

Romanov Family Shooting in post-Soviet Newspapers: Discourse and Memory

Introduction

In Russian history we can find a lot of different traumatic events that continue to impact individuals today. The disintegration of the Soviet Union, Stalinist repressions, The First and The Second World Wars and others. However, there are some events that have not gained the status of traumatic ones.

The Shooting of the Romanov family is a controversial event in the history of Russia. During the Soviet regime the murder of the royal family was often interpreted as a necessary measure in building new socialistic state. During the 90s the topic of Romanov shooting was rarely discussed. In 2000s several processes of religious and political rehabilitation of Romanov family actualized the resignation with the pre-Soviet past and the revival of its values in order to find new self-identity.

This event is researched in details as a historical fact, but the appearance of its representations in culture and politics shows that this problem has not only historical dimension (Фирсов, 2010; Slater, 2005). The shooting of the Romanov family has indicated a split between two ideologies, two types of values and the ways of living. With the Emperor's execution several groups of people have felt themselves repressed because the Emperor himself has represented certain socio-cultural values they followed.

Some Soviet people could identify themselves not only with the main victims of the new regime: they also felt responsibility for its crimes. There were several social groups where the Tsar was honored as a sacral victim during the 20th century in spite of official ideological obstructions. In 2000s juridical and religious aspects of this cult were legitimated by Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the act of official rehabilitation. These procedures became the symbols of the reconciliation between the Soviet and pre-Soviet past.

These socio-cultural processes were supported by the actualization of their symbolical meanings. Nicolas the II was the figure that revived nationalist discourses in social movements and politics. The images of Romanov family and its last members appeared in several patriotic Russian movies. One of them ("*The Romanovs: An Imperial Family*" by G. Panfilov) was premiered at the 22nd annual Moscow Film Festival as its central event. In 2014 Russia is honoring the 400 years anniversary of the Romanov dynasty, and we can expect the new rise of official and unofficial memorization connected with the major tragedy of this family.

The importance of this research is due to the fact that the discussion about Russian traumatic experience is concentrated mostly on the Soviet past. We consider that the events of 1917-1918 are also crucial for the problems of self-identification in post-Soviet Russia. The memorization of the events that happened in this transitional period of Russian history was not well analyzed. The main corpus of texts focuses on the process of creating myth about the last Russian Tsar and

his family's shooting in contemporary Russia. The narratives about the Royal family are barely engaged with the historical discipline, but they do not explain why the Romanovs were killed. They create sentimentalized, anti-Semitic or mystical myths about the shooting of the Czar without any attempt to discuss it on the social or academic level.

According to the topic of our research, it was discussed only in one volume of "Неприкосновенный Запас" and was dedicated to political and cultural meanings of the Romanov family canonization. This events are reflected as "Legends and Myths" (the name of the magazine section), i. e. as constructed with the rules of the genre stories. These stories are connected with the "imperial world perception" ("имперское мироощущение"), which has not noticeable differences with pre-Soviet ideology (Герасимов, 2000).

The discourse of imperial power and its representation is also the main topic of O. Kinskiy's article about the 22nd annual Moscow Film Festival and the film of Gleb Panfilov "*The Romanovs: An Imperial Family*". Its premiere was accompanied by sending invitation to the relatives of the Romanov family, Mikhalkov's complimentary speech about the film and receipt of the award by Gleb Panfilov. The choice of the film shows the popularity of the monarchic discourse among society, where it relates with themes of patriotism and fair ruler who loves its people, and official authorities who use the monarchic discourse to legitimate their power (Кинский, 2000).

The last article in this section is about the political meaning of the Romanov family canonization. V. Krivulin interpreters this event as division of power between ROC and Russian official authorities. Thorough analysis shows that ROC was the main actor in most of socio-political events that were connected with Romanov family at the beginning of new century. ROC tried to declare itself as an instate of social power (Кривулин, 2000).

The majority of the existent researches are dedicated mostly to the political meaning of the Romanov family canonization and its connection with the rhetoric of Russian authorities or representation in media: movies, documentaries, television debates, articles.

At the same time there are very few articles that reflect the cultural consequences of this event. There are no visible attempts in trying to mark the shooting of the Romanov family as the cultural trauma experience in public discourse. Meanwhile, the problems of the collective fault exist only in religious discourse, where the killing of the Royal family is taken as the burden of all Russian people - their ancestors and descendants. Our aim is to find out why Nicholas Romanov and his family is still a controversial topic despite the fact of political rehabilitation and religious canonization?

More detailed study on this topic can clarify the meaning of some commemorative practices that take place in modern Russia. Analyzing the cultural representations of Tsar family shooting we can understand how the inner conflict of building the national identity is resolving (or whether it can just be resolved).

In order to understand how the Romanov family shooting functions in contemporary socio-cultural context we will study its representations in the Russian media. We focus on post-Soviet narratives about Romanov family that are constructed in the newspapers as a case.

The reason for this choice is connected with the conceptualization of this event as cultural trauma. In cultural sociology approach trauma can be described as a construction which is expressed through the process of narration and signification. Mass media allows articulating a special narrative about traumatic event (Alexander, 2004). Besides, different social groups take part in the constructing these narratives interacting with media. The analyses of public media can also help to reveal representatives of such groups and examine how they talk about particular events. We have chosen newspapers as the most available source for the detailed research (other types of media such as TV are more difficult to analyze because they have more complicated semiotic structure and they are more difficult to find and systematize).

Case study

In our research we concentrate only on the text content of newspaper articles and use the discourse analysis as the main method. As Donald Matheson states, discourse analysis of the media allows describing collective meanings in details and finding which representations of the social life predominate (Matheson, 2005). With the help of this method we can find structures that create trauma narratives.

The limitations for our material are language (Russian), type of press (central [main] daily Russian newspapers) and period of time (1998-2013). We do not take into account a time period 1991-1997 because our test search showed us that there were no publications dedicated to Romanov family during this time. To collect appropriate materials we made a search in “Интегрум” and “Public.ru” databases and used the following key words: *расстрел :1 Романовых, канонизация :1 Романовых, останки : Романовых, Николай : 2 кровавый или святой.*

Picture 1 presents the results of this search. It shows the number of articles in each newspaper and their approximate circulation and number of audience (data from “Атлас СМИ” portal [URL: <http://www.mediageo.ru/fedpressa/fedpressa.html>]). To make our analysis valid we select only newspapers with wide audience and big number of articles.

The number of articles found in the databases after the inquiry “расстрел Романовых” is twice as much as “канонизация Романовых”: that may indicate that political meaning of the Tsar’s figure overshadows the sacral (orthodox) discourse.

Many articles include “Николай кровавый” in their titles that shows negative connotations of the Nicholas’s image. At the same time it is seen that main characteristics revolves around two opposite aspects of his figure: the saint who was an innocent victim of the Soviet regime or the “bloody” tyrant whose death was a logical conclusion of his deeds.

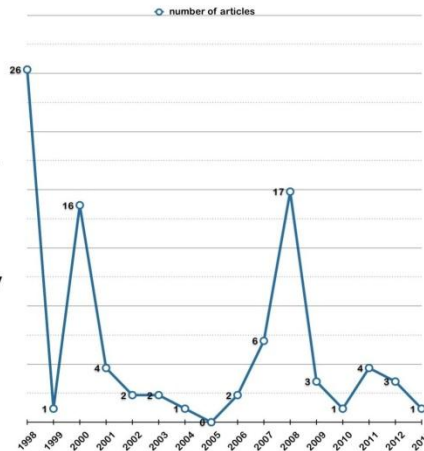
| newspaper | circulation (k) | audience (k) | number of articles |
|-------------------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------------|
| Комсомольская Правда | 800 | 520 | 14 |
| Московский комсомолец | 950 | 850 | 12 |
| Известия | 250 | 125 | 9 |
| Независимая газета | 55 (?) | ? | 8 |
| Российская газета | 400 | 190 | 6 |
| Коммерсант | 250 | 150 | 9 |
| Труд | 150 | 65 | 7 |
| Вечерняя Москва | ? | ? | 4 |
| Российские Вести | ? | ? | 3 |
| Новые Известия (Москва) | 50 | 30 | 4 |
| Other newspapers | | | 13 |

Picture 1

Number of publications (89)

Events:

- 1998 - remains, burials
- 2000 - film by Gleb Panfilov
- 2001 - canonization
- 2005-2008 - rehabilitation
- 2008 - 90 years anniversary of shooting



On *Picture 2* we showed the dynamic allocation of the publications (in all newspapers, not only in selected). There is a direct dependence between this statistics and major events connected with our topic.

Our main aim is to find out how the discourses about the Royal family are constructed in the contemporary Russian media.

Picture 2

We attract our attention to selected newspapers in order to understand what themes were discussed and how they were presented to the public.

The narrative is constructed from several codes of trauma (as we assume) discourse. We highlight three elements in each article: events/main topic, rhetoric, names/personalities. It will help us to formulate some codes (or “tags”) that were used through the selected years.

Events/main topic

The themes dedicated to the Royal family became popular few times through the period of our research (*Picture 3*):

- 1998-1999: Discussion about *the Royal family's remains and their burial*. It was accompanied by the debates about the identification of the remains that were found in Yekaterinburg. There was also a confrontation between Church and Government over the necessity of the burial in The Petropavlovsk Cathedral. Public and official debates actualized a variety of interpretations of Nicholas and his place in the history of Russia.
- 2000-2001: *The process of canonization of the Royal family*. It revealed a number of contradictions inside the ROC connected with the attitude of Church authorities to the figure of Nicholas II. It also indicated the rise of the monarchic discourse.
- 2006-2008: *Political rehabilitation of the Romanov family*. These processes caused a sequence of publication in press and discussions about the ambiguity of Nicholas in contemporary Russian public discourse.

| Год/Year | Кол-во статей/Number of articles |
|----------|----------------------------------|
| 1998 | 27 |
| 1999 | 1 |
| 2000 | 16 |
| 2001 | 3 |
| 2002 | 2 |
| 2003 | 2 |
| 2004 | 1 |
| 2005 | 0 |
| 2006 | 1 |
| 2007 | 6 |
| 2008 | 17 |
| 2009 | 3 |
| 2010 | 1 |
| 2011 | 4 |
| 2012 | 3 |
| 2013 | 1 |

Picture 3

Rhetoric

The representation of the Romanov family in post-Soviet press helps to highlight a number of contradictions among official and Church authorities and public. The incapability of comprehension of this traumatic experience creates a conflict of identities and produces a number of gaps. This conflict becomes visible in a number of articles through the language used there. The following quotes represent the confusion among “common people”. For example, the topic of public uncertainty in the authenticity of the Royals remains appeared in the Коммерсант-Daily newspaper:

«Большое количество верующих с подозрением относятся к этим останкам, и вопросы этих людей должны были сняты»

(Коммерсант-Daily. 28.02.1998.)

Sometimes the public opinion may be supported by the official authorities:

«Высказав личное мнение, Юрий Лужков выразил общественное "это не те кости". Он заговорил о символической усыпальнице, которая стала бы памятником жертвам "периода богоборчества и красного террора в России».

(Коммерсант-Daily. 07.05.1998)

or ROC representatives like Metropolitan Juvenaly:

«Для церкви не столь важно, чьи именно это останки, ведь священники молятся не о теле, а о душе»

(Коммерсант. 28.02.1998)

The contradictions in the society become apparent in the letters and telephone calls of the readers:

«Вы представляете, что будет, если выяснится, что похоронили в Петербурге не царя, а какого-то купца?» (позвонивший в редакцию)

(Комсомольская правда. 26.07.2001)

«Уклоняясь от этого [посещения церемонии захоронения], Вы, как мне кажется, можете многое потерять в глазах российских граждан. Едва ли они простят Вам это. Думаю, еще не поздно проявить свойственное Вам мужество и внять голосу сердца и совести.» (письмо читателя)

(Московский комсомолец. 12.07.1998)

In the newspapers we can see different position about the place of the Romanov family in Russian history, like hatred against the Soviet regime:

«Это очередная победа России в деле установления идеи права и справедливости на земле русской. Все жертвы репрессий безбожного коммунистического режима должны быть реабилитированы». (Герман Лукьянов, адвокат)

(Коммерсант. 09.06.2009)

or, on the contrary, the support of Romanov shooting:

«Политическая необходимость уничтожения всей семьи (а не "зверская кровожадность", как это рисуют враги) была не всем понятна и не всем понятна еще теперь. Не только за границей, но и у нас» (Ф. Юровский)

(Московский комсомолец. 15.01. 1998)

The most representative article, in our opinion, was published in “Комсомольская правда” newspaper in 2008 where the different opinions about the need of State to admit its historical mistakes were introduced. We may observe different points of view from ROC authorities:

«Государство, не осудившее преступлений, совершенных против царской семьи, отягощает себя, а в некоторой степени и народ, последствиями этих преступлений. Осуждение государством убийства царской семьи станет актом покаяния нашей страны перед убиенными царственными страстотерпцами». (Всеволод Чаплин, протоиерей, замглавы отдела внешних церковных связей Московского патриархата).

«Мы должны делать так, чтобы кровопролитие не повторялось. Царскую семью казнили исподтишка - без суда. Такая громадная страна - и даже не спросили у народа» (Олег Тэор, настоятель храма Святого благоверного князя Александра Невского, Псков)

politicians:

«Историю пишут люди. А за ошибки зачастую отвечают потомки. И еще вопрос: извиняться перед кем? Перед народом или перед потомками царя?» (Асгат Сафаров, министр внутренних дел Татарстана)

«Я думаю, власть в этом случае извинится. Хотя могла бы и сама это сделать, не дожидаясь обращения церкви» (Константин Боровский, политик).

culture representatives:

«Я всегда поддерживаю церковь, но в данном случае обвинение направлено не по адресу. Расстрел Романовых - акт революционного террора, а не государственного волеизъявления. Тут уместнее было бы извиниться коммунистам» (Александр Дугин, философ)

«Нынешняя власть не имеет никакого отношения к убийству Николая II, и то, что устраивает церковь, - просто смешно» (Сергей Мазаев, солист группы «Моральный кодекс»)

«Уж если просить прощения, то у миллионов репрессированных. За их искалеченные судьбы» (Алексей Воронцов, завотделом охраны памятников музея «Куликово поле»)

and “common people”:

«Нет, не нужно. Это все равно что в одном конце автобуса наступили на ногу, а в другом конце говорят: «Извините».» (Галина, читательница сайта KP.RU)

«Думаю, Романовы наконец-то обрели покой. И нам уже надо смириться со всем этим. Это наша история, ее не переделаешь. Тогда совершенно другие люди у

власти стояли. Да есть и другие, более живые проблемы в нашей стране» (Нонна Яхновская, фотомодель, Хабаровск)

These statements from various groups of people indicates that there is no understanding of who should ask for redemption and why. Even the question “who is the victim?” stays unclear: is it just Romanov family or all the people who suffered from the Soviet Regime. It is impossible to reveal a certain answer, so it gives rise to various fantasies and conjectures about the Emperor and his family. These fantasies also exist because of many flaws in the investigation of shooting and the identification process:

«Накануне 84-й годовщины расстрела Романовых в Екатеринбурге историк Владлен Сироткин и советник председателя Государственной думы Юрий Дергаусов публично заявили о том, что царская семья не была расстреляна, а скрывалась на Кавказе, и что до сих пор жива Анастасия Романова»

(Московский комсомолец 13.07.2002)

«Больше всего было казаков. Большинство людей в форме держали хоругви с изображениями святых и надписями "Всероссийское соборное движение", "Союз православных хоругвеносцев". Выстроились люди с патриотической литературой. Рядом с многочисленными биографиями Николая II и всевозможными историческими хрониками соседствовали газеты "Память", "Черная сотня", "Дуэль" и книги типа "Ядовитые рыбы (масоны и сионисты в Японии)».

(Независимая газета, 22.08.2000)

These „myths“ may be produced even by official authorities like we can see in the first quote or approved by the Church.

Names/Personalities

The number of mentioned names and personalities in the publications can be combined in several groups. First of all, we can divide them into two big parts: political figures and representatives of ROC who displays different positions to the Nicholas and different discourses. The symbolic meaning of the official burial plays the prior role to such political figures as Boris Yeltsin, Yuri Luzhkov and Vladimir Putin in order to legitimate the continuity of power, while the act of canonization is more important to the Church authorities and society in order to expiate general guilt.

Another theme is connected with the historical meaning of the Nicholas II and addresses to the debates over the reasonableness of the Romanovs killing and opposed them to the soviet leaders - Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin and their politics. Other group of personalities is primary consist of cultural figures who translate monarchic discourse in their works - Nikita Mikhalkov, Gleb Panfilov, Edvard Radzinsky. The places mentioned in articles are related with the locations where the Royal family was killed (Ipatiev House, Ganina Yama, Church of All Saints (Yekaterinburg) or were buried (Peter and Paul Cathedral).

Representatives of the ROC: Alexey II, Vsevolod Chaplin, Metropolitan Juvenaly, Metropolitan Kirill

Historical figures: Nicholas II, Vladimir Lenin, Sokolov, Yakov Yurovsky, Joseph Stalin

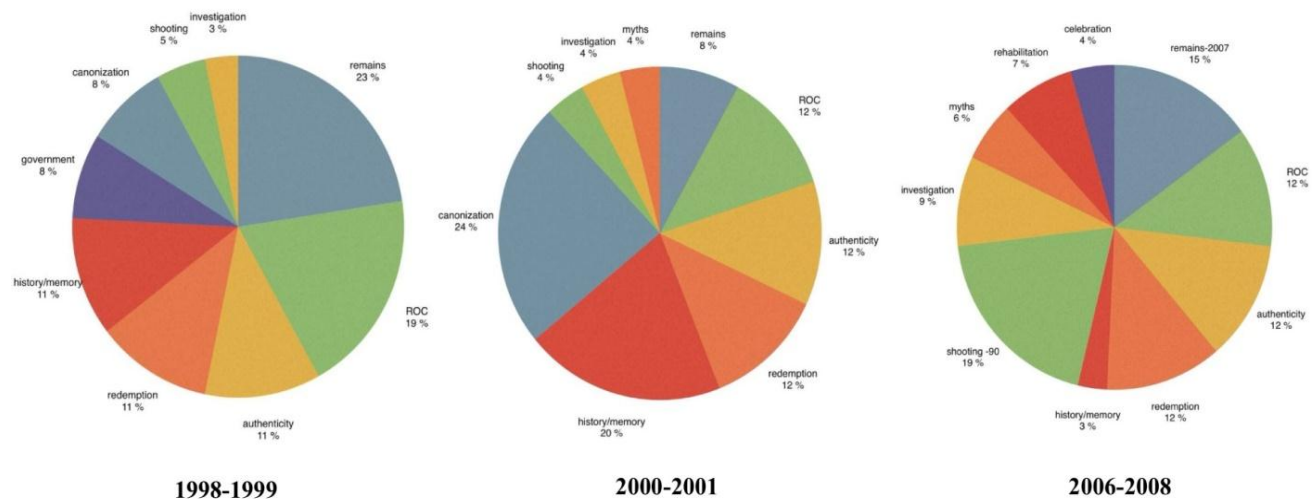
Contemporary politicians: Boris Yeltsin, Boris Nemtsov, Yuri Luzhkov, Vladimir Putin

Others: Gleb Panfilov, Nikita Mikhalkov, Maria Romanova, Edvard Radzinsky

Places: Ipatiev House, Ganina Yama, Church of All Saints (Yekaterinburg), Koptyaki Road, Peter and Paul Cathedral

Tags

The thorough analysis of the rhetoric, key words, headlines and mentioned names allows us to reduce them into a several “tags” that are repeated in each selected period of time. Three diagrams (*Pictures 5*) show the percentage correlation of this “tags” in 1998-1999, 2000-2001 and 2006-2008.



Picture 5

| tags \ years | 1998 - 1999 | 2000 - 2001 | 2006 - 2008 |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| remains/burial | 14 | 2 | 10 |
| ROC | 12 | 3 | 8 |
| authenticity | 7 | 3 | 8 |
| redemption | 7 | 3 | 8 |
| history/memory | 6 | 5 | 2 |
| cannonization | 5 | 6 | -- |
| government | 5 | -- | -- |
| shooting | 3 | 1 | 13 |
| investigation | 2 | 1 | 6 |
| myths | -- | 1 | -- |
| rehabilitation | -- | -- | 5 |
| celebration | -- | -- | 3 |

In 1998-1999 the attention was focused on the burial of Romanov family because the remains were found at that time. It is confirmed by the number of articles dedicated to this topic (*Picture 6*).

Another popular topic was connected with debates about the authenticity of this remains. ROC insisted on the more detailed expertise and cancellation of the official burial ceremony. It was the

Picture 6

moment when ROC tried to legitimate itself as a social power that can compete with the government in the new political situation (Кривулин, 2000).

In 2000-2001 the process of canonization was the most discussed topic because ROC and government had finally divided their fields of interests. During this period we can describe newspaper articles using the tags “canonization”, “ROC”, “memory”. The last tag is important because it is connected with “myths” that appear at this time. This “myths” are the first attempt to reflect the shooting of Romanov family as a narrative. It is confirmed by different documentaries and films about Romanovs (such as G.Panfilov’s and E.Radzinsky’s works).

In 2007 “new” remains were found in Yekaterinburg. That caused discussions about authenticity and burial again. There were also arguments about official political rehabilitation of Romanovs as soviet regime victims. Among new topics we can highlight celebrations dedicated to Romanov dynasty (such as 90 years anniversary of shooting).

Conclusion

According to the selected material we can single out repeating personalities, tags and key words that create a number of various topics and combine into narratives. These narratives are revealed through the core events (Burial, Canonization, and Rehabilitation) and underline the unified socio-cultural process which shows how the Romanov family, on the one hand, turn into the object of justification for official authorities’ monarchic attitude, and, on the other hand, how it creates a division between politicians, church authorities and public. It also displays an inability to formulate a consolidated reflection about the traumatic influence of the Romanov shooting.

The canonization and juridical rehabilitation of the Royal family members actualizes a variety of social, political and cultural discussions about what symbolic meaning the figure of the Last Czar assumes today. The Romanov family became an object of disputes between The Church and Government in the early 2000s so as their status in the social discourse. The act of canonization divided not only the public opinion but also the orthodox believers. Nicholas II and his family turned into passive instruments according to Government or Church’s interests.

The analyses of the articles in main Russian newspapers represents the lack of reflection on the symbolic, political and cultural meaning of the Romanovs’ death, therefore there is still no articulated traumatic discourse. At the same time, we can notice tendencies for creating number of conspiracy theories which appear because of lack of structured knowledge on this topic and the absence of attempts to find a consensus between religious and political authorities who can translate them in a public field. Nicholas Romanov and his family are still the object of debates between Government and Church, nationalists and communist, and even among common people.

The dynamics of publications through 15 years shows that the rhetoric they use did not essentially change. The monarchic discourse of official authorities which was mentioned in the “Неприкосновенный запас” in 2000 is still connected with the figures of Russian rulers, including Nickolas II. Moreover, the division of power between ROC and Russian official authorities still exists. 2013 is the year of 400th anniversary of Romanov family ruling and it

assumes a various commemorative events and practices but it is unclear if there are any changes in their representation.

The opinion of the Church is still important for all the topics related to the Romanovs and, first of all, for the public. There can be seen a sense of sympathy for the killed family in readers' letters but it is not enough to create an undiluted narrative about Romanov's shooting. At the same time we may observe certain signs of collective trauma which can be expressed by Church, Government or society. But they still stay unimportant.

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