially true in the case of authoritarianism and totalitarianism. This paradoxical mechanism of lifting the curtain in a situation of war worked in the case of the Soviet Union during World War II, when Red Army soldiers saw the world outside the USSR during their march to Berlin. It turned out that, compared to official propaganda, life in capitalist countries exceeded the conditions of the communist homeland. A consequence of this was the war and post-war policy of the Soviet authorities, aimed at the ideological isolation from the Western world (Fukuyama 1993). A commentator from Chatham House, in a 1948 text published in “The World Today”, put it this way: “the current propaganda, however bizarre or even infantile to the Western mind, is directed entirely towards this purpose, i.e. to eliminate the influence of Western culture on the worldview of Soviet

citizens and to strengthen the belief in Russian or Slavic superiority" (M.D. 1948: 395). In other words, by sealing off the flow of information through the rising iron curtain at that time, they wanted to restore the pre-war state of complete isolation from Western influences. A way to achieve the goal turned out to be the further intensive development of propaganda mechanisms, but with a specific vector. For the war caused a shift in the propaganda-built confrontation between the Soviet Union and the outside world. It ceased to be a confrontation between communism and capitalism and became a struggle between Soviet Russia and the West. This meant a shift from the socio-political emphasis to the national one, which in the face of military tension turned out to be the most effective in terms of mobilising citizens (M.D. 1948: 393).

My work is situated within Soviet studies on childhood, conducted with the use of analysis inspired by linguistic semantics. Following Edward Sapir, I assume that language is a symbolic guide to culture and that words used by culture participants are its best indicator. This implies the assumption that the meanings of words in a given culture are specific, thus reflecting culture-specific values or attitudes, lifestyles, and ways of thinking (Wierzbicka 2007: 21). Politics is certainly an activity carried out using linguistic means such as texts and conversations, supported by a visual message also treated as text. In this sense, it is a collection of speech acts understood as a social action. A semantic analysis of linguistic acts accompanied by a visual message, such as propaganda, will therefore make it possible for me to define the ways of understanding or revealing the essence and meaning of the concepts used in propaganda messages (Parakhońskij, Javorśka 2019: 36). It is worth noting, however, that there is no clear answer to the question of whether speech acts only provide an insight into the way of thinking of a given society, or whether they determine it (Goddard 2011: 4). This is a particularly important question in the context of the semantic analysis of propaganda. Following Wierzbicka, I assume that words are a conceptual tool that codes and consolidates past social experiences. However, as changes take place, they also evolve and may become outdated (Wierzbicka 2007: 23). Hence my research questions:

1. What are the available historical semantic sources used in contemporary Russian propaganda?
2. Is it possible to talk about the continuity of the semantic fields of propaganda messages in the situation of changing social reality, especially those aspects related to communication technologies?
3. What is the possible function of childhood semantics in the Russian propaganda message?

At the beginning, I will describe the coupling of propaganda and new means of communication, looking for its roots in the development of mediatization at the beginning of the 20th century. Then I will analyse the metaphors of war in order to present an analysis of the symptomatic product of modern war propaganda in Russia, i.e. the clip of the song "Uncle Vova, we are with you!". This will make it possible for me to answer the question posed about the possible function of childhood semantics in propaganda products.

Mediatization and children's Leniniana

From the very beginning, the flourishing of propaganda techniques was associated with the development of communication technologies. In this sense, we can talk about the coupling of propaganda with mediatization, understood, after Nick Cloudry and Andreas Hepp (2016), as forming social reality through the media, which took place in three phases: mechanization, electrification, and digitization. Mediatization is, therefore, a specific aspect of the modernization process in general, and when we talk about 20th-century Russia and the Soviet Union, we place it in the electrification phase. It was a transitional period when mediatization based on the popularization of print, and as a result of the turbulent development of innovation, turned into an audiovisual process that could reach a mass audience (Wojtkowski 2017: 11). The massification of communication was, therefore, a necessary condition for the development of propaganda techniques in the scale of the whole of society.

In the presented text, I focus my attention on the point of intersection of the issues of propaganda as a political tool for the formation of public and individual opinion with the cultural representations of childhood used in its construction. For the Russian and Soviet contexts, the emergence of this contact point was synchronized with the development of modern propaganda (Bonnell 1997). The early Soviet variant of mediatization, as described by Alex Oushakine (2019), consisted of various genres of products, most often corresponding to the Polish concept of jobbing prints, brochures, or posters. All similar "ephemeral" productions after the Bolshevik revolution, often created by outstanding avant-garde artists, belong to the so-called *art du jour*, i.e. one-day art forms. Despite the short life of such products, their influence on the forming of the awareness of mass audiences cannot be underestimated. Ephemeral productions became an essential tool through which the central government was able to achieve practical political goals. In the conditions of limited literacy and an economy of shortages, they were the most effective way to reach selected social groups. Besides, their ephemeral form provided a possibility of easy development into more complex products, such as illustrated magazines or mobile exhibitions. It can be said that it was a kind of training ground where designers and artists experimented with various visual forms, which then contributed to the modern architecture of the Soviet media. Let me mention that the aforementioned visual channels of communication were used for propaganda purposes, because the main political goal of the authorities was to reorganize the habits and opinions of the broad masses of Soviet people (Oushakine 2019: 14).

Apart from jobbing prints, the so-called mass book, aimed at a wide audience and designed primarily to raise the cultural level of the masses was in the centre of Soviet mediatization. The main principle followed by the authors of such literature was *nagladnost'*, essentially an educational concept that can be translated as visual attractiveness. It meant a deliberate relationship between the graphic and text layers. Therefore, the point was not so much to replace a text with an image that would represent the text, but rather to

make the effect visually attractive and semantically effective. The semantic effectiveness of a publication was measured by its ability to simultaneously activate the ideological and visual resources of the book's audience (Oushakine 2019: 17).

One of the segments of this production was children's literature. The prototype item for this type of literature was the book under the title "Children and Lenin" by Ilya Lin with photo collages by Gustaw Kłucis and Siergiej Sienkin (Lin 1924). The publication appeared after the death of the "leader of the revolution" and initiated the emergence of a separate genre in Soviet art, a kind of children's hagiography of Lenin. "Children and Lenin", with a cover depicting a collage of the leader walking hand in hand with a few-year-old boy, is a collection of excerpts from letters and diaries of wards from one of Moscow's orphanages, interspersed with Lin's editorial intrusions. The time line begins in 1922, when the wards from the orphanage invite Lenin to their place, and he agrees to come. The visit, however, does not take place because of Lenin's illness and death. Lin's book is, therefore, a record of children's despair and mourning after the death of "Uncle Lenin", which in time became part of a huge collection of children's Leniniana. As it was the case with mass literature for adults, the rule of *nagladnost'*, which was recommended by Soviet educators such as Evgenia Flerina (1930), was also in force here. A text had to be accompanied by illustrations consisting of schematic, rhythmic structures and forms easy for young readers to follow. As Oushakine puts it, the geometric forms in the book drew attention to the internal structure of the whole composition, making it possible to capture the main ideological message (Oushakine 2019: 34). That is why I call *nagladnost'* an educational concept, because in the Soviet reality it meant the creation of visual and discursive forms through which individuals could become part of the field of politics. It should be emphasized that Lin's book had been written before the petrification of Lenin's cult. The authors could not take advantage of an established formal cliché, because it was not there. Therefore, this publication itself was an example of an invented tradition of visual and narrative political language aimed at children. But not only. "Children and Lenin" prefigured trends in the visual development of media for adults, which would begin to be developed in Soviet Russia only a few years later. In this sense, the politics of mass children's literature was exemplary for the politics of mass production for adults.

Mass children's literature devoted to Lenin, or, in other words, children's Leniniana, became more and more iconographic and semantically diverse from publication to publication. Lenin began to be portrayed in many incarnations, e.g. as a great leader, steadfast revolutionist, genius strategist and politician, thrilling orator, but, at the same time, as a man of the people, "the most human of men". The biography of the leader of the revolution was, therefore, a discursive phenomenon of a dynamic and, at the same time, etiological character. It is about the situation in which the children grew up with Lenin. In the subsequent stages of their lives, they followed the next biographical details of the leader's life; from the unruly little Volodia of Symbirsk, to a person with a divine status, at the same time an uncle, father, and grandfather of the nation. As noted by Bogdanov (2008), this is how Lenin's biography began to illustrate the history of the state in general.

This story had its beginning, but it had no pre-history, i.e. everything important for the history of the state began with the birth of Lenin, the story of whose childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and death became, like a metonymy, the history of the entire Soviet state.

Children’s Leniniana were part of the wider political activities of the Soviet power, directed at the youngest citizens of the Soviet Union. Along with them, a pioneer organization, named after Vladimir Lenin, was created which in turn had its own press organs such as the periodical “Baraban” or “Pioneer”. How seriously the Soviet authorities treated the issues of educating the young generation in the spirit of communism is evidenced by the fact that in the first issue of Pioneer, which appeared on the occasion of Lenin’s death, an essay by Lev Trotsky was published (Bogdanov 2008). It was on the basis of such initiatives of the communist regime that the “new children’s folklore” was spontaneously created, which in turn became the content of publications intended for children, which created a self-reinforcing system, i.e. the politicization of children’s culture inspired the creation of new forms of activity, which then became the content of studies and articles encouraging copying or inspiring new forms. Invariant in this cycle was the central ideological place occupied by Lenin. This centralized ideological system was petrified with the publication in 1925 of a brochure for children under the title “Ilyich’s Childhood and School Years”, written by Lenin’s elder sister Anna Ulyanova (1950). The story of her brother’s childhood became an archetypal and folklore text of Soviet culture. As for other aspects of the process of creating children’s folklore around the figure of the leader, the best example is the children’s game that was created spontaneously during the period of mourning following Ulyanov’s death. It was called “Playing Lenin” and was inspired by visits to the mausoleum, which, by the way, were called “visiting grandpa”. The game consisted in children taking turns playing Lenin lying in the coffin, while other children passed by, playing the role of his comrades, Kalinin, Kamenev, Trotsky, Lenin’s wife, and his sister. In this way, Mayakowski’s lyrical phrase (1924) about the deceased Lenin, who remained more live than all living people, was realized in children’s play narratives.

Summing up, it can be said that the process of propaganda development was closely coupled with technological development, which in the 20th century made it possible to massify the message, but also to reach the target group more accurately. As a result of the mediatization of the Soviet reality, children became a separate and important social group to which the authorities directed a specially formatted propaganda message. In this sense, children were a key subject of the propaganda influence of the state, the aim of which was to create the Soviet man. As I have already mentioned, the Second World War and its end caused a shift in the official discourse of power, i.e. it was no longer about the utopian creation of a new man, but about preserving the conservative *status quo ante*. The official discourse of the authorities became a discourse of not so much ideological, but national confrontation, which turned out to be the most effective in the process of mobilizing mass support, but also in sealing the discursive iron curtain. Thus, the image of the confrontation was built as a juxtaposition of the Soviet people and representatives of Western nation-states, and one of the main metaphors present in the public discourse was the metaphor of war.

“Metaphors can kill” – the contemporary semantics of war

When a discourse on war is conducted, there must inevitably be an appeal to Carl von Clausewitz, a Prussian general whose work “On War” often boils down to the maxim saying that war is only the continuation of politics by other means. Other maxims taken from Clausewitz can be treated in a similar way, e.g. war is nothing but a duel on an extensive scale; war is an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfil our will, and others. The essence of these maxims is the abolition of the juxtaposition of the domains of politics and war, with the latter becoming another tool of politics. However, I would like to highlight Clausewitz’s emphasis on the human factor in war. It is all about human courage or boldness, which make us talk about issues involved in the human factor when we talk about the art of war. If this is the case, it means that Clausewitz included in his theory of war an uncontrollable, because related to human, random factor (Fabiszak 2007: 76). This has considerable consequences for the semantics of war, which becomes a kind of game in which fortune is entangled. This means that the metaphor of war as a game is at the root of the modern conceptualization of what is called the art of war.

Moreover, it is necessary to emphasize the specificity of the relationships between the semantic fields of the notion of war and peace as antonyms. Parakhonśkij and Javorśka call it an asymmetric relationship, because from the semantic point of view the basic category is war. We are dealing here with the contradictory type of opposition, when one of the members of the pair indicates the presence of a certain basic feature or property, while the other indicates its absence (Parakhonśkij, Javorśka 2019: 50). Thus, the lexemes for “peace” contain the necessary circumstance of the absence of war (as in the opposition “life-death” the base is life, as death means the end of life). War, on the other hand, cannot be defined by a state of lack of peace, because it requires an independent semantic field, which is even more pronounced in the case of modern hybrid warfare.

Many of Clausewitz’s interpreters, commenting on his classic work in the late 20th century, argued that this conceptualization of war had become obsolete. After the end of the Cold War, the utopian paradigm of F. Fukuyama’s end of history prevailed, which meant that with the victory of liberal democracy, the concept of universal peace won. All this led to the claim that the narrow understanding of war as a confrontation of nation-states was a thing of the past. In a 1998 essay on the philosophy of war, Pierre Hassner wrote that the collapse of two totalitarian empires resulted in the emptying of the battlefield, replacing the threat of World War III with the balance, dialogue, and cooperation of former opponents: “The relations between developed liberal countries can no longer be construed in terms of understanding international relations as a state of nature in which force can be used. Neither the limitations nor the tasks of the modern state can be well considered on the basis of (…) an extreme case, i.e. war” (Hassner 1998: 49). However, the idealistic belief in capitalist rationality was quickly verified. The 21st century began with terrorist attacks on the WTC, and a variant of a post-modern discourse appeared in the theory of war; liquid reality began to mean a liquid enemy (terrorists) and hybrid forms of war (the

Internet, "little green men"). The Cold War was neither war nor peace, as Raymond Aron (1995) called it. But four decades after the fall of communism we did not get a situation opposite to that of the Cold War. As Hassner writes, local wars have now become more likely or even common, which suggests that the world today is in a state of both war and peace (Hassner 1998: 50).

Such a state can be called the effect of shifting the semantic field of war towards hybridity. After the attack on Ukraine in 2014, the re-framing process was complete and the hybrid reality of peace/war in the Western world became the present. For after 2014, in Ukraine we were dealing with a state of undeclared war, officially known as ATO (Anti-Terrorist Operation). Until 2022, this ambiguous state was accepted in Ukrainian society, as evidenced by the adoption of the lexeme "atoshnik", meaning "a participant in combat operations as part of the anti-terrorist operation" (Parakhonśkij, Javorśka 2019: 49).

For the reflection on the semantics of war, however, the breakthrough was the earlier war in the Persian Gulf, the narratives about which became a reservoir of modern war metaphors. J. Lakoff, in his famous essay on the metaphors of war, talks about the panorama of metaphors born on the basis of the events in Iraq, i.e. strangling the economy, progressive rape, defending the future, and innocent victims of Saddam Hussein, the new Hitler, etc. Most of these metaphors work on a pre-reflective level, are cognitive automatism, which makes it possible to understand abstract and complex issues (Lakoff 2012: 5). Geopolitics, international relations, and war certainly belong to such issues. Lakoff warns that metaphors become naturalized and then become difficult to distinguish from the literality of the expressions used in them. In this way, a metaphor becomes dangerous as it begins to hide elements of reality, making the veil real. This is why Lakoff's essay begins with the sentence that metaphors can kill – really (Lakoff 2012: 5).

Public discourse about war often uses the metaphor of profit and loss. In fact, it refers once again to Clausewitz's conceptualization of war in terms of political gains and costs, i.e. each nation-state has its own political goals, and war is the best way to achieve them. So politics is about weighing profits at an acceptable level of cost. Thus, an interpretation of Clausewitz's famous phrase can be made in such a spirit that war is not a military extension of politics at all, but a result of the balance between profit and loss. War, in other words, is business.

This main metaphor organizing war narratives is surrounded by many metaphorical systems. Lakoff provides an example of such a system: the state as a person (state/person); welfare expressed in economic terms, the adulthood of the state/person is a transition to the phase of industrialization, rationality, maximization of profits. The metaphorical system is governed by an internal logic, i.e. if it is in the interest of each person to be strong and rich, then a rational state/person will strive to maximize wealth and military strength. There is also the problem of morality. This is a matter of keeping the moral books in balance. Thus, an immoral person incurs a debt that he or she must pay off or suffer punishment, if it is impossible to balance the moral account, that is to restore the state of justice. War in this system is a fight to get morally even (Lakoff 2012: 7). Such a system

is often realized narratively in a fairy tale pattern, where there are fixed characters, i.e. the protagonist (who acts rationally), the victim, and the villain (the irrational trickster). The metonymy of the ruler as a state harmonizes with the fairy-tale narrative, or as Louis XIV used to say: the state is me. Interestingly, this metonymy works primarily with authoritarian rulers, because Saddam Hussein could have attacked Kuwait, but the United States, not President Bush, intervened in response.

As it has been said, the metaphor of war as a business, a pragmatic profit and loss account, is popular in the analytical discourse about war. This is owing to its economic rationality and, therefore, it is perceived as literal truth. However, there is another metaphor that is not widespread in the accepted convention of analytical discourse. It is a metaphor for war as a brutal crime, as murder, kidnapping, arson, rape, and theft, in a word, meanings that otherwise refer to serious crimes. Unlike the examples so far, this system is built solely around morality and contains an asymmetry on the we-they axis. When "they" are mentioned, actions are described in terms of crime, rape and madness, so they remain in the semantic field of morality. "Our" acts are presented in Clausewitz's imagery as a rational calculation and, therefore, only morally permissible (Lakoff 2012: 11).

The we/they asymmetry is often associated with another basic metaphorical system, where war means a game, most often related to competition (chess, sport – football matches, boxing). As Lakoff notes, such a metaphor presupposes the existence of a heroic winner and a disgraced loser, and a clear moment of the end of the game, a settlement (Lakoff 2012: 12). But not only. The metaphor of the game is also fundamental to the sphere of politics (card game, house of cards, chess, theatre). Politics as a war game means a ruse, the use of political weapons, and fighting. We obtain a kind of semantic chain, where war is an extension of politics, and politics is a game that can also be used in the semantic field of war. The metaphor of war as a game, in turn, refers to unpredictability. Similarly to Wittgenstein's semantic family resemblances (Grad 2021: 72–73), the metaphor of war as a game also includes star wars, war computer games, virtual wars, fantasy in literature and film, or anti-utopias.

All this is very well represented in the discourse of the current war in Ukraine. As indicated by Parakhonśkij and Javorśka (2019: 50), the separatist quasi-states and, more broadly, the whole of Russia are represented as Mordor, the mythological "black land" from the novels by J.R.R. Tolkien. The soldiers of the Russian Federation's army are called orcs in the public discourse of Ukraine, i.e. cannibalistic creatures bred in conditions of violence. Such depiction of the enemy with reference to the world of darkness is part of the logic of the metaphor of a game based on competition, also in the moral field. The war in Ukraine is a confrontation of darkness and light, civilization and anti-civilization, people and non-people. And even when the official narrative uses terms for Ukrainian soldiers borrowed from fantasy literature, these are metaphors with a meliorative overtone. The best example is the use of the name "cyborgs" for the Ukrainian defenders of the airport in Donetsk, which emphasized the superhuman abilities and endurance of the soldiers who defended their positions for 240 days.

"Uncle Vova, we are with you" – a case study

In 2017, a video was published on YouTube, recorded by Vyacheslav Antonov and his son Nikolay, in which they perform a song entitled "Dyadya Vova, we are with you" (Uncle Vova, we are with you)[1]. Vyacheslav himself wrote the lyrics and music for the song. In November of the same year, another music video for this song appeared, recorded by Anna Kuvychko, a deputy to the Russian Duma from Volgograd[2]. Unlike the original, it is professionally made. The recording of the second version of the song and the clip was attended by the deputy with the children from the Volgograd cadet choir, aged from but a few to several years of age. The recording became very popular in the Russian segment of the network and was widely commented on in the media. The words written by Antonov read as follows:

I
The 21st century has come, and the world is tired of wars
Humanity is fed up with the hegemon
The European Union has no opinion of its own, the Middle East groans with pain
Overseas, the president has lost power
Ref.:
And we want, from the northern seas to the southern border,
From the Kuril Islands to the Baltic coast,
There to be peace in this land, but when the commander-in-chief
Summons us to the final battle: Uncle Vova, we are with you!
II
And what will our generation get out of it?
If we show weakness, we will lose the whole country
And our true friends are the navy and the army
A memory of friendship and a grandfather's red star.
Ref.:
And we want…
III
The samurai will never get the archipelago,
We will stand up to defend the capital of amber
We will keep our Sevastopol and Crimea for posterity
We will bring Alaska to our home port.
Ref.:
And we want…

The children's choir is dressed in uniforms with sewn-on chevrons of various power structures: Ministry of the Interior, the Police, the Don Republic during the Russian Civil War, and medals for exemplary cadets. Some of the children are wearing forage caps on

[1] "Дядя Вова, мы с тобой", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rE0MrvC0FTE, 20.06.2022.
[2] Анна Кувычко – "Дядя Вова, мы с тобой", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ZZJJ1k8xAE, 20.06.2022.

their heads, and some gala caps. Kuvychko, a member of the State Duma, is wearing a kind of festive uniform with a Russian flag pin. The video is shot in two locations. One is a recording studio, where close-ups of single singing children are featured, or the whole ensemble is shown in a wide plan. It is positioned in such a way that children are standing to attention in rows (from the youngest in the front, to the oldest in the back), while Kuvychko MP is standing and singing in the middle. All the choristers have serious expressions, their eyes must be fixed on one point. In the second plan there is Mamayev Kurgan with the famous monument "Motherland is Calling!" in Volgograd (formerly Stalingrad) dedicated to the Soviet soldiers fighting in the Battle of Stalingrad in the years 1942–1943. The choir poses in a group, as in the studio, in a row, standing to attention, with some children holding black and white photos of war veterans in their hands. The photos of the choir are interrupted by copies of various shots of the memorial site complex "To the Heroes of the Stalingrad Battle", including reliefs with the inscriptions "Not a step back" and "For the Soviet homeland". In addition, the video includes several-second shots literally depicting the sung content: Brexit protests, crowds running in desert scenery, the flag of the Russian Federation blowing in the wind, parades on the Red Square on the occasion of May 9th – Victory Day, flying planes, helicopters, photos of gunshots from warships, an icebreaker, the landscape of the Kuril Islands, and Orthodox churches. While singing the last phrase of the chorus, some of the children raise their clenched fists.

New *nagladnost'*

The analysed clip is an example of a mass propaganda message that uses mature forms of digital mediatization. This means that we are dealing here with the use of modern media techniques, including IT platforms, to disseminate the message. Simplifying, it can be said that the streaming media are the equivalent of mass literature from the beginning of the 20th century. However, what makes this case unique is not so much the medium as the semantic field of the clip, which consists of a text and a visual layer. In this case, it can be said that it is a reinterpretation of the propaganda metaphors fixed in the common Soviet and Russian social consciousness, which make up the modern type of *nagladnost'*. And it is thanks to the simultaneous activation of well-known ideological and visual content, presented in an attractive and legible form and through an easily accessible channel, that it is possible to achieve a mass propaganda effect.

Children's patriotism

In the ideological layer, the clip is an example of the implementation of the idea of Russian patriotism. Taking into account the choice of heroes, their visual style and location, patriotism is found in two overlapping semantic fields, i.e. the military field and the imperial

historical field, also related primarily to the war (World War II, in Russia called the Great Patriotic War). It can even be said that patriotism is devoid of any civil element; children are wearing uniforms, standing in formation, against the backdrop of a war monument, they are a contemporary hybrid of pioneers, Komsomol members, male and female camp followers, and cadets. The visual layer creates a historical context, referring the viewer to the key military triumph of the Soviets, i.e. the Battle of Stalingrad, but not only. We have here an accumulation of other elements symbolizing the imperial threads of Russian history, i.e. a snapshot presenting a bas-relief of Mikhail Kutuzov, the commander of the tsarist army during the Napoleonic wars, or a patch with the inscription "The All-Great Don Army", symbolizing the Cossack republic that fought against the Bolsheviks in 1918. Similarly, the lyrics of the song paraphrase the words attributed to Tsar Alexander III that Russia has two allies – the army and the navy. In the Russian Empire, the tsar was the absolute ruler, and in this sense the state could be reduced metonymically to the person of the emperor. There is a similar mechanism in the lyrics of the song, except that the army and the navy become the only allies of the children who begin to represent the nation, and more specifically the future of the nation in general.

It can be said that the semantic field of patriotism consists of an ideological conglomerate of mutually exclusive elements that cease to be mutually exclusive here, i.e. elements of tsarism and the Russian empire, together with Orthodoxy, merge with the "grandfather's red star" and the Stalingrad location. This means that in Putin's Russia traditional political divisions are suspended and the historically conditioned antagonistic system is falling apart. In the 21st century, tsarism, Orthodoxy, Bolshevism, and communism complement each other and together belong to the field of semantic children's patriotism. This is because they are all organized around one basic trait of patriotism, which is militarism. Therefore, I can say that the image of patriotism created here is devoid of civilian elements, and fits in with the metaphor of a stratocratic state, i.e. one that is built analogously to military institutions (Castoriadis 1985).

Anachrony

The breakdown of the antagonistic ideological system carries one more feature of the clip's narrative related to the recreated temporal line, that is anachrony. The central temporal point in the song is World War II, or rather its turning point, which was the Battle of Stalingrad. It is a reconstruction of the temporal system characteristic of today's Russia, and earlier the Soviet Union, for which World War II is a kind of cosmogonic myth and, therefore, tells about the beginning of the world. The mythical time that governs this narrative is not diachronic. That is why, in the content of the song in the second stanza, the answer to the question about the future generation is a paraphrase of Tsar Alexander III's words about the army and a reference to the memory of the (front) friendship and grandfather's red star (the metaphor of a veteran decoration), that is, the essence of war. Thus, it can be said that the Great Patriotic

War remains the matrix for prehistory, e.g. the time of the October Revolution, but also for the future in which there is a risk of losing the state. That is why the snapshots with the inscription "For the Soviet Homeland" remain valid for the mythical chronology, although for those remaining in historical time the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991.

Playing Lenin, playing Putin

The departure from diachronic time in favour of anachronism translates into the image of the song's main character, who remains hidden, however, hidden behind the apostrophe closing the chorus. I am talking about the turn to "Uncle Vova", which is, certainly, a familiar turn to President Volodimir Putin. However, in this case, the text does not refer to his function as president. In the chorus, Uncle Vova is the commander-in-chief, the chief commander of the army, which underlines even more the basic role of militaristic semantics used to describe state institutions. As we said, the metaphor of family ties linking children/the nation with the leader has been part of mass propaganda production since the time of Lenin, portrayed as an uncle or father, and was further developed during the Stalinist period (although the pattern itself is much older and, certainly, dates back to pre-revolutionary times with the figure of the tsar as the father). In any case, it is not a symbol of the democratic relations prevailing in society, but their opposites, i.e. formalized authoritarianism and totalitarianism (Lakoff describes it in the form of the metaphor "the ruler is a state"). As I said, Putin the leader is hidden behind an apostrophe, but he is connected with a (visual) ploy of weirdness, i.e. the use of a radical form evoking novelty or individuality, such as the 18th-century figure of *homo extraneus*, that is a stranger, one not belonging to the community (Mrugalski 2020: 238). I mean one of the boys in the music video where the camera stops several times. He is strikingly similar to Vladimir Putin when he was a child. So we are dealing with a double, rather a kind of *doppelganger*, remaining in an anachronistic time, because it is similar to Putin/the child who no longer exists. I think that this is why we can talk about the *extraneus* figure in this case, because there is no image of Putin in the clip, and yet there is. I have already mentioned a similar ontological paradox, which turns out to be part of the metaphorical system of the leader as the father of the nation, i.e. the dead Lenin also remained the most alive among the living, and Soviet children played "Lenin" during their visits to the mausoleum (the Mamayev Kurgan in Volgograd is a kind of mausoleum).

Sein-zum-Tode (Being-toward-death) the Putin's way

The mysterious figure of a *doppelganger* evokes a feeling of danger, misfortune, and, in some variants, death (Rank 1971). This semantics of emotions is consistent with those that appear in the song. The narrative talks about war fatigue, Middle Eastern pain, and danger

resulting from weakness and loss. The atmosphere of danger is related to the outside world that lurks on the frontier of the state/national community. What is characteristic here are those parts of the empire that were incorporated as a result of the recent expansion, i.e. the Kuril Islands which the samurai sets his sights on (the metaphor of Japan), Kaliningrad (former German Koenigsberg), Crimea, and Sevastopol – the Ukrainian lands occupied after 2014. Thus, we obtain a geometrization of the conflict contemporary for Putin’s Russia, which, as in the case of the Soviet Union, is responsible for the sense of the necessity to defend and for the building of the imperative of survival in the fight against the national external threat. All in all, the last stanza falls within the same semantic field as the metaphor for the Iron Curtain and the Cold War. However, the analysed narrative goes further in its metaphor, because it ends with the announcement of regaining Alaska. It is, therefore, a harbinger not of peace, but of further military expansion or simply war. The apostrophe of children/the nation addressed to the uncle/leader uses the military metaphor of the last battle[3]. This implies the expected outcome of the war and the future in general. Obedience to the leader means consent to the complete annihilation of the community, i.e. of the children, who are the personification of the nation and Uncle Vova, the personification of a totalitarian state, which has the right to demand the highest sacrifice of life from its subordinates. In 2018, the metaphor of the last battle was made concrete by Vladimir Putin, who, speaking about a possible nuclear conflict, said: “Why do we need a world in which there is no Russia?”[4].

Conclusion

Referring to my questions, which I posed in the presented text, I can say that the semantics of the Russian propaganda message bases its universe of meanings on the patterns taken from the previous eras of the Russian (Soviet) state and various political systems, combining them in a new configuration. It can be called a hybrid one, because the new configuration abolishes ideological contradictions and combines completely mutually exclusive elements, such as Orthodoxy and communism. What remains invariant for contemporary Russia and the Soviet Union, and thus is a semantic structure with over 80 years of tradition, is treating the Second World War as a prototype of history in general, a kind of myth about the beginning of the Russian world. This also translates into temporal meanings, because, here too, the mythical and anachronistic order of history rules, with the central event being the Second World War. The use of the familiar metaphor in depicting the authoritarian state, which is presented in family terms, is also invariant: the leader of the nation (Lenin/Putin) is presented as the head or patriarch of the family, while the citizens

[3] The phrase “the last fight” refers to the classic song from the Soviet war epic *Liberation* from 1968.

[4] Заседание дискуссионного клуба «Валдай», http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58848, 10.06.2022.

are children, treating the patriarch with respect or even admiration. This temporal invariant is also anachronistic; in the case of the music video it appears as a *doppelganger*. One could say that the variant of “Lenin alive forever” in the clip is Putin’s child twin. Thus, it can be seen that it is possible to identify the historical semantic sources of the propaganda message of contemporary Russian propaganda, and it is certainly possible to demonstrate the continuity of semantic fields. The new media techniques used turn out to reinforce only the *nagladnost’* principle because they make it easier and more attractive to combine the established ideological content (e.g. patriotism rooted in the reality of the post-war Soviet Union) with the visual layer, which is also easily decodable by the audience. What constitutes the importance of the analysed material is its multimedia form and communication channel (YouTube), which together created the possibility of quick massification of this message. At the same time, such massification would not be possible, if it were not for the good use of the *nagladnost’* principle which makes the message attractive.

The war in Ukraine made it necessary to strengthen the propaganda message, the focal point of which is patriotism. As I have shown before, in the case of early Soviet propaganda, the visual and narrative canon of political language was initially developed in forms aimed at children (children’s Leniniana). In the case of the clip in question, we are dealing with the development of this scheme, in which children’s production prefigures the directions of development of media messages in general. Well, images of children as carriers of a patriotic message function here in a kind of conventional metaphor of the nation in general. The pattern of the father of the nation (Putin) and his children (all citizens) fits in here. In this way, the clip itself ceases to be a media product theoretically aimed at children, with children as characters. The characters from the clip, the children, become one of the tools for the shaping of the desired form of patriotism among the audience of the clip, many of whom are adults. Moreover, the presented model of patriotism is saturated with military meanings and deeply immersed in the historical context of war, understood as opposing the threat coming from the Borderlands, and thus acquiring positive connotations. In this way, the content of the semantic field of childhood becomes one of the most effective tools used in propaganda production.

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