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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Pierobon, C. (2014). Political youth organisations, music and national identity in contemporary Russia. *Studies of Transition States and Societies*, 6(2), 39-56. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-407694>

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Political Youth Organisations, Music and National Identity in Contemporary Russia

Chiara Pierobon*

Abstract

This article analyses the relationship between political youth organisations, music and national identity in contemporary Russia. It focuses on four of the most representative political youth groups present in the city of St. Petersburg – the Young Guard, the National Bolsheviks, the Movement Against Illegal Immigration (DPNI), and Oborona [*Defence*] – and describes their conceptualisation of post-Soviet Russianness, as captured through an analysis of their lyrics. The main contribution of this empirical study is the detection of convergences and divergences with regard to the national identity issue characterising youth organisations that position themselves differently in the Russian political spectrum.

Keywords: Russian civil society, Russian music, post-Soviet Russian national identity, cultural trauma.

Introduction

The paper focuses on four of the most representative political youth organisations present in the city of St. Petersburg and describes their contribution to the conceptualisation of post-Soviet Russian national identity/ies, as captured through an analysis of their music. More specifically, the article is an empirical study centred on the processes of construction of meanings that characterise contemporary Russian political youth organisations by looking at music as a cultural tool that takes part in the creation of the ideological and interpretative framework in which these organisations operate. The analysis is based on the lyrics of the Young Guard, the National Bolsheviks, the Movement Against Illegal Immigration (DPNI), and Oborona and pinpoints the different images and contents associated with post-Soviet Russianness emerging from their songs. The main purpose of this empirical investigation is the detection of convergences and divergences with regard to the national identity issue among political organisations that position themselves differently in the Russian political spectrum.

The importance of music in the life of social movements and organisations and, in particular, its potential in forging and sustaining their ideological framework is a well-recognised yet underexplored phenomenon, especially in the Russian context. Indeed, albeit several studies have been devoted to the examination of the role of music in youth subcultures in contemporary Russia (see, for example, Pilkington, 1994, 1996; Pilkington, Omelchenko, Flynn, Bliudina, & Starkova, 2002), none of them have been explicitly concerned with formal political organisations. Taking up this challenge, this article looks at music as an analytic lens for the study and comparison of both state-organised and oppositional organisations and evaluates to what extent this medium contributes to the life of the selected youth political groups and to their conceptualisation of post-Soviet Russian national identity.

The paper is organised as follows. The first section describes the theoretical background of the article, familiarising the reader with different ways in which music may contribute to the life of social movements and organisations and to the articulation of national collective identities. Section

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two presents the analytical framework of the article, contextualising and explaining the centrality of the national identity issue in contemporary Russia and its relevance as an analytical category. Moreover, in this section the reader will get acquainted with the main interpretations of post-Soviet Russianness that animate the contemporary political and intellectual debate, which represents the main point of reference for the content analysis of the lyrics coming in section 4 of the article. Besides introducing the selected organisations and portraying their ideology, the third section contributes to making this study plausible by investigating the concrete role of music in the life of the Young Guard, the National Bolsheviks, the Movement Against Illegal Immigration (DPNI), and Oborona and their relationship to bands and musicians composing and playing ‘their’ music. The data presented here was collected through interviews with the leaders and main representatives of the selected organisations conducted in the city of St. Petersburg during the summer and autumn of 2010.¹ The final part of the section includes detailed information on the construction of the sample of songs together with some theoretical and methodological considerations: it is noteworthy that the sample is based on the musical material available on the organisations’ webpages, which they use as an efficient strategy to grasp the processes of identity-construction and reinforcement. The fourth paragraph presents the major empirical contribution of this study and is dedicated to a content analysis of the song lyrics, which are examined *vis-à-vis* the main interpretations of post-Soviet *Russianness* that characterise the contemporary political and intellectual debate in a comparative perspective. The aim is to provide a description as accurate as possible of the different conceptualisations of Russianness emerging from the music of the selected organisations. Neither the historical accuracy nor the outcomes and individual responses to these theorisations are taken into account in the analysis. Finally, the conclusion sums up the main outcomes of this investigation, emphasising its methodological implications.

Noteworthy, many of the data presented in this paper was collected looking at the webpages of the organizations selected for this study. The reader should keep in mind that most of the links are not available anymore. This is due to the transient nature of Web content, which is usually available only for a short period of time (see Schneider & Foot, 2004, p. 15), and which causes the typical ‘headache’ of Internet studies, as defined by Gorny (2006, p. 73). For this reason, together with the link, the date when the pages were last accessed, is provided.

On the role of music in social movements and organisations

As stated by Eyerman and Jamison (1998), music represents an essential element in constructing the meanings of social movements and in making and organising their collective identity (Eyerman & Jamison, 1998). In their book *Music and Social Movements in the 1960s*, the authors refer to the work of Hunt, Benford and Snow (1994), who were among the first scholars to introduce the study of culture into the sociology of social movements by using the concept of ‘framing.’ For Eyerman and Jamison, culture – and, therefore, music – can be compared to the border surrounding a painting, to the frame which structures the picture of reality, conferring that peculiar shape to the ideational activities of the movement and guiding the actors in pursuing its goals. As they state in this regard, *the so-called ‘Master’ frame is seen to provide interpretation of the context in which the movement is operated in, something akin to what Marxist-oriented social scientists call ideology or what Weber meant*

1 The choice of placing the fieldwork in St. Petersburg was grounded on political and cultural rationales. Indeed, St. Petersburg was the capital of Russia during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the course of time, the city has been characterised by political effervescence, hosting some of the pivotal events for the nation’s political history. At the same time, the city is often depicted as the cultural center of Russia and, in the past years, has been the home of Russian cultural and artistic avant-gardes. In particular, it was in St. Petersburg that, in the course of the 1970s, the Leningrad rock club (LRC) was founded by many bands of the “underground” such as DDT, Kino with their singer Viktor Tsoi, Alisa, Mashina Vremeni [Time Machine], and Televizor [TV set], representing the *de facto* birthplace of the Russian Rock phenomenon.

by *ethos* (Eyerman and Jamison, 1998, p. 18). The scholars dwell on the constructive nature of this cultural frame which can be conceived as an analytic device produced by the movement's theorists and intellectuals. During the construction of this cultural frame, the collective identity of a movement is articulated and becomes the ideological framework of interpretation and reproduction of the movement; Eyerman and Jamison (1998) define this process of identity formation as 'cognitive praxis.'

In line with Eyerman and Jamison (1998), Roscigno, Danaher and Summers-Effler (2002) argue that music with its emotional and cognitive impacts can be fundamental to the construction of social movements' culture and collective identity. In their view, music can be conceived as an important mechanism promoting social cohesion at the most general level, able to forge and sustain solidarity among group members as well as to legitimate and motivate challenges to existing structures (Roscigno & Danaher, 2001; Roscigno, Danaher, & Summers-Effler, 2002, p. 145). Through music, an identity amplification process can take place, since lyrics might influence the individual salience hierarchy, so that lower order identities may be strengthened in order to foster participation in collective action (Roscigno, Danaher, & Summers-Effler, 2002, p. 143). The authors identify three fundamental components of social movement culture: a sense of group identity, an alternative interpretational frame of cause and effect, and a sense of group political efficacy; in their opinion, song lyrics may affect all these dimensions of social movement culture (Roscigno, Danaher, & Summers-Effler, 2002, pp. 145-146).

Finally, talking about the relationship between music and (national) collective identity, Bohlman (2004) points out how nationalistic music plays a significant role in the formation of ethnic consciousness. In particular, music can serve a nation state in its competition with other nation states and contribute to the struggle over contested territory such as border regions: in this view, possessing music becomes possessing land. For the author, nationalist music relies on the symbolism of structures that defines the nation, creates and fabricates an image of the state and enters into public and political rituals giving an identity to the nation. Nationalist music can mobilise the residents of the state by narrating a historical or political struggle and by identifying the entity against which the nation should fight, thus taking people into battle, both abstract and real (Bohlman, 2004, p. 88).

The national identity issue in contemporary Russia: the 'cultural trauma'

In order to fully understand the centrality of the national identity issue in contemporary Russia, the reader should keep in mind the complexity of the post-Soviet Russian case and the several economic, political, social and cultural transformations that have affected the country in the past twenty years and that have given rise to what is by Sztompka (2000) defined as a 'cultural trauma'. Indeed, the substitution of the Leninist single party and of the socio-economic system based on a near-total state control that characterised the USSR for over seven decades with a democratisation of society and a liberalisation of the economy has significantly affected the cultural foundations of the country itself, leaving Russia in a sort of ideological vacuum (see also Hanson, 2010).

According to Laruelle (2010), it is in this context that the idea of the Russian nation has gained its centrality as an element able to *integrate citizens and legitimate the power of the elite, all that while ensuring social cohesion in a period of significant disruption* (Laruelle, 2010, p. 2). For the scholar, through this concept it was possible to establish a consensus on which the stabilisation and normalisation of the country was grounded. Nowadays, the topic of the nation has *come to dominate the whole of the political spectrum and constitute the common denominator of political correctness. Political space is saturated with it and public figures are unable to acquire legitimacy, whatever their duties, unless they justify their choices in terms of the overriding national interest* (Laruelle, 2010, p. 10). As a result, according to the author, the national identity issue may also be used as an operational category offering a relevant framework for the study of contemporary Russia (Laruelle, 2010, p. 6).

Talking about the national issue in the contemporary political and intellectual debate, Tolz (1998, 2001) identifies five main interpretations of post-Soviet Russian national identity:

- a) the union identity,
- b) Russia as a nation of all eastern Slavs,
- c) as a community of Russian speakers,
- d) as a racial community, and
- e) as a civic nation, respectively.

The advocates of the *union identity* define Russians as an imperial people entitled to the mission of creating a supranational state (Tolz, 1998, p. 995). In their opinion, the USSR was the supranational force reflecting the interests of a multiethnic Eurasian community composed of different nationalities unable to survive outside the 'Soviet structure.' Since all these nationalities are still united by a common Russian culture and belong to a unique civilisation, constituting a united Soviet people, these theorists support a re-establishment of the Union in the form of a supranational state led by the Russians.

A less inclusive theorisation of Russia sees the country as a *community of eastern Slavs*, united by common past and culture. In this case, Belarusians and Ukrainians are defined as Russians due to the ethno-cultural similarities and common historical origins between the Great Russians and other eastern Slavs in the empire, dating back to the medieval state of Kiev Rus' (Tolz, 1998, p. 999). In this view, the religious dimension prevails and Russia is conceived as a triune Orthodox nation composed of the three brotherly Slavic peoples: Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians.

On the contrary, according to the supporters of Russia as a *community of Russian speakers*, neither ethnicity nor religion constitutes the main marker of national identity, which is in this case represented by language. This interpretation takes inspiration from the 19th century, when many Russian intellectuals conferred great importance to language as a *force unifying different ethnic and social groups in the Russian empire* (Tolz, 1998, p. 1000). For them, Russia comprises all areas where Russians and Russian speakers live in compact settlement in the near abroad, and the Russian government should try to regain those territories.

The vision that adopts a *racial definition* of a nation, according to which national identity is based on blood ties, is extremely restrictive. This theorisation goes back to the late 1960s and early 1970s, as a reaction of the Russian intellectuals against the assimilationist policies adopted by the Soviet state and the growing national assertiveness of non-Russian ethnic groups in the USSR (Tolz, 1998, p. 1002). This conception survived throughout the 1970s and 1980s, when the propaganda was addressed against the Jews and peoples from the Caucasus and Central Asia. Nowadays, the proponents of this view assert that Russians should safeguard themselves from the harmful influences of other 'ethnoses', and that only those who are of 'Russian blood' should be admitted into the 'Russian community' and represented in its government.

Finally, for the theorists of post-Soviet Russia as a *civic Russian nation*, all citizens of the Russian Federation should be united by loyalty to the new political institutions and the constitution, regardless of their ethnic or cultural background. It is noteworthy here that the definition of Russian national identity in civic terms is a novel phenomenon for the country, discouraged both in the pre-revolutionary and the Soviet periods, when the state contrasted the creation of horizontal ties between members of society in order to prevent the formation of a civil society and, therefore, of a civic nation (Tolz, 1998, p. 1004).

Political youth organisations and music in contemporary Russia: evidence from St. Petersburg

The organisations chosen for the sample

According to a survey annually conducted by the research institute Public Opinion Foundation, in 2011, 32% of the population was aware of the existence of the Young Guard, 10% of the National-Bolsheviks, 4% of the Movement Against Illegal Immigration (DPNI) and 1% of Oborona (Public Opinion Foundation, 2011). Despite a significant discrepancy in the popularity registered by the selected organisations, a criterion aiming at representing the ideological variety of the Russian political spectrum was taken into account in the creation of the sample. Thus, the sample for analysis includes: one pro-governmental organisation – the Young Guard, one radical group representing the reconciliation between Western (neo-)fascism and Soviet and Russian authoritarian nationalism – the National-Bolsheviks (see also Mathyl, 2002), one extreme right and ultranationalist organisation – the Movement Against Illegal Immigration (DPNI) (see also Zuev, 2010), and one liberal group – Oborona.

Since its foundation in 2006, the Young Guard has become the best-known youth organisation in the country (Public Opinion Foundation, 2011). It is worth noting that the group is also the youth wing of the political party United Russia and represents the only ‘registered’ and, therefore, state-financed and supported organisation of the sample. In this regard, it is also noteworthy that the activities of children and youth organisations in contemporary Russia are regulated by the state through the Constitution and the Civil Code of the Russian Federation, the Federal Acts *On non-profit organisations* and *On civic associations*, as well as the Governmental Decree of 2006, which assure legal, economic, and organisational support to organisations whose activities are oriented towards the implementation of the state’s policies and initiatives. These organisations are referred to as ‘officially registered’. Conversely, ‘non-official’ is used to indicate all the organisations that are not included in the Russian Federal Register of Civic Children and Youth Organisations and are, therefore, not state-funded.

According to the manifest published on the Young Guard’s webpage (Young Guard, n.d. a), Russia should be a strong nation, independent from the opinion of other Western democracies. The organisation finds its ideological foundation in the idea of a sovereign democracy and in three different projects: *Putin’s Plan*, the *4 I* of Dmitri Medvedev, and *Strategy 2020*. At the same time, it recognises the need for innovation in the country in terms of investments, infrastructure, and the consolidation of political and civic institutions. The manifest cites a legitimate presidential power, a working party system, the implementation of the state’s social guarantees and obligations to the citizens, personal and economic modernisation and the rule of the law as the basis for the future development of the country. A central role in this process of modernisation is ensured for young people.

According to the programme approved in 2003 (National Bolsheviks, 2003), the National Bolsheviks (also called the Nazbols) aim at a revolutionary transformation of Russia: more specifically, through a people’s revolt, the group tries to create a new Russia that would be able to achieve a breakthrough in the world. The new society will be built on the ideals of masculinity, collectivism and devotion to individual duties.

As reported in the programme available online, the National Bolsheviks strive for protecting and defending the rights of Russians at home as well as abroad, wherein belonging to the Russian people is determined neither by birth nor by religion but rather by a historical, linguistic and cultural identification with the country. The global aim of the National Bolsheviks is the creation of a great Eurasian superpower, through a reunification of Russia and Belarus and all those neighbouring territories where Russians represent the majority, such as northern Kazakhstan, eastern and southern

Ukraine, Crimea and Transnistria, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and the Russian regions of the former Soviet Union. In their opinion, the United States and NATO are the main foreign enemies who are robbing the country and whose dominance should be destroyed.

The Movement Against Illegal Immigration (also known as DPNI) was founded in 2002. On its webpage (DPNI, 2009), the group describes itself as a non-racist movement open to and officially representing the interests of all people who are Russian by birth, who are representatives of one of the indigenous peoples of Russia or have at least one Russian parent, who sincerely identifies with the Russian nation and its interests. Moreover, also non-Slavic Europeans who grew up in Russia, share the Russian culture, mentality and the position of Russian nationalists can be accepted into the movement. According to the *Programme* the moment discussed and adopted since the second All-Russian Congress in July 2009 (DPNI, 2009), the organisation believes in the need for maintaining a strong tie with Russian compatriots and indigenous people of Russia living abroad, by facilitating their acquisition and re-acquisition of Russian citizenship. On the contrary, the naturalisation of non-Russian people should be made more difficult through a mandatory Russian language exam, as well as basic knowledge of Russian social culture, history and law. Non-indigenous people of Russia living in the country should be prohibited from creating autonomous national-cultural associations. Moreover, the organisation is in favour of the establishment of new borders with Kazakhstan and Caucasian countries and of the introduction of a restricted visa system and registration requirements for all foreigners entering Russia. Since 2010, the movement has slightly modified its position regarding migration and is now campaigning for a restriction of both illegal and legal immigration to Russia.² Remarkably, the Movement was accused of having repeatedly taken part in events aimed at igniting interethnic hatred. On February 18, 2011, a decree of the Moscow Chief Prosecutor on the suspension of the activities of the organisation entered into force, while on April 18, 2011, the movement was banned by the Moscow City Court (DPNI, 2011). Nonetheless, the group is still active.

Oborona is a civic youth movement established in 2005, based on the network principle and mostly horizontal relations, without leaders or a centralised structure. Although it may have different views on the political and economic reforms implemented during the 1990s, on the declaration reported on its webpage, the group presents its members as a new and free generation of people, who grew up in a free country, who do not fear authority, who are not burdened by the experience of the Soviet past and who are interested in the future (Oborona, n.d.).

In the declaration, the organisation states its demands for a free and prosperous country, with a professional and effective army able to protect Russian citizens. The group strives for a democratic transfer of power via free and popular elections, free and independent media and, in general, more freedom for students and people to defend their rights and express their ideas. Additionally, Oborona aims at more equality in the application of law, avoiding law abuses in the repression of opposition and dissent, and more security for companies against criminals and corrupt officials. According to the group, love for the Motherland means the promotion of the economic and business sector rather than pointless patriotic declarations. The movement aims at a better distribution of the state's budget in favour of students and public sector employers, compared to the current regime that mostly benefits state officials. Oborona only uses non-violent methods in its struggles.

The role of music in the life of the selected organisations

The paragraph is based on the data collected through in-depth interviews with the leaders and main representatives of the organizations included in this study in the course of the fieldwork I conducted in St. Petersburg during the summer and autumn 2010.

² This issue was pointed out by A. Kuznetsov, spokesman of the Movement Against Illegal Immigration, in the course of the interview conducted in August 2010.

When looking at the contribution of music to the life of their organisation, the National Bolsheviks undoubtedly emerge as the group in which music plays a major role, since this medium is strictly connected to the essence of the organisation. Indeed, as stressed by A. Dmitriev during an interview, their representative in St. Petersburg, many rock musicians and avant-garde musicians took part in the foundation of the organisation and are now members. In this regard, the musicians Egor Letov and Sergey Kuryokhin are referred to as the ideological fathers and co-founders of the movement by the movement's leader, a St. Petersburg native. A. Dmitriev explains that in the Nazbols' case the musicians can be conceived as the movement's intellectuals *par excellence* – even while the central contribution of the writer and current leader Edward Limonov cannot be overlooked – providing the ideological framework for the further development of the group through their music. As a matter of fact, the organisation, which was initially born as a subculture grounded on music and style, has undergone a process of transformation in the course of time and wasn't politically engaged until the year 2000. Nowadays, music and politics are strictly intertwined and constitute the non-conformist lifestyle so peculiar of the Nazbol phenomenon. Although this group organises several concerts a year, A. Dmitriev denounces the enormous difficulties faced by the NazBols along the way. In fact, in order to avoid possible complications with the police and authorities, many St. Petersburg club managers do not give permission to organise such events in their establishments, when they hear about the group's affiliation with Limonov.

A. Ziviliiev, leader of the Young Guard in St. Petersburg, pinpoints the political potential of music by providing the example of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004, highlighting the central contribution of music in carrying out and consolidating the movement's ideology. In his opinion, in the Ukrainian case there was a strong engagement of music and musicians, so it is valid to speak of this medium in terms of an 'effective ideological machine' that significantly contributed to the triumph of Mr. Yushchenko. The Young Guard's music engagement in St. Petersburg includes organising of music festivals and events during which the creation of a sense of shared solidarity and the consolidation the individual's belonging to the organisation take place through music. The Molodaya Gvardiya's [Young Guard] music engagement in St. Petersburg includes festivals and events, as well as free entrance to a classical concert at the Mariinsky Theater once a month for all its members.

For A. Kuznetsov, spokesman for the Movement Against Illegal Immigration (DPNI) in St. Petersburg, music does play a role in the life of his group, albeit not yet one of pivotal importance. In his opinion, this is the era of 'visuality' and his organisation rather makes use of images, videos and short texts. Nonetheless, he recognises the potential of music and considers it possible that the Movement will make more use of the medium in the future. From the interview, it comes to light that the organisation supports and recognises itself in the music initiative *Русские для русских* [*Russians for Russians*]: a collection of albums of Russian White Rap songs whose lyrics, according to A. Kuznetsov, can be interpreted as a *response against the tendency to multiculturalism and the foreign contaminations characterizing contemporary Russia* (Kuznetsov). In 2010, the project reached its 9th edition. In line with Roscigno, Danaher and Summers-Effler (2002) and their observations on the role of songs in the southern textile workers mobilisation in the 1920s and 1930s, music is conceived by the DPNI's spokesman also as an instrument to address grievances, to deliver new interpretational frameworks of reality, and to question the status quo.

According to M. Ivantsov, one of the representatives of Oborona in St. Petersburg, music fulfils several functions in the life of organisations and political groups: in his opinion, music is able to attract people, to confer popularity to ideas, to gain support and to create subcultures. Looking at the case of the anarchists in Russia, he emphasises how music has significantly contributed to developing the scene and making it popular. Nonetheless, M. Ivantsov emphasises that relying on music may also be dysfunctional for political groups and lead to an 'identity crisis', as the one seen among anarchist groups in St. Petersburg in the previous years. Indeed, in this case, music became

a substitute for movement activity, inhibiting participation and involvement in direct actions, since most of the members of the scene were more interested in the music and only few of them were willing to engage in social and political activities. For M. Ivantsov, the use of this medium on behalf of pro-Kremlin organisations is quite a consolidated phenomenon: these groups have strategically and instrumentally relied on music and well-known musicians for a long time. On the contrary, for oppositional groups, this represents a novel phenomenon still in the initial stage and one that has not yet borne fruit, since they only recently turned their attention to music and integrated it into their lives. In this regard, M. Ivantsov provides the example of the collaboration between the organisation *Солідарність [Solidarity]* and the rock band *Televizor [TV set]*.

On the relationship between organisations and their musicians

Dmitry Kaldun and Fabrika were cited as representative bands that support and collaborate with the Young Guard. According to A. Zivilev, these bands are well known and their popularity represents a strongly attractive element, fostering youth participation and commitment to the organisation.

In the course of the interview conducted with the Nazbols' leader in St. Petersburg, A. Dmitriev refers to musicians affiliated with pro-Kremlin organisations, such as the Young Guard, who define their commitment not as an honest but rather an instrumental one. In his opinion, these bands are like prostitutes, who sell themselves for money or a few TV appearances. On the contrary, in the case of the National Bolsheviks, this relationship is very authentic, since musicians tend to be personally engaged in the organisation as members or even co-founders - like Egor Letov and Sergey Kuriokhin - and their contribution has led to the development of a new music genre peculiar to the organisation, known as 'Nazbol rock'. Messer fuer Frau Mueller, Grazhdanskaya Oborona *Гражданская Оборона [Citizens' Defence]*, *Союз Созидателей [Union of the Creators]*, or Paranoia are all mentioned by A. Dmitriev as representative Nazbol bands by which, in contrast to pro-Kremlin groups, tend to be 'non-conformist' and, therefore, are not very popular in mainstream media.

Although his organisation does not have any musicians officially affiliated, Oborona's representative M. Ivantsov expresses a clear view about the modalities of possible collaboration between his group and musicians. In his opinion, a central requisite is an ideological and spiritual commitment of the bands as well as their identification with the values and ideals of the movement. This common ideological positioning should transpire especially from the content of their music. Moreover, according to M. Ivantsov, the cooperation should not be economically rewarded. Liumen, Jack-Pot - which has actually composed the organisation's hymn - Lapis Trubetskoy, Smerch, Tat'iana Lubovskaia, and Televizor are referred to by Oborona's representative as important bands and artists for Oborona. Also, M. Ivantsov points out the peculiar phenomenon of musicians' engagement in the Russian political field that has recently taken place, referring to the examples of Noice-MC and the band Barto. Remarkably, in 2010 strong measures against oppositional artists were put into place, which ranged from song censorship and cancellation of music shows to the arrest and imprisonment of musicians, such as in the case of Noice-MC. According to Oborona's representative, the persecution of these musicians by state authorities can be interpreted as evidence of the enormous potential of music in creating hostility against the *status quo*, fomenting discontent and hatred.

In line with A. Dmitriev and M. Ivantsov, A. Kuznetsov also emphasises the ideological nature of the relationship between his organisation and its artists and bands. In particular, talking about the music initiative *Русские для Русских [Russians for Russians]* the DPNI's leader underlines that the content and ideals enclosed in the songs of this project are in line with the movement's ideological framework.

Here the reader should keep in mind that the ideological nature of this relationship is of pivotal importance for this study, since it represents the theoretical foundation on which the content analysis of the songs is grounded. Indeed, the fact that the organisations recognise themselves in

the views, values and ideas embraced in the music of the selected bands and musicians corroborates the hypothesis that this music and, especially, the songs' lyrics can be conceived as an extension of the organisations' ideology. Yet, as already mentioned, Eyerman and Jamison (1998) emphasise the importance of culture and music in providing and conferring a peculiar ideological frame to the activities of a movement and in guiding the actors in pursuing its goals. Scholars define the process of the creation of this cultural and ideological frame as 'cognitive praxis', and the method for the study of the ideological content of social movements as the 'cognitive approach.' Therefore, the ideological nature of the relationship between Russian political youth organisations and their bands and artists allows the researcher, adopting a cognitive approach, to knowledgeably employ their music as a resource for the examination of their cultural framework and, in this specific study, for the ideological positioning of the selected organisations with regard to the issue of post-Soviet Russian national identity/ies.

The creation of the sample of songs

The sample of songs included in the study is based on the musical material available on the organisations' webpage. The choice of grounding the following analysis on the Internet site of the selected political groups is not detached from previous research studies in this field. In fact, as noted by Zuev (2010), in contemporary Russia the Internet represents an expressive means used by (oppositional) organisations for the successful presentation of the self, by allowing them to build up an attractive public profile and assuring them a permanent performance visible to the audience. As confirmed in the course of the interviews personally conducted with the leaders and main representatives of the selected organisations, the Internet does play a pivotal role in the life of political groups and activists in contemporary Russia. This applies especially in the case of oppositional organisations, affected by what A. Dmitriev defines as a 'media block'; that is, a severe coverage restriction in traditional media such as television, radio and newspaper.

Therefore, the sample of songs was created looking at the webpages of the selected organisations, used as a convenient and unobtrusive way to grasp their processes of identity construction and reinforcement (Zuev, 2010, p. 267). On the webpages, all the chosen groups have a special link with music. Altogether, 12 songs are available under the link 'Audio' of the Young Guard (Young Guard, n.d. b), 106 songs under the link 'Audio' of the National Bolsheviks (National Bolsheviks, n.d. b), 61 songs are listed under the Movement Against Illegal Immigration's link *Аудиотека [Audio library]* (DPNI, n.d.), and 35 songs are accessible under the *Медиа-архив/Музыка [Media archive/music]* link on the Oborona's webpage (Oborona, n.d. b).

Post-Soviet Russian national identity: a content analysis of the organisations' song lyrics

From the analysis of the music of the four political youth organisations included in this study, a very interesting parallelism emerges between the possible interpretations described by Tolz (1998) and the conceptualisations of Russian national identity/ies (for a more detailed analysis, see Pierobon 2014). This applies, in particular, in the case of the National Bolsheviks and the Movement Against Illegal Immigration, whose song lyrics bring to mind the interpretations of Russia as the imperial union and as the nation of eastern Slavs.

More specifically, the Nazbols' music leans towards the *union-identity interpretation*, wherein Russians are defined as an imperial people, whose history represents the basis for the continuation of a multiethnic state within the borders of the former USSR. In the *Pesne o Lenine* (Song about Lenin), the band *Гражданская Оборона [Citizens' Defense]* sings:

Ленин – это Гитлер, Ленин – это Сталин / Ленин – это Ким-Ир-Сен, Ленин – это Мао / Ленин – это Будда, Христос, Авель и Каин / Ленин – это Инь и Ян, Ленин – это Дао [Lenin is Hitler, Lenin is Stalin / Lenin is Kim-Ir-Sen, Lenin is Mao / Lenin is Buddha, Jesus, Abel and Cain / Lenin is Yin and Yang, Lenin is Dao].

In this case, the country is associated with its Soviet revolutionary past, and the figure of Lenin, who is depicted in ambiguous ways, likened to contradictory historical personalities such as Hitler, Stalin, Kim Il-Sung and Mao, to religious figures such as Buddha, Christ, Abel and Cain, and to religious symbols such as the Yin and Yang and the Tao. Despite these ambiguous connotations, the lyrics contain a turning of Lenin into a myth by stating his temporal continuity through past, present and future stating that *Ленин жил, Ленин жив, Ленин будет жить* [*Lenin lived, Lenin lives, Lenin will live*].

The National Bolsheviks' music celebrates the figure of Stalin. In the song *Коба* [*Koba*], the Band Babangida describes Stalin as follows: *Наш бог – Коба, / Наш вождь добрый. Мы все – топливо в пожаре революции, / В пожаре революции...* [*Our God is Koba / Our leader is kind. We all are a fuel in the fire of revolution, / In the fire of revolution...*]. Stalin is here presented as its God, as a great leader and band calls him Koba, using Stalin's pseudonym after Kazbegi's character in the novel *The Patricide* (see Volkogonov, 1999). The Soviet leader is associated with communism, which the band describes as a hard-earned achievement through the centuries and as the kingdom of reason. For the musicians, communism represents their roots and the world in which they were born. Remarkably, the country is often associated with red, widely known as the colour of communism. In particular, in the Nazbols' music, the red flag, the red blood flowing through the veins, the red wave which instils fear in enemies, and the red Gods are cited. Furthermore, the holy swastika and the stinking black flag, symbols of anarchism since 1880, are mentioned in the song *Ленин в кепке* [*Lenin in a cap*] of Delfin and *Свастика* [*Swastika*] of the band Babangida. Together with Lenin and Stalin, ancestors are also exalted. For instance, in the song *Этап на Восток* [*Prison train to the East*], Shchuke and Kharlamovoi sing: *За землю за эту деды воевали / Кровью полили, врагам не отдали* [*Our grandfathers fought for this land / they poured their blood over it, did not give it away to enemies*]. Here the artists give credit to the forefathers for having bloodily fought for the country so that the enemies would not return. In the organisation's song lyrics, Russian national identity is associated with the idea of a unique Eurasian civilisation, which combines Christian Orthodoxy with Buddha, red gods with mighty archangels. Interestingly, the hymn of Soviet Latvia is included in the list of songs partaking in the Nazbols' online presentation: here, a special relation and affinity with the country which is rooted on the Soviet experience is identifiable.

Conversely, the music of the Movement Against Illegal Immigration tends to conceptualise Russia in terms of a nation of all eastern Slavs united by ethno-cultural similarities and a common Slavic past. The country is addressed as Great Russia and as Rus', which, as already mentioned, is an expression referring to the Medieval Kievan Rus', comprising Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. The song *Мы победим* [*We will win*] of the artists 25/17 feat. Beogradski Sindikat celebrates the legendary Slavic past of the country, conceptualised as the result of the contribution and blood of its heroes. There are no communist and Soviet emblems, but rather Celtic and pagan symbols such as the Sun Cross are present in the lyrics of the Movement Against Illegal Immigration. For instance, in the song *Мы идем* [*We are coming*], the band Russkii Stiaг [*Russian banner*] sings: *Коловрат осветит наше знамя, каждый получит своё!* [*The Sun cross will shine over our banner, everyone will get what he deserves*]. Moreover, the music lyrics of the DPNI imply an identification of Russia not with Eurasia but rather with Europe and European beauty. For example, in the song *Путь к мечте* [*Way to the dream*], the band Russkii Stiaг provides a physical description of the country in terms of a European beauty, with blue eyes and light brown hair.

Also in the music of the Young Guard, reference to a heroic past is made, but in this case it assumes a more ambiguous connotation. In particular, in the song *Зло* [*Evil*] the Diskoteka Avariya sings:

Пососать леденец на обломках вековой империи? / Ты рожден на земле отваги и мужества [...] А что-то в шкафу пылится рядом с медалями прадеда. [Suck a candy over the ruins of centuries-old empire? / You are born on the land of bravery and manhood [...] There's something in the wardrobe collecting dust next to the medals of your great-grandfather]. (Diskoteka Avariya)

Russia is presented as a heroic country, a centuries-old empire, the land of bravery and courage, characterised by a great past and by great ancestors and forefathers who, through their heroic efforts, earned medals and, therefore, constitute a role model for the younger generations. The forefathers of the country are especially celebrated in the song *Спасибо деду за победу* [*Thanks to grandfather for the victory*], in which Gurtskaia hails the ancestors as symbol of the greatness of the country and thanks them for the happiness and the peaceful daybreaks, for their sincere talks and for their songs on the frontline, on the honour and glory of the battle:

Спасибо вам родные наши [...] Мы подвиг ваш как знамя над собой [...] За ваши душевные беседы За песни о дороге фронтовой / О чести и о славе боевой. [Thank you, our relations [...] your deeds we hold as a banner over our head / [...] For your heartfelt conversations / For the songs about the road of the war / About the honor and the glory of battle]. (Gurtsjaka)

Also in the song *Вперед, Россия!* [*Go forward, Russia*] of Bivni [Tusks], Russia's past is exalted. As the lyrics mention, *Расцвет советской школы и чемпионский стиль, / Бессмертные победы, великие труды / Как золотой пример для молодых* [*The bloom of Soviet school and champion style / immortal victories, great deeds / as a golden example for the young*]: the Soviet education system, based on hard work and its champion style, which has led to immortal victories, constitute a golden example for its youth.

Finally, a religious dimension emerges from the lyrics, since the country is associated with holy prophecies and saints. For instance, in the song *Ради счастья* [*In the name of happiness*], Gurtskaia refers to Peter and Fevronia, the holies of Murom, protagonists of a Russian tale of the 11th century by Hermolaus-Erasmus, who are presented as an example to follow with regard to love, family and loyalty in order to achieve a happy and peaceful life (see also Zenskovsky, 1974).

Notably, in Oborona's songs neither the Slavic character nor the Soviet experience constitute a source of inspiration for the country, which has to find its own way without being able to rely on any edifying example from its own past. Here an interpretation of 'Russia in civic terms' emerges, since Russia is conceptualised as a weak civil society, burdened by a lack of freedom and disempowered rights, characterised by corrupt state institutions and political elite. Hope for the democratic development of the country transpires from Oborona's song lyrics.

Generally speaking, the songs of the oppositional political groups – the National Bolsheviks, the Movement Against Illegal Immigration, and Oborona – tend to depict contemporary Russia only in negative terms, pointing out several problems affecting the country. Material poverty, spiritual degradation, lack of freedom, and the inability of the country to serve both as a Motherland and as a state are all addressed in the lyrics of these non-registered organisations. In the songs presented on Oborona's webpage conceptualise Russia in terms of a Police State characterised by power abuse and unable to protect its citizens:

Они должны защищать нас с тобой, / А они защищают свою власть. / Как могут нарушать закон, люди. / У которых есть право стрелять на поражение. [They are supposed to protect you and me, / but they are protecting their power. / how can be breaking the law the very same people, / Who have the right to shoot to kill]. (Liumen-Blagoveshtshensk)

In the song *Жизнь в полицейском государстве* [*Life in a police state*], the band Adaptatsiia denounces how in its country an increasing number of people commit suicide or give birth to abnormal children:

Кончают с собой или что / ещё хуже / Рожают на свет / ненормальных детей. [Commit suicide / or what is even worse / give birth / to abnormal children]. (Adaptatsiia)

According to the Nazbols' songs, democracy in the country is in a state of crisis, is drowning in misfortune and urgently needs to be saved. A real opposition does not exist and people are a ruined flock with limited alternatives, able only to choose between loans, vodka, the Tsar, the iron curtain and the camp:

Демократия стонет в беде / Нужно её срочно спасти / Оппозиция тонет в беде / Не нужно было лодку трясти / Всё, что выбрать сможете вы: / Кредиты, водку и царя / И пропитое стадо лошья / Всё, что выбрать сможете вы: / Железный занавес и лагеря. [Democracy is moaning in trouble / need to save her urgently / Opposition is sinking in bidet / should not have shaken the boat / All that you can choose from: / Credits, vodka and Tzar / And a drunken herd of fools / All that you can choose from: / Iron curtain and the Gulags] (Тараканы [Coacroaches] – Мой Голос [My voice]).

Together with a democratic deficit, also a lack of legal rights and the abuse of power on behalf of the state police are pointed out in the Nazbols' lyrics:

Законные права – 'Стоять, лицом к стене!' / Законные права - дубинкой по лицу, дубинкой по спине - всё можно подлещу. [Lawful rights – 'Face the wall!' / Lawful rights – baton to the face, baton to the back – all is allowed to the rascal]. (Михаил Новицкий – С кокардой в голове [With cockade on the head])

In *Право выбора* [*Right to Choose*] by the band D.A.P.A. available on the DPNI's webpage, Russia is depicted as a mother unable to fulfil her parental duties and unable to love her children, who are of her flesh and thus part of her. As a result, even if everyone loves their native land, no one loves Russia:

Посмотри ведь я твой сын / Чувства не взаимны / Плоть от плоти, часть твоя / Но не могу этого понять / Почему с такою силой / Все любят родину, но не любят Россию. [Look, I am your son / Feelings are not mutual / Flesh of flesh, a part of you / Cannot understand / Why with such force / Everyone loves Motherland, but do not love Russia]. (D.A.P.A)

Regarding the youngest generations, the band stresses how they are on their knees, wet and sick; this uncomfortable and precarious condition afflicting Russian youth, which should represent the future of Russia, can be read as a metaphor for the uncertainty of the country's future. In his song *О террактах* [*About the terroristic acts*], DINO MC47 denounces the economic disparity between rich and poor people – the former are able to send their children to London to study and their money to the Cayman Islands, while the latter neither know what to do nor where to go:

Их дети в Лондоне, все деньги на Кайманах, / А что же делать нам, скажите, и куда бежать?. [Their children are in London, all their money on Caymans / But tell us what shall we do, and where to run?] (DINO MC47, accessed from the webpage of National Bolsheviks).

Finally, disorientation and a lack of sense of belonging are conceptualised by the band Neschatnyi Sluchai in the song *Генералы* [*Generals*] available on the Nazbols' webpage, where it affirms:

Где мой очаг, где мой ночлег? / Не признаете вы мое родство, / А я ваш брат, я человек. [Where is my hearth, where's the place to lay my head? / You don't accept my kinship / but I am your brother, I am human]. (Neschatnyi Sluchai)

Interesting similarities among oppositional organisations emerge with regard to the identification of the forces contaminating the country and disturbing its peace. In particular, the song lyrics of the selected organisations indicate scepticism regarding the political establishment and attribute a negative connotation to state institutions and the government, which seems more concerned about serving its own interests rather than the interests of the public:

Ничего - правительство найдет выход / Лишит всех стариков льгот и пенсионных выплат. [It doesn't matter – government will find a way out / will take all privileges and pensions from the aged]. (accessed from the webpage of National Bolsheviks).

According to the Nazbols' music, Russia lacks real leaders, who are able to take responsibility and assure the country a future, and this has dramatic consequences for the population, especially the children:

Кто в этой стране главный? Кто за это ответит? / Хоть кто-нибудь подает в отставку в наших верхах? / Это, конечно, очень плохо, что погибли дети. [Who is the boss in this country? Who will answer for all of this? Will at least someone step back up there in our top? / Of course it is very bad that children got killed] (Dino Mc47 – О терактах, accessed from the webpage of National Bolsheviks).

Similarly, the songs of the non-registered organisations denounce the corruption that characterises the police and the Russian secret services, which instead of protecting people contravene their own duties and, abusing their power and authority, violate people's freedoms and rights. For example, for the band Zakhar Mai in the song *Менты хуже пидорасов [Cops are worse than fags]*, the police are worse than 'pederasts' since they attack in the darkness, organize checkpoints and steal money from people:

*Ведь – кто нападает из темноты? Менты! / Кто выставляет блокпосты? Менты! / Кто забрал все твои деньги вчера? Мусора, в бога душу их мать! / А пидарас обычно хочет / Просто отсосать. [Who attacks from the darkness? The cops! / Who puts up the block-posts? The cops! / Who took all your money yesterday? / The rubbish cops, **** their mother! / And what do the fags want / Just to suck you out]. (Zakhar Mai, accessed from the webpage of National Bolsheviks).*

In a similar way, in the song *С кокардой в голове [With the cockade on the head]* the band SP-Babai criticises the abuse of power characteristic to the police authorities, since they are the only ones entitled to legal rights in the country:

Милиция всегда по-своему права, / Поскольку у неё законные права. [The police is always right in their own way / Because they have a lawful right] (SP-Babai, accessed from the webpage of National Bolsheviks).

A negative role is also assigned to television, depicted as being under the control of the political and economic establishment, which employs it as its main propaganda instrument. For the band DotsFam, today an entire generation thinks that television is the only reliable source of truth and believes that reality is not life but what the television transmits. This generation adapts its behaviour

in many fields so that it eats, raises children, and thinks as it is presented on TV. Furthermore, in the song *Сундук Мертвеца* [*Dead man's Trunk*] DotsFam defines television as KGB's home-delivered product, controlling the entire system; as a consequence, the spectators are prisoners and victims of brainwashing:

Дурит пенное, зрители словно пленные / Примеры промывки видели незабвенные. [The foam is fooling, the viewers are like prisoners / have seen unforgettable examples of brains being washed] (DotsFam, accessed from the webpage of Movement Against Illegal Immigration).

In the Nazbols' music, television is defined as something ridiculous and as a zoo, characterised by a bad smell and captivity:

А в телевизоре смешно, как в зоопарке – / И так же пахнет и такая же неволя. [On TV all is as funny as in a zoo / Same smell, same lack of freedom] (Александр Новиков – *Страна Всеобщего Вранья* [*The land where everyone is lying*]).

Together with the bourgeois power, bankers, money and moneylenders, foreign countries are also addressed in the songs as enemies of the country. More specifically, a conflict between the West and the East is described in the Nazbols' songs, wherein the West gains the upper hand. Europeans with their democratic culture and the Americanisation, which hurts and fosters the death of the Russian nation, are all cited as elements that jeopardise Russia's nature and stability. Furthermore, the increasing presence of foreigners and, especially, the Chinese, is described in negative terms.

Differently from the oppositional organisations of the sample, whose lyrics significantly denounce the degradation and detrimental situation that characterises contemporary Russia, the songs of the pro-governmental group the Young Guard do not conceptualise a time of crisis and great suffering affecting the country. Indeed, a more positive attitude is widespread throughout the Young Guard's songs together with a confident belief in a serene and glorious future for Russia. Russia is presented in negative terms only in the song *Zlo* [*Evil*], in which the band Diskoteka Avariia points out the consequences of the influence of evil, which has intoxicated freedom, and has devastated and humiliated people, so that only few survived:

В лету кануло зло, впереди опьяняла свобода. / И что, свобода, вот она – [...]. И друзья твои биты, разорены и унижены, / В новой жизни счастливой немногие выжили. [Evil was gone, freedom was looming ahead / And so what, here is the freedom – [...]. Your friends have been beaten, ruined and humiliated, / Not many have survived in the new happy life]. (Diskoteka Avariia)

As a result, there is fear everywhere and no one dares to tell the truth anymore:

И все в страхе вокруг. / И правды сказать никто не решается. [And everyone around is in fear / And no one dares to say the truth]. (Diskoteka Avariia)

Finally, resistance emerges as a common topic in the songs of all the organisations of the sample, independent from their ideological positioning in the Russian political spectrum and their affiliation to the state. In particular, the resistance aims at liberating the country from its enemies and is conceived as a sacrifice to assure freedom and a future for Russia even if it may cause suffering and death. This liberation may assume different forms and modalities, which range from the verbal denunciation of the current situation to the engagement in a mortal fight and revolution; a moral and spiritual connotation is very often assigned to this act of resistance:

Я революция / Или я твоя / Или кто ещё / Это любовь моя / И она меня / Как и я её. [I am revolution / I am either yours / or who else / This is my love / and she does to me / as I do to her]. (Russkii Stiag – Революция [Revolution], available on the webpage of the Movement Against Illegal Immigration)

Resistance is described as a collective endeavour wherein, among the organisations, the composition of the community of the elected varies. In particular, in the lyrics of the Movement Against Illegal Immigration its nature is quite exclusive and composed by people who are close and belong to the same white family.

Some of the bands present themselves as an example to follow and as a source of inspiration for the listener. In *Нам важно все [Everything is important to us]*, the band I.F.K. sings:

О той стране в которой мы сейчас живем / Нас разбудили и сейчас нам важно все / Все это страшно, но ведь кто-то должен думать / Всем неприятно, но ведь кто-то должен слушать. [About the country where we live now / We were awakened and now everything matters to us / This all is scary, but someone has to think / It is unpleasant to all, but someone has to listen] (I.F.K., accessed from the webpage of Oborona).

Someone has finally woken the band up and since then every single matter concerning the country has become of pivotal importance to them even if this might be unpleasant and uncomfortable. At the same time, several groups explicitly invite the listener to open his or her eyes and to take action as in the the song *В наших глазах [In our eyes]* of the band Kino: *Разуй глаза... какая родина?! / не хочу назад... какая вера?! [Open your eyes... what motherland?! / I don't want to go back... what faith?!]* (Kino) and *Что тебе нужно? Выбери! [What do you need? Choose!]* (Kino).

As a side note, the reader should be aware that despite the cornucopia of studies sustaining a univocal relation between sounds and social groups (with this regard, Bourdieu's account on taste and habitus is worthy of noting), the sample of songs included in this study discredits the existence of a homology between a music genre and a political function. In particular, the songs presented on the organisations' webpage comprise a variety of genres, ranging from pop and punk to rap and rock music, which are independent from the organisations' political orientation. This phenomenon confirms Eyerman's observation according to which what distinguishes extreme organisations with regard to music is not the music itself but rather the symbols, ideology and the political implications enclosed in the songs (Eyerman, 2002, p. 453).

Conclusion

The main aim of this article was to provide an insight into the different conceptualisations of *Russianness* produced by some of the numerous political youth organisations that animate the Russian political spectrum; more specifically, those conceptualisations that emerge from their music and particularly their song lyrics. The paper looks at music as an important element in the construction of meanings and in complementing the ideological framework of social movements and organisations and distinguishes itself for the use of this medium as a research tool for the study and comparison of political youth organisations.

The study confirmed Eyerman and Jamison's (1998) account on music as an element that structures the lives of political youth organisations and movements (especially in the case of the National Bolsheviks), as well as contributes to the creation of their ideological framework. In line with Roscigno, Danaher and Summers-Effler (2002), the analysis revealed that the music and, more

specifically, the lyrics affect the three fundamental components of the organisations' culture. First, the lyrics of the organisations contribute to the creation of a (national) group identity grounded on the definition of what Russia and Russians are and are not. It is worth noting that the music of all the organisations included in this study deals with the Russian question and the conceptualisations of Russia emerging from the lyrics tend to be in line with those expressed in the ideologies and programmes available on the organisations' webpages. Second, the lyrics provide an alternative frame of cause and effect, explaining the current situation as a consequence of the aggression of internal forces – which, for instance, in the songs of non-registered organisations are identified with the Kremlin, the police authorities, television, etc. – and external agents such as the United States and the West more in general. Finally, a sense of political efficacy in terms of a possible redemption of the country, conceived as a collective endeavour conducted by the organisations' members and sympathisers, is conceptualised in the lyrics.

Returning to Tolz (1998) and the five main interpretations of post-Soviet national identity, the analysis showed some compelling convergences between the definitions of *Russianness* put forward in the current political and intellectual debate and those characterising the songs of the selected political groups. This clearly applies in the case of the National Bolsheviks and the Movement Against Illegal Immigration, whose lyrics recall the interpretation of Russia as an *imperial union* with clear reference to the Soviet experience and as the *nation of eastern Slavs*. Moreover, the allusion to a great and legendary Soviet past that constitutes a source of inspiration for the present characterises the songs of the Young Guard.

From the analysis, a significant divergence between registered and non-registered organisations came into view: in fact, whereas in the Young Guard's music, Russia tends to be described in positive terms, the music of the selected oppositional groups emphasises the detrimental situation and the many problems affecting the country, which range from material poverty to spiritual degradation, from the lack of freedom and capable politicians to the inability of the country to serve both as a Motherland and as a state. Finally, the music of all the organisations of the sample conceptualises the need for resistance in order to liberate the country from its enemies who, nonetheless, may assume different forms and modalities. For instance, whereas the lyrics of the Young Guard are permeated by a certain optimism and confidence in the future, the Nazbols' songs highlight the revolutionary, cruel and mortal character of this move.

The study of the post-Soviet political spectrum represents quite a vexing issue at least from a methodological viewpoint. As highlighted by Evans and Whitefield (1998) with regard to the formation of cleavages in post-Soviet societies, the use of categories such as 'left' and 'right,' which are established as central terms of political discourse and identity in Western countries, can be inadequate and misleading for the study of the Russian case and its peculiarities. Similarly, McCrone (1998) speaks of a 'danger' in applying Western models of understanding to the Russian space, since they are not always able to take into account the historical, political, economic and cultural specificities of this country. The article suggested the adoption of the national identity issue as an analytic lens for the study of the Russian political field and the ideological positioning of youth organisations within it, providing new evidence on the suitability of this topic as an *operational category offering a [new] relevant framework for the study of contemporary Russia* (Laruelle, 2010, p. 6).

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