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## CZYNNIK MENTALNO-PSYCHOLOGICZNY I POLITYKA: KONTEKST ROSYJSKI

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**Adnotacja:** Artykuł poświęcono badaniu problemu korelacji między czynnikiem mentalno-psychologicznym a polityką, która ma charakter dialektyczny i jest wyraźnie widoczna na przykładzie rosyjskich realiów. Jak świadczy doświadczenie społeczno-historyczne, długa tradycja rosyjskiej państwowości doprowadziła do powstania specyficznej mentalności Rosjan, odzwierciedlającej podstawowe przejawy rosyjskiego imperialnego systemu społeczno-politycznego. Ponieważ takie cechy psychologiczno-mentalne są dość trwałe i aktywne, należy wziąć pod uwagę realną możliwość ich wpływu nie tylko na charakter współczesnego rasyjstowskiego reżimu politycznego W. Putina, ale także na procesy polityczne w Rosji po jej klęsce w wojnie z Ukrainą, w szczególności poprzez poszukiwanie nowych form własnej imperialnej egzystencji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** imperialna mentalność, autorytaryzm, ekspansjonizm, militarizm, agresywność, okrucieństwo, szowinizm, ukrajinofobia, ludobójstwo.

## MENTAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTOR AND POLITICS: THE RUSSIAN CONTEXT

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**Abstract.** The article is devoted to the study of the problem of the correlation between the mental-psychological factor and politics, which is dialectical in nature and clearly traceable on the example of Russian realities. As socio-historical experience testifies, the long tradition of Russian statehood led to the formation of a specific mentality of Russians, which reflects the essential manifestations of the Russian imperial socio-political system. Since such psychological and mental traits are quite stable and active, one should take into account the real possibility of their influence not only on the nature of the modern racist political regime of V. Putin, but also on the political processes in Russia after its defeat in the war with Ukraine, in particular, from-for the search for new forms of their own imperial existence.

**Key words:** imperial mentality, authoritarianism, expansionism, militarism, aggressiveness, cruelty, chauvinism, Ukrainianophobia, genocide.

## МЕНТАЛЬНО-ПСИХОЛОГІЧНИЙ ФАКТОР І ПОЛІТИКА: РОСІЙСЬКИЙ КОНТЕКСТ

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**Анотація.** Стаття присвячена дослідженню проблеми кореляції між ментально-психологічним фактором і політикою, що носить діалектичний характер і яскраво простежується на прикладі Російських реалій. Як свідчить соціально-історичний досвід, тривала традиція Російської державності обумовила формування специфічної ментальності росіян, що віддзеркалює сутнісні прояви російської імперської суспільно-політичної системи. Оскільки подібні психолого-ментальні риси носять доволі стійкий і активний характер, слід враховувати реальну можливість їх впливу не тільки на характер сучасного рашистського політичного режиму В. Путіна, але й на політичні процеси в Росії після її поразки у війні з Україною, зокрема через пошуки нових форм власного імперського існування.

**Ключові слова:** імперська ментальність, авторитаризм, експансіонізм, мілітаризм, агресивність, жорстокість, шовінізм, українофобія, геноцид.

**Introduction.** The study of the problem of the mental-psychological factor influence on the political life of society and the state has a long tradition and is based on rich historical experience accumulated from Antiquity to the present day. At the same time, the tragic events of 2014–2023, caused by Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, extremely actualized this problem, because its further study can reveal the underlying causes underlying the socio-political processes at the intrastate and interstate levels, including the process of formation Russian fascism and the peculiarities of its manifestation. It is no accident that V. Grinevich, S. Datsyuk, G. Karpyuk, E. Anisimov, N. Rozov, J. Hosking, R. Suny, A. Etkind, E. Thompson and others, who explored different aspects of the relationship between the Russian mentality and modern Russian political realities. At the same time, since rashism is constantly trying to mimic, disguise itself, resorting to systemic falsification of facts and outright lies, making the most of the entire arsenal of communication links available – diplomacy, international organizations, the media and propaganda, this problem requires further research and discussion.

Based on this, the purpose of this article can be considered to expand our understanding of the mental roots of Russian fascism, and the task is to identify the features of its manifestation in the hybrid Russian-Ukrainian war.

**Presentation of the main material.** The connection between mentality and political realities is dialectical in nature, since mentality, on the one hand, is formed over a long period of existence of the people under the influence of specific objective natural and social (including political) conditions of its existence. In addition, the most mental features of the people actively influence the way of life, including the system of public relations. In this regard, Russia is no exception, because the process of formation of the Russian mentality is organically linked with the centuries-old tradition of Russian imperial statehood; and it is this mentality that to a large extent determined the purposeful choice of the Putin regime of the neo-imperial course of the country's development. Therefore, it can be argued that the vast majority of Russian citizens (up to 80% of the total population) support the aggressive policy of the current political authorities and its leader due to the fact that V.Putin ideologically and mentally personifies the collective Russian.

However, speaking about the influence of the Russian mentality on the establishment of the current political regime in Russia – a regime that has actualized the worst manifestations of human essence, one cannot simplify the mechanism of such influence. After all, the Russian mentality, like the mentality of other peoples, is not a homogeneous formation – it clearly shows ambivalent features, which attract the attention of many researchers of the 19th–20th centuries, in particular, K. Aksakov, V. Belinsky, M. Berdyaev, V. Dahl, S. Bulgakov, A. Herzen, M. Danilevsky, I. Plyn, K. Kavelin, N. Karamzin, L. Karsavin, I. Kirievsky, O. Losev, M. Nadezhdin, F. Nesterov, P. Florensky and many others.

It is significant that, despite the existence of such frames as constant variables, two principles of mental and psychological qualities actively interact in them – positive and negative. The ratio of the latter, as well as the degree of manifestation of each of them, depends on specific historical socio-cultural circumstances. An important role in this process is also played by the ideological component of the state policy, which embodies the corresponding

worldview and value priorities in the social environment and is able to actively attract various levers of influence for this – the system of education and upbringing, art, the church, the information field, etc.

The Russian imperial mentality has its own characteristics. It is a symbiosis of Orthodoxy, etatism and hegemonism. At the same time, all elements of this symbiosis substantially coincide with the essential features of Russian imperial statehood. Briefly recall:

Orthodoxy, represented by the Russian Orthodox Church, is a component of the Russian national consciousness. And the ideology of the Russian Orthodox Church has always justified the Russian imperial policy, because it was about the fight against another soulless world. The Russian Church itself has always emphasized a certain injustice of God in relation to Russian Orthodoxy and has suffered from three fundamental foundations: 1) anti-Westernism; 2) the cult of the Russian people in the proper sense of the word “cult” (the cult of Rus’ the God-bearer, the cult of Russia the savior of the world, etc.); 3) the idea of a “special path” for Russia, the idea of creating the last of that unique civilization and culture, which, at the same time, will occupy the highest stage of world historical development. including the Slavic peoples, both on the outskirts of the Kremlin and the boundless desire for leadership in the world. It is also appropriate to talk about eschatologism, which was also used to justify the imperial policy of Russia and whose content has recently become significantly radicalized.

Etatism (from French – état – state) – the concept of political thought, which considers the state the highest achievement and goal of social development. Etatism justifies authoritarianism, which considers strong, authoritative power in accordance with the requirements of legislation or the application of morality and cultural practices. It is noteworthy that the ideology of etatism has traditionally supported fascism, believing that sovereignty does not belong to the people, but in the nation state all people and associations exist only to increase the power, prestige and welfare of the state.

Hegemonism (from Gr. hehemonia – leadership, domination) – the claim of some social group, stratum, class, political force, state (in the international arena) for a leading role in the social process, the desire for the forced establishment of dictate, the imposition of others on their policy, common for all ideals and values, attempts to single-handedly resolve issues affecting everyone, posing as a representative of the general interest. In Russia, the ambition of supremacy is traditionally inherent in all subjects of political relations.

In this regard, the process of convergence in the Russian discourse of the concepts “russian” and “Russian people”, which today have become almost identical, is of interest. Such a meaningful transformation of these concepts is quite clearly explained by Dugin, considering the concept of “Russian people”. The latter, in his opinion, is closely related to the tradition of interpreting the concept of nationality as a component of the well-known Uravov triad, which is one of the theoretical foundations of modern Russian state ideology. When considering nationality, A. Dugin takes into account not only the historical retrospective, but also the situation of the post-communist era, which correlate with the phenomenon of Russianness. At the same time, he proceeds from the fact that “the Russian Federation is not Russia, a full-fledged Russian state. This is a transitional entity in a broad and dynamic global geopolitical process and nothing more. At the same time, the author emphasizes that, despite the content and ethnic uncertainty of the concept of “Russian people”, it is this concept that becomes the center of the Russian geopolitical concept. The essence of Russianness is manifested primarily through its comparison with Westernism, as a certain radical opposite of the latter – that is, anti-Westernness. These two beginnings are “competing and mutually exclusive models, opposite poles”. That is, as you can see, even the definition of the concept of Russianness is derived not through identifying its specific features as an expression of essence, but through a categorical and formal statement about its fundamental difference in content from another concept.

This is of fundamental importance for understanding the process of mental changes in Russians, when all of them – both Russians and Russian people – without a doubt, realizing their ethnic differences, at the same time increasingly begin to feel that they belong to a single imperial political field, becoming infected with common mental traits.

In general, the identification of the concepts “Russian” and “Russian people” is not without tricks. Here, the actual inequality and contradiction between the metropolis and the national outskirts (colonies) is formally “removed”. On the one hand, the influence of the metropolis, its politics, culture, and language spreads throughout the entire territory of the empire, strengthening the feeling of omnipresence, its own greatness and power among the representatives of the metropolis. On the other hand, representatives of the national outskirts (small peoples), in whose territories there is an active process of Russification and destruction of local cultures and languages, the “dissolution” of their ethno-national identities, as compensation receive a guarantee of their organic belonging to the metropolis, involvement in its greatness and the greatness of representatives titular ethnos, which is also fixed on their mental level. At the same time, internal contradictions between the two unequal socio-ethnic components of the empire are “removed” in the external arena. All of them are equally negative about everything that is alien to Russian – territories, peoples, culture, language, etc. However, representatives of small nations often defend the values of the “Russian world” even more harshly, as is often observed among marginals who are ashamed of their origin and who are trying to prove their “new” authenticity. (In the war of Russia against Ukraine, representatives of small nations are the most involved, including ardently, non-Slavs and Muslims with weapons in their hands defend the values of the Russian world – Slavism, Orthodoxy. There are many ethnic Ukrainians here who have renounced their ethnic origin and also prove his devotion to Russian imperial values).

The imperial mentality of the Russians was inextricably linked with the authoritarian system of government, which in fact remained so in essence, despite the historical changes in state imperialism – tsarist, Soviet, post-Soviet. So,

the specificity of the Russian imperial consciousness is determined by the despotism (repressiveness) of the power of the Moscow autocrats, the slave mentality of the people based on serfdom, the hierarchy of not vassals, but state slaves, the long absence of a class system in society, self-governing cities and a common spirit, a common spirit in the name of the state. (Гриневич, 2022).

The essence of the Russian authoritarian system is clearly defined in the work of K. Marx “The History of Secret Diplomacy of the 18th Century” (*Die Geschichte der Geheimdiplomatie des 18. Jahrhunderts*), where he gives assessment of the so-called “Eastern barbarism” and “Eastern despotism”: “Moscow has grown and strengthened from the terrible and insignificant school of Mongol slavery. Her power is enhanced only by the fact that in the art of slavery it reaches virtuosity”. Marx’s statement is important in that we are talking about the regression to slavery of the Moscow state, which to a certain extent is its historical code. Such a regression, in comparison with the February bourgeois revolution of 1917, was the October Revolution, which led not only to the “re-feudalization” of Russian society, where the place of princes was blocked by party functionaries, and the Soviet Union became the restoration of the Russian Empire, but also social forms, with modern “science and technology as ideology” became unprecedented forms of slavery in history (Єрмоленко, 2015). In fact, Marx speaks of “Machiavellianism of a slave seeking to usurp power” as a mental feature of Russians that feeds regressive tendencies in society.

Such a regression is taking place in Russia today, which is not only the result of Putin’s propaganda, but is also determined by socio-ontological factors that reflect the ontological attitude towards extensive development, expansion, and, finally, to war. It is she who determines the foreign policy strategy of the Kremlin and its current political leader Putin. The latter is a bright type of “new man”. This “new man” absorbed the qualities produced by the entire history of the Russian Empire.

The very slavish obedience of Russians to their political leader (tsar, general secretary, president) and power deprives them in their bulk of the ability to critically perceive the policy of the state and makes them obedient executors of any of its adventurous plans and slogans. In addition, such slavish obedience is compensated by the transfer of one’s own discontent and irritation to other, non-Russian irritants, which causes an approving attitude towards forceful methods of solving the problem.

The Russian mentality clearly reflected the specific features of the formation of the Russian empire with expansionist aspirations for the incessant expansion of its territories under the slogan of “unification of Russian lands around Moscow” by conquering other sovereign states and peoples. Russian expansionism is not a historical accident. For a long period, the Russians were forced to believe that the Russian people are the bearer of a special civilization that has “features of an original and full-fledged planetary and historical phenomenon”, ensuring its right to “civilizational expansion”. This expansionism is an integral part of the historical existence of the Russian people, an internal need to create an Empire, the boundaries of which historically constantly expanded, covering an ever larger conglomerate of peoples, cultures, religions, territories, regions. And this is the messianic role of the Russian people as a kind of “common denominator”, which “allows the Russians to integrate any cultural reality into their Empire”. However, the Russian people in their being emerge from an even more global, soteriological perspective, which tends to have a planetary significance. And this fully corresponds not only to the official position of the Kremlin on Russia’s foreign policy strategy for the future, but also to the mental mood in Russian society.

It is noteworthy that attempts are being made to explain the roots of Russian expansionism even through the application of genetic theory. An example is the concept of Klesov, a well-known modern American-Russian specialist in the field of genetic genealogy. He argues about the genetic relationship of the Proto-Slavs with the Aryans, which has 5000 years. However, trying to “tie” the Slavic-Aryan line to the Russian context, Klesov, solely from the standpoint of genetic determinism and without taking into account other factors of socio-historical development, is trying to substantiate the opinion about the special place of Russians in the history of mankind and the modern world, and therefore their right to cultural and political expansionism.

The high militaristic spirit inherent in the Russian mentality also largely corresponds to the expansionist imperial desire. Therefore, the fact of an absolutely positive attitude towards the war in the minds of Russians at the national level was and remains quite clear. According to polls by the Levada Center sociological service, back in August 2022, supporters of the Russian-Ukrainian war to the bitter end prevailed (Гудков, 2022). It is noteworthy that even the heavy losses of Russians at the front during 2022–2023 did not significantly affect their attitude towards the war as such.

The militaristic spirit of Russian society is a continuation of the ancient tradition of cultivating such social values that are built on militaristic myths. Namely, the rise of brute force, disdain for publicity, cynicism and anomie. All this is multiplied by the Soviet tradition of the inheritance of the individual, the criminalization of mass consciousness and the industrialization of lies. The dominant anthropological type of modern Russia – the collective personality – has become the bearer of the values of a militarized society, the main pillar in the mobilization strategies of the Putin regime (Білий, 2021). By the way, it was this spirit that largely determined the specifics of the formation of the Russian national consciousness. In this regard, it is appropriate to refer to the outstanding Russian historian Sergei Solovyov, who spoke something like this: they say, Russia is not a public, not a political concept, it is a military concept. It is noteworthy that in Russia, never, including today, during the Russian-Ukrainian war, which claimed the largest number of Russian lives since the Second World War, there are practically no anti-war movements within society. And those of the Russians who criticize the authorities in this aspect of its policy, the vast majority are not against the war, but in favor of better training and armament of the Russian military, which would ensure the impossibility of losing Russia in this war (Пареп, 2023). At the same time, it should be noted that recently

there has been an increase in the number of those Russians who are neither supporters nor opponents of the war, expressing indifference to a greater extent, which in general can be perceived as a positive trend, which, however, does not mean the possibility of a radical change vector. this trend in its opposite direction (Ya-тв, 2023).

It is obvious that the war for Russians is one of the dominant values that corresponds to their worldview ideas, forms and reflects a specific attitude to the most important aspects of national life. By definition, war is already a strategic action, because the term “strategy” itself comes from the ancient Greek *στρατήγία*, which means “campaign”, “expedition”, “the art of the commander” and, finally, its own “war”. In strategic action, the other person, the world as a whole, narrows down to an object, means, resource, and in its extreme manifestation, in war, appears as a target or goal (not at all in Kant’s understanding). Here, such a dimension of human interaction as communication, talking, dialogue, discourse, aimed at achieving mutual understanding, is reduced to nothing. Hybrid warfare probably consists in the fact that it is difficult to identify. The main thing in its definition is that it takes place as a war without rules, as a logical continuation of the anomie that prevails in society as a whole. In such a war, the strength of moral and legal norms becomes problematic. Therefore, a state waging a hybrid war makes a deal with non-state executors – militants, prisoners, groups of the local population, organizations, formally denying connection with them, in fact shifting responsibility for any war crimes to citizens. That is, executors hired by the state can do things that the aggressor state itself does not dare to do, because any state is obliged to comply with international military law, in particular the Geneva and Hague conventions on the laws of war on land and agreements with other states in this area.

Since almost all imperial wars are connected not only with the seizure of foreign territories, the enslavement of other peoples, they are predatory in nature. Consequently, conquest, confiscation, robbery become normalized rules and do not cause public and individual condemnation. Moreover, the overwhelming majority of citizens in Russia perceive war as a way to earn money, improve their financial situation, and enrich themselves: in this regard, each soldier is considered for his family as a competitor, a breadwinner. They even make an order for him to bring back from the war as gifts. Although such a tradition is closely connected with certain mental characteristics, historically determined by socio-cultural factors. Suffice it to recall Russian folklore with its leading character – Ivan the Fool, personifying the image of a representative of the middle environment, which accounted for up to 90% of the Russian population: poor, stupid, simple-minded, irresponsible, patient, trusting, sincere, kind, generous, carefree, cheerful, lucky. Poverty is a characteristic feature of the fabulous Ivan the Fool. He never strives to be rich just for the sake of wealth, for this you need to be greedy, and this is a negative trait from the point of view of the popular ideal. Although he is not against wealth, various benefits, which he finally receives, and easily, thanks to some miracles. At the basis of such behavior of a fairy-tale hero is the specific attitude of Russians to work, due to the absence in the state of any time of genuine private property, which is protected by an unshakable law. Here, traditionally, the authorities did not guarantee the security of the private owner, and the economic system was based on forced labor, which barely supported the survival of the mass disenfranchised labor force, even in tsarist or Soviet times. A characteristic feature of this system was corruption and theft at all levels. Hence the rooted belief that no matter how hard you work, you cannot achieve solvency, they will still take it away. This is what gave rise to such traits of the national character as passivity and laziness. On the other hand, hope in God, temper, luck, not excluding “freebies”, which is also reflected in the mental characteristics of Russians (Орлова, 2019) and is clearly manifested, in particular, during aggressive campaigns.

Another side of imperial militancy is aggressiveness, because, as a rule, it is the empire that initiates military conflicts. At the same time, aggressiveness can be considered as a component not only of state policy, but also a psychological feature of Russians in general. And one of the motivating factors causing outbursts of aggressiveness may be the crisis states of the imperial system itself. An attempt to protect and preserve it as a value as a symbol of one’s own greatness and power significantly activates the mental potential of Russians, directing it towards all those who pose a real external and internal threat to the physical existence of the empire.

Today, this is a deep experience of the collapse of the Soviet Union, which the imperial consciousness considers as a huge tragedy of the 20th century, a “historical trauma”. And when Putin speaks about this with pain in his heart, he, in fact, verbalizes an idea that is stuck in the mind of an ordinary Russian, usually far from politics. This feeling of metaphysical humiliation is the foundation of the reincarnation of Putin’s “Russian world” idea, which is at the top of this pyramid. The attack on Ukraine is a certain explosion caused by this experience, which was bound to happen inevitably. In any case, such an explosion of aggression, a flash of idiosyncrasy towards reality, a blind rejection of historical facts – all this was generated by a sense of loss of imperial greatness.

By the way, a sense of imperial greatness underlies Russia’s constant struggle for regional and global military-political leadership, which was fueled by the idea of influence legitime – Russia’s legal right not only to fight for spheres of influence, but also to seize new territories based on the need to expand the safe territory around own boundaries. An example of this can be considered the capture by Russia at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Finland to protect Petersburg from the Swedes. Under the same pretext, the USSR launched a war against Finland in 1939. For a similar purpose, the Soviet Union created the system of the “Warsaw Pact”, signed in 1955. The USSR used similar slogans to send its troops into Afghanistan in 1979. There is a prevention of the deployment of NATO troops on its territory, etc. In fact, the principle of influence legitime is actively used to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries in the field of politics, economics, religion, language, and culture.

To justify their right to intervene in order to avoid external danger, the idea of a primordial enemy of Russia, which has also become a component of the Russian imperial mentality, is very actively used. In fact, according to

this approach, Russia is literally surrounded by enemies, and any aggressive actions of Russia in relation to other states are a “preemptive strike” – absolutely, as history proves, a false argument that is most actively used by Russian politicians and diplomats, numerous experts and the entire system of Russian propaganda. On the other hand, the image of an external enemy, which traditionally includes Europe and the United States, but also other countries whose policies do not meet the interests of Russia, is a strong social integration and mobilization factor for Russians.

At the same time, the nature of Russian aggressiveness can be explained by other factors, including economic ones. Thus, according to Datsyuk, the aggressive nature of Russian society is explained by four paradoxes of its resource provision. 1. This is the “paradox of the resource curse”, or simply the “resource curse” of Russia, which means that a large amount of resources does not contribute, but slows down development, because it does not increase, but reduces the motivation for change. The consequences of this are clearly visible in the humanitarian sphere. 2. Non-conversion of abundance: the abundance of one resource does not lead to the replenishment of other resources, but to the growth of monopoly, an increase in aggression and the projection of resource dictates on all other spheres of life. The result is the creation of absolute weapons and humanitarian aggression. 3. The absolute weapon serves not to protect the world, but to preserve the whole as a resource empire with military and humanitarian aggression. The latter stimulates resource territorial expansion, which implies the intellectual and cultural suppression of colonial neighborhoods in the name of the damned resource. 4. The presence of an absolute weapon leads to the creation of a situation of its mandatory use, since a lot of resources have been invested in it (Дацюк, 2022).

Russian aggressiveness is closely connected with cruelty, which can be considered as one of the components of the Russian imperial mentality. This trait sits deep in the socio-cultural life of Russians. It can be viewed as the reverse side of Russians’ awareness of their own peculiarities – a pathological hatred of everything else. (Even within the Russian Federation, there are outright manifestations of ethnophobia, Nazism, chauvinism. The Slavic part of the citizens hates representatives of non-Slavic peoples. Even those who are citizens of Russia). Paradoxically, Russians understand cruelty as a specific manifestation of love. This is love through violence (“hitting means loving”). Therefore, proceeding from this, the murders of, say, Ukrainians are not committed out of hatred towards them; murder and rape is a punishment for their desire to be different, it is a way of re-education. By the way, the tolerant attitude in Russian society to such manifestations has its own explanation. After all, we are talking about the fact that criminal behavior in Russia does not have a frankly negative perception at all. Moreover, it is even often regarded as a matter of pride. Indeed, in the imagination of Russians, this means being a real man, a real member of society. M.Y. Saltykov-Shchedrin wrote about the cult of criminals, perverts, scoundrels in Russia at one time, noting that such people are elected to power there.

Often such a feature of the Russian mentality is explained by the nature of the Russian soul, its duality. Actually, we are talking about the fact that out of the three principles in the structure of the human soul – the holy, specifically human and animal, in the Russian soul there are mainly two – the holy and the animal. At the same time, the specifically human principle in it is incommensurably weaker in comparison with the national psychology of other peoples. A. Pushkin, M. Dostoevsky and other Russian writers paid attention to a similar feature of the Russian psyche, endowing their heroes with this particular trait. Consequently, with the weakness of the middle link, there is a constant struggle between the saint and the bestial. The holy side is able to slow down the activity of the beasts. However, the rassist aggressive slogans, and even consecrated by the Russian Orthodox Church, are precisely aimed at justifying cruelty, atrocity, robbery, hiding behind some good intentions (the struggle for ancestral Russian territories, the return of Russian shrines, the protection of the Russian / Russian-speaking population, etc.).

Commit crimes – sincerely repent of them – and commit new ones. Move in a circle. “... So repentance became a technique that cleared the way for new murders. Ivan the Terrible did the same, this agreement with conscience is a characteristic Russian feature. The ambivalence of feelings is a birthmark of the spiritual life of primitive man, preserved by the Russians better and in a form more accessible to consciousness than by other peoples” (Епштейн, 2022).

Some researchers link the cruelty of Russians with a genetic factor – their connection with androphages. As evidenced by historical sources (Геродот, 1993: 180-228), in the days of Antiquity they lived in the expanses of present-day Muscovy. According to Herodotus, among all the tribes they have the wildest customs; that people are some kind of special, completely different from the sketes, they do not speak the skete language, they have no laws, they have the wildest customs, they are nomad hunters and cannibals, and this is the only cannibal tribe in this country (Білецький, 1993). In Russia they were called Samoyeds, later – more harmoniously – Samoyeds. As evidenced by archaeological excavations and folklore, Samoyeds lived several thousand years before Herodotus and later, already in the Christian era. Even during the 16th-20th centuries, public cruel tortures were the norm, which were perceived by all those present with great pleasure. And even publicly mocked the bodies of the dead. Moreover, men and women took an active part in such actions. Indicative in this regard is the origin of the disparaging colloquial name of the Russians “katsap” (translated from the Turkic “flayer”, or “butcher”), which the latter, according to the most common version (D. Yavornitsky), received precisely for cruelty.

Without a doubt, it is impossible to absolutize the cruelty that was inherent in the ancestors of Russians in the distant and not very distant past, but the point is that such cruelty was constantly supported and cultivated at the level of state imperial policy. And this trend has acquired today an unprecedented barbaric scope. The tradition of such torture, although in more sophisticated forms, was adopted by the NKVD system (The People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs), which turned out to be the mass destruction of citizens, the genocide of entire peoples, including

Ukrainians. It is indicative that atrocities have always been encouraged in the RF Armed Forces both in relation to enemy soldiers and to the civilian population of the regions that were carried away by Russian troops. This is evidenced by the events of 1943–1944 during the Second World War, during the war in Afghanistan (1979–1989), in Chechnya (1991–1994; 1999–2009), Georgia (2008), Ukraine (2014–2023).

Some associate the brutality of the Russians with their Horde roots. Indeed, for the Horde, cruelty is a manifestation of strength, power, victory (Зеленько, 2020).

The justification of cruelty is closely connected with the cult of death – necrophilia, which has a centuries-old tradition of Russian folk life. And although this cult is found among almost all peoples, it is in Russia that it has acquired special significance and is actively preached by the Russian Orthodox Church and is closely associated with the idea of imperial Russian patriotism. One can even talk about a new stage of necroculture, which begins in the 2000s. and passes under the slogans “St. George’s Ribbon”, “grandfathers fought”, etc. We are talking about the fact that a whole Pantheon of New Martyrs who died on the fronts of the Russian Federation over the past 31 years is currently being added to the well-known saints of the Russian Orthodox Church. In one of his sermons, the Russian Patriarch Kirill noted that the deceased soldier sacrifices himself to others. And such a sacrifice washes away all the sins that a person has committed (i.e., both aggression and all those crimes committed by Russian invaders on foreign territory are justified in this way) (Долматов, 2022). Moreover, she deserves respect after death. The necrophile is absolutely convinced that violence in general is the only way to resolve problems and conflicts, and only the past is real for him, and not the present and the future (Фромм, 2004).

As noted, the Russian imperial mentality is based on a clear opposition between the metropolis and the colonies. It is clear that the political dominance of the mother country over its colonies is transferred to all aspects of public life. Hence, one of the basic ideological theses is the thesis about the superiority of Russians in comparison with representatives of any other nations. Characteristically, this applies to both Slavic and non-Slavic peoples, and the peoples of highly developed countries, the peoples of other metropolises, and any colonial peoples, including those that make up their own empire. A similar principle underlies the chauvinist sentiments in Russia, which have always been quite sensitive. Even in the Soviet Union, the principle of internationalism in practice appeared with a Russian face, and the concept of the Soviet people recognized the special status of Russians as an older brother “in the family of fraternal peoples”.

The fact of realizing one’s superiority in comparison with other peoples is closely related to such a phenomenon as xenophobia, which has always been inherent in Russian public sentiment, but in recent years, according to experts, has become rampant. Xenophobia is a persistent obsessive feeling of fear, hatred, hostility towards strangers or aliens, intolerance and hostility towards representatives of another nation, religion, culture, nationality, foreigners or representatives of other regions, as well as towards something unfamiliar, unusual, alien. It is clear that xenophobia is organically linked to the imperial spirit of Russians. The main manifestations of xenophobia are considered to be racism, ethnophobia, anti-Semitism, religious intolerance, linguistic antipathy, and the like, which are professed in the most concentrated form by representatives of modern ultranationalist movements in Russia (“Nashi”, “South-Eastern Radical Bloc” (SERB), etc.), but mentally inherent in the vast majority of Russians.

If we talk about ethnic intolerance, then Ukrainophobia occupies a special place here. The latter has centuries-old historical roots. It is formed already at the household level and is a reaction to significant differences in the character, way of life and level of abundance of Russians and Ukrainians. It is uncomfortable for a Russian person to see another person next to him who is actively building his life, trying to improve it with a perspective on the future. Here the spirit of the Russian rises, begins to persecute the “bourgeois”, “kulak”, “Geyropa” or Ukraine. It is no coincidence that in the mass Russian consciousness there was an image of a “Khokhol” – a petty fist, greedy and cunning, not in a hurry to share “brotherly” (Дацик, 2015).

However, this is only one side of the problem. It is significant that its underlying causes were carefully masked by the Russian authorities, but the anti-Ukrainian policy was one of the main manifestations of the Russian state ideology throughout almost the entire period of the existence of the Russian empire, which was fixed on the mental level of Russians. The fact is that the whole history of Russia, after the abandonment of its previous name Muscovy, is a process of shameless exploitation of the foreign, Kievor-Russian (Ukrainian) territory, history and culture appropriated by it. And in order to “hide” this fact, the awareness of which, no doubt, cultivates an inferiority complex of Russians, the latter had to radically correct history from the very beginning, creating numerous myths about their / not their origin, hiding / hushing up / distorting the real facts of their own history, faith, culture.

In addition, according to the Russians, Ukraine and Ukrainians, given their genetic love of freedom and the readiness to disobey and defend their freedom, confirmed by the entire history of their own existence, including with weapons in their hands, have been and still are the greatest danger among all the peoples enslaved by the Russian Empire, to separatism, the struggle for independence, which is a real threat to the existence of the Russian Empire (the struggle of the Zaporizhzhia Cossacks, led by Hetman I. Mazepa, Gaydamachchina, the activities of the Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood, the Insurgent Movement of 1918–1921, mass, including the performances of the Ukrainian peasantry against collectivization in the early 1930s, the struggle of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) during the Second World War and after it, the movement of the Sixties in Ukraine, etc.).

This is on the one hand. But on the other hand, to discredit the real connections of Ukrainians with their own history, trying to “cleanse” their historical memory and convince them that they are also the same Russians, only “fake”, “second-class”. Based on this logic, Ukrainians do not and cannot have their own language, or their own faith, or their own culture, which were subjected to endless attacks from the Russian imperial policy and are not

perceived at the level of Russian public consciousness as full-fledged. However, the fact that the constituent parts of the Ukrainian ethnic identity have not only been preserved, but continue to develop, has become one of the leading reasons for the hatred of Russians for Ukrainians. Therefore, the struggle against manifestations of Ukrainian national identity has been and remains very sharp, irreconcilable, and the arguments in favor of justifying such an attitude are becoming more and more categorical, sometimes reaching the point of absurdity. So, Russian director Nikita Mikhalkov, at a meeting with teachers in the Moscow region, justifying his negative attitude towards the possibility of teaching the Ukrainian language in the schools of the so-called DPR and LPR, said that the phrases that we hear in Ukrainian transcription and pronunciation are a formulation of hatred for Russia. And if school subjects are taught somewhere in Ukrainian, this is a “catastrophe”, because in recent years the Ukrainian language has become “an image of Russophobia” («Українська мова», 2022). Moreover, in general, everything connected with Ukraine and Ukrainians arouses in a significant number of not only ordinary Russians, but also their spiritual and political leaders, undisguised hostility and unwillingness to somehow hide their anti-Ukrainian feelings. It suffices to cite a set of “bright” epithets that D. Medvedev recently used, demonstrating his position on this issue. Like, this is “a part of the dying world” that hates Russians, “bans their language, values and even faith”, as well as “a bunch of crazy Nazi drug addicts”, “a large pack of barking dogs from a Western kennel” and “a diverse pack of narrow-minded from a decayed Western Empire”.

It is clear that the pathological Ukrainophobia inherent in Russian society has always fueled surges in the policy of genocide against Ukrainians, which was observed both under Tsarist Russia and during the existence of the USSR. A new manifestation of the genocide was the rashist policy of modern Russia, which is actually supported by the supporters of the concept of the “Russian world”. Thus, commenting on the bloody clashes in Odessa on May 2, 2014, provoked by pro-Russian forces in Ukraine, Dugin called in one of his video appeals: “Ukrainians need to be killed, killed and killed, I tell you this as a professor” (Ворожко, 2015).

These provisions almost completely correspond to the signs of genocide propaganda, which has already been reflected in the UN Decision of April 7, 2022 on the exclusion of the Russian Federation from the Human Rights Council through the genocide of Ukrainians (Ленеха, 2022). Such a “program”, which is largely supported in Russian society, testifies to the corresponding mental and psychological state of Russian society, conditioned not only by Russia’s imperial past, but also by its modern neo-imperial aspirations and purposeful feeding of just such traits of the national character, corresponding to the imperial state formation of the period rule of Putin’s fascist regime. And this means that even after Russia’s defeat in the war with Ukraine and its recognition of this fact, the imperial psychological and mental traits of Russians will remain, creating that fertile ground that, under favorable conditions, will influence the corresponding choice of Russian society of its political course. The latter dictates the need to dismantle the very basis for the cultivation of similar psychological and mental state traits of Russians - the Russian empire in any form.

**Conclusions.** 1. The psychological and mental characteristics of Russians are a complex and contradictory formation, reflecting the specific features of their centuries-old past. A significant place here belongs to the features that determine the manifestations of the imperial mentality, due to the long period of historical development of the Russian imperial statehood, which has gone through the stages of the periods of Russia of the tsarist era, the Soviet-style empire and the neo-empire of the post-Soviet period.

2. In the structure of the imperial Russian mentality, those features are clearly traced that correspond to the essential manifestations of the Russian imperial state with its authoritarian way of life, expansionist policy direction, militarized essence, justification of violence, cruelty, which is encouraged in every possible way by various means. and fascist on the grounds of Putin’s regime. It is these mental and psychological traits that largely influence the choice of the political vector for the development of Russian statehood, which leads to the reproduction of Russian imperialism in one form or another, with all its negative consequences both for the Russian people themselves and for other peoples elected as victims of the Russian imperial ones. encroachments.

3. One of the manifestations of the Russian imperial mentality should be considered chauvinism with various manifestations of xenophobia, which is a derivative of building relationships between the metropolis and the colonies. Traditionally, a special place in this context belongs to Ukrainophobia associated with the extraordinary role of Ukraine, its history, ethnic, economic and spiritual potential in the origin, development and prospects for the further existence of Russia as an imperial state entity. Today, Ukrainophobia is experiencing another historical wave of the genocide of the Ukrainian people, initiated by Russia, which can be considered one of the most threatening to the fate of Ukraine and Ukrainians.

4. Only the deprivation of Russia of its imperial spirit, the disintegration into separate ethno-national state formations that will develop not on the illusory idea of belonging to some kind of empire, but on their own ethno-cultural traditions and assets, can become a prerequisite for changing the structure of the mentality and Russians, and peoples colonized by Russia.

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