A R T I G O

WE, THE *NARODNIKS*: RUSSIAN POPULISM, POLITICAL PROPAGANDA, AND THE PRESS IN THE 19TH CENTURY

NÓS, OS *NARODNIKS*: POPULISMO RUSSO, PROPAGANDA POLÍTICA E IMPRENSA NO SÉCULO XIX

NOSOTROS, LOS *NARODNIKS*: POPULISMO RUSO, PROPAGANDA POLÍTICA Y PRENSA EN EL SIGLO XIX

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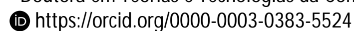
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Abstract

From a historical, theoretical, and non-empirical perspective, this study aims to trace the emergence and delimit the characteristics of the *Narodnik* movement in Russia during the second half of the 19th century to understand how this movement used propaganda and the press, focusing our analysis, especially, on the figure of Alexander Herzen, who historians deem the father of Russian populism. Moreover, we investigate the relation between this movement and the political propaganda which emerged at this time via an extensive literature review.

Keywords: Populism, *Narodnik*, Russia, Propaganda, Press, History.

Resumo

A partir de uma perspectiva histórica, teórica e não empírica, este estudo busca traçar o surgimento do movimento *Narodnik* na Rússia durante a segunda metade do século XIX e delimitar suas características para entender como esse movimento usou a propaganda e a imprensa. Nossa análise foca na figura de Alexander Herzen, que historiadores consideram o pai do populismo russo. Também investigamos a relação entre esse movimento e a propaganda política que surgiu neste momento através de uma extensa revisão da literatura.

Palavras-Chave: Populismo, *Narodnik*, Rússia, Propaganda, Imprensa, História.

Resumen

Desde una perspectiva histórica, teórica y no empírica, este estudio busca rastrear el surgimiento del movimiento *Narodnik* en Rusia durante la segunda mitad del siglo XIX y plantear sus características para comprender cómo este movimiento utilizó la propaganda y la prensa. Para ello, este análisis se centra en la figura de Alexander Herzen, que es considerado por los historiadores como el padre del populismo ruso. Además se investiga la relación entre este movimiento y la propaganda política que ha surgido en ese entonces mediante una extensa revisión de la literatura.

Palabras clave: Populismo, *Narodnik*, Rusia, Propaganda, Prensa, Historia.

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INTRODUCTION

For some years now, Russian President Vladimir Putin's name has served to describe a type of populism (Eksi; Wood, 2019; Hauser, 2018; Mamonova, 2019; Müller, 2016; Tipaldou, 2019; Wiedlack, 2020) whose development is associated with the rise of social media as a public space and the control or censorship of the media. On the other hand, Putin has also been associated (more often from the 2010s onward) with a totalitarian figure, a sort of contemporary Russian Tsar; three important examples of the latter case include the cover and article "A Tsar is born"[1], from the October 2017 issue of *The Economist* magazine; the March 2018 cover of *Time* magazine, entitled "Rising Tsar: how Vladimir Putin plans to stay on top"[2]; and the book *The New Tsar: The Rise and Reign of Vladimir Putin* (2016), by American journalist Steven Lee Myers. Moreover, the communication strategies the Russian president use, especially concerning his relationship with social media, have exemplified the dissemination of disinformation across these channels (Broad, 2020; Kornblum, 2015; Unver, 2019). Both references (to populism and authoritarianism) go beyond Putin, who still evades identifying as a disinformation propagator.

Several countries with threats to democracy (such as Jair Bolsonaro's Brazil or Viktor Orbán's Hungary) foster the same correlation in academic studies (Albernaz, 2019; Maitino, 2020; Matias Filho, 2021; Nascimento; Braga, 2021; Radlinsky, 2021; Visnovitz, Jenne, 2021) and journalistic media. These leaders eventually receive the label of fascists, a title whose definition does not necessarily evade populist and authoritarian components.

This association (or even the confusion), in trying to name these rulers' political strands/lines/ideologies/characteristics, derives, partly, from the difficulty of establishing the conceptual panorama basing these analyses. The concept of populism is very variable and often imprecise (Mudde, Kaltwasser, 2017), mixing itself with others and generating new nomenclatures, such as authoritarian populism (Pinto Neto, Cipriani, 2021). Even the origins of the expression are controversial, although commonly associated with the creation of the People's Party in 1892 (also known as the Populist Party) in the United States, which occupies a central place in the historiography of the term (Argersinger, 2014; Hicks, 1931), despite earlier manifestations of populism.

Despite this conceptual issue and the divergences in its origin, the use and/or control of the media (especially digital) becomes unmistakable when it refers to observing the figures dominating the contemporary political scene, sometimes identified as populists, sometimes as authoritarians, uses and/or controls which also unmistakably featured in People's Party propaganda, for example, and in the totalitarian or authoritarian regimes of the 20th century, albeit in traditional media.

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Thus, few would oppose the idea that communication and its phenomena, such as political propaganda, play a very relevant role for these leaders and past ones. In Russia, before the 20th century (thus, well before Putin), we also find evidence that communication had the same significance, despite tsars' strict control over what could and could not be published – and its national tardiness to revolutionize mass media. We also find indications that the so-called Russian populism drove much of the development of the press during the 19th century in Russia, leveraging its press and the spread of propaganda. This study seeks to understand this strand of populism, evaluating how it used the press in that country under censorship to disseminate its ideology.

Therefore, this text focuses on the 19th century *Narodnik* (or *Narodnichestvo*) movement, investigating what type of populism it was linked to and its uses of the media available at the time. In this undertaking, we avoid offering a definitive meaning for the term populism through its history, preferring to delimit the communicational aspects disseminating narodism — which we consider the first expression of populism after the French Revolution. It interests us, of course, understanding the movement and its definitions and especially evaluating its use of the media (notably the use of the press and propaganda) to enable further reflections on approximations or distances from what is understood as populism today and on the nuances of Narodniks' idea of truth in political communication.

This theoretical, historical, and non-empirical research employed a bibliographic review and search of files available online. The historical return to the origins of the term "populism" and the evaluation of the role of the media in this context belongs to a media history comprising endurance and ruptures in this great period called the Contemporary Age, which has begun and is yet to end. We understand that ignoring elements of the past makes the present even harder to interpret. Rather than offering an ahistorical perspective of populism and the media (as if they remained the same) or establishing an explicit causal relation between present and past of populist manifestations, we do the exact opposite, offering elements to assess current affairs based on history, enabling us to highlight similarities, differences, and dissonances. We also hope to contribute to discussions about populisms in the 21st century.

SCENARIOS OF JOURNALISM IN 19TH CENTURY RUSSIA

The history of the rise of electric or printed mass media, refers, above all, to the history of the media in the Northern West, especially Europe and the United States. This history pays little attention to Russia, although some of its territory lies in Europe, hindering the definition

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of how the country disseminated mass media and how its particular expressions, such as journalism, developed. Furthermore, after the 1917 Russian Revolution, other historical periods and events attracted more attention from media historians: Soviet propaganda and press, Soviet Union communication during World War II and the Cold War, and media during the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the later (post-Soviet) period (McNair, 1994). The length of time Russia comprised the center of power in the Soviet Union alone (69 years, from 1922 to 1991) prevented more direct access to documents and histories about the country. Thus, the history of the early Russian mass media remains scarcely known. Thus, little is said about its peculiarities, unlike countries such as England, France, and the United States.

This differentiated genesis stems mainly from the characteristics of tsarist Russia (1547-1917), which, for centuries, distanced the country from the ideas in circulation in Modern Europe, such as the Enlightenment, the democratic ideals which flowed into the French Revolution, and the growth of the role of the press in urban societies, for example. Thus, the tsarist period helped to build an image of Russia as a European pangolin, even though "Being a pangolin which does not fit in is, however, still very much being part of the taxonomy, and a very important part at that" (Neumann, 1998: 66).

In the 19th century, as western Europe underwent industrialization, the Russian Empire (the third-largest in history) followed an economic structure very similar to rural feudalism. Its peasants lived in decadence and its autocratic power structure centered on the figure of the tsar (Benedini, 2015), resembling, in turn, absolutism. As an example, Russia extinguished serfdom practically a century after the rest of Europe (in 1862) – and tsarism only met its end with the 1917 Russian Revolution. Thus, in Russia, "modernity took time to settle in" (Benedeni, 2015: 4). At the same time, the take-off of industrial society in Western Europe "brought ideological, social, and economic perspectives that had been dormant in the great empire to the surface" (Fonseca, 2016: 39). As a result, many ideas the Russian intelligentsia had imported began to flourish amid the tsar's social austerity and supremacy, creating an unstable environment. This paradoxical situation pitted the West against Russia. Movements sometimes favored greater Europeanization (Westernization) and sometimes rejected it (Slavophilia), showing intense political activities, such as the 1825 Decembrist Revolt[3].

In this contradictory, austere, and troubling scenario, as in almost all sectors of Russian life, communication modernization took time to settle in, as did the ideals related to the free press in democratic societies (after the American and French revolutions). Censorship and information control belonged to the actions of the Russian Empire, in which

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"there was no early modern 'print revolution'" (Franklin, Bowers, 2017). This means that, while the United States experienced the growth of the penny press, Russians only had a few publications with an extremely sparse production and circulation, most under the tsar and his counselors' tutelage.

Since the first printed publication in the country, the *Vedomost* (*News*), created by Tsar Peter I in 1703, most journalistic information in Russia consisted of little more than translations from foreign newspapers with edits, cuts, and omissions (Waugh; Maier, 2017). In this context, determining what would be considered true content became a challenge. The question of the need for truth (which would later appear in the West with the professionalization of journalism) was pointless and often recognized as impossible to be achieved (Waugh; Maier, 2017).

This scenario gradually changed along the 19th century. The number of printed newspapers containing information related to the inner lands of the Empire grew, even if control and censorship remained (after decrees on the subject from Peter I to the last tsar, Nicholas II). During this period, the Bureau of Censorship was founded under the Ministry of Education. During the first half of the 19th century, Nicholas I (1815-1855) continued to suppress press activities — considered harmful to the maintenance of the Russian elite's privileges (Reddick, 1944). However, newspapers continued to spread, as Waugh and Maier (2017) assert, even though they were often printed outside Russia.

In part, the press developed due to the political ebullience of the period, the end of serfdom, peasant riots, and the spark of several revolutionary movements in Russia. Among them, we find Mikhail Bakunin's anarchism, Alexander Herzen's populism, and the communism influenced by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Nonetheless, it was Herzen[4] — deemed the father of Russian populism (Venturi, 1960) — who stimulated the beginning of liberal journalism and gave prestige to the printed word in in Russia (Reddick, 1944). Herzen also instituted the Free Russian Press in 1853, a Russian immigrant press based in London which produced and circulated dozens of titles. With Herzen, narodism was also born.

WE, THE *NARODNIK*

We the people is probably one of the most famous expressions of contemporary democracies, generally due to 1787 US Constitution preamble, a manifestation of the democratic principle ideal, i.e., government by the people for the people.

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Figure 1 – Opening of the US Constitution in its first handwritten version.

Rather than being exclusive to the American vision of democracy, these references stem from the idea of democracy in both Greece and Ancient Rome[5], which, in their own etymology, meant "[…] government exercised by the *demos* (people, a set of free citizens)" (Reis, 2018: 45-46). With temporal and geographical variations in its meaning, the notion of popular participation, free citizens (with the right to choose their representatives), and people in power constitute a good part of the democratic political ideology. The word "populism" even comes from *populi* (people, in Latin). Therefore, both democratic ideals and populist movements have an undeniably central conception of the people.

The term "people," under this point of view, and its dissonances and consonances constitutes a variable structure whose meaning is often empty (Laclau, 2005). However, we can claim that its definitions, more or less generally, evoke three meanings: "[…] the people as sovereign, as a common people, and as a nation" (Mudde, 2017: 9). In populism, these people oppose what would be the elite or the aristocracy, identified as corrupt, even if populist leaders belong to the latter categories. The people are, in this sense, "[…] the 'common people' (the part of the *res publica* made up of commoners, or in modern terms: the excluded, the downtrodden, and the forgotten)" (Müller, 2016: 22).

The *Narodnik* movement represents yet another variety of appeal to the power of the people in clear opposition to the Russian aristocracy, configuring one of the first expressions of organized populism. Moreover, the *Narodnik* is one of the first political movements to use the media as a means of reaching, via propaganda, these people and their allies in one of the first efforts to "mediatize politics" (Deiwiks, 2009: 9). But how may we define the *Narodnik* movement?

As with "populism" today, the origins of Russian populism are surrounded by many controversies and its delimitation, as Müller (2016) claims of contemporary populism, is far

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from obvious. Thus, definitions of Russian populism are often confused, encompassing disparate revolutionary trends, as shown in the long quote from Pipes (1964: 442) below, which highlights the complexity of the problem:

> There exists really very little agreement among the authorities not only on what actually constitutes *narodnichestvo* but also on what personalities and events come within its range. Professor Venturi devotes a whole long chapter to Bakunin as one of the creators of *narodnichestvo*, while Professor Berlin, in his introduction to Venturi's book, denies that Bakunin was a *Narodnik*, although he concedes that Bakunin had influenced the movement. Soviet historians deny that Herzen and Chernyshevsky were Populists, and prefer to call them instead "revolutionary democrats" (*revolittsionnyedemokraty*) […] Some authors include in this category the 'going to the people movement'; others exclude it; some include the Narodnaia volia, while others do not (Pipes, 1964: 442).

However, as Pipes (1964) suggests, the term is best applied to the movement Alexander Herzen conceived between the 1850s and 60s until the events of "Going to the people," in the 1870s. The name *Narodnik*, in turn, comes from the noun *narod* (people) and the adjective *narodnyi*, used as an equivalent of "popular" or even "democratic" in tsarist Russia (Pipes, 1964). Its use became popular a few years after the movement it designates took shape and had some impact, representing a specific phase in its history (Pipes, 1964). Furthermore, Russian populism failed to give rise to a political party (as the American one did) but was basically "a widespread radical movement" (Berlin, 1960: vii).

Social justice and equality constituted the main objectives of Narodism. We can describe it as a kind of agrarian socialism, based on a powerful belief that the *obschina* (a form of rural peasant community) would represent an ideal social organization and, consequently, an exaltation of peasants as the "true people." The conception of peasants as the true Russian people, in this case, resembles the Rousseauian ideal, which finds the lower classes "as uncorrupted by the evils of civilization" (Ely, 2021: 22). It also contains a moral aim to replace the corrupt nature of the Russian elite (including the tsarist nobility) with rural people's incorruptible and honest nature. Such a moralizing and essentialist perception of peasants brought the movement closer to a religious bent (despite the growing atheism among the Russian intelligentsia of the period). As Fedotov attests, populists "[…] had a horror of civilization as a whole and they looked to the people as to the sole redeemer of all social evils. Despite their conscious atheism, their whole attitude towards life (including the thirst for martyrdom) was a religious one, and so calls for a religious explanation" (1942: 30).

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These views, however (or perhaps obviously)[6], did not emerge from the peasants themselves. On the contrary, they came from the wealthy classes of the Russian intelligentsia, who saw in the *obschina* the possibility of a completely harmonious society (Ely, 2021; Sivakumar, 2001). As Christopher Ely (2021: 4) summarizes, "[…] populism in Russia thrived almost exclusively in the minds of those privileged with a higher education, most of whom lived their lives in urban centers or on country estates, separated from the small villages".

The idealization of peasants' life was more than something distant, abstract. By delimiting Russian peasants as "the people," *Narodniks* intended to become the people and somehow amalgamate themselves with them, teaching them to think in a revolutionary way about their role in Russian society. From this union, Russian society would experience the ideal revolution and social justice which would dispense with Western industrialization, creating an egalitarian and self-sufficient agrarian society.

These ideas resonated with many students, teachers, and other less affluent members of Russian society, who, however, had access to university education and contact with the European elite culture, finding themselves adrift in the affirmation of an identity linked to the values of tsarist Russia. That explains why, even revering the people as the central point of the movement,

> The original source from which Russian populism arose was not the people themselves. The most immediate origins of populist thought are to be found in the growing crisis of identity experienced by the members of educated society during the first half of the nineteenth century (Ely, 2021: 13).

Among them, the figure of Alexander Herzen (already mentioned here) stands out. Born in Saint Petersburg in 1812, son[7] of Ivan Alekseyevich Yakovlev, of Russian nobility, and Henriette Wilhelmina Luisa Haag, a German from Stuttgart. Herzen received the same education as the elite, with French, Russian, and German tutors. He later studied Natural Sciences at Moscow University between 1829 and 1933.

In 1848, Herzen left Russia for Paris with a limited idea of what the West would be, even though he rejected Slavophilia, a movement that preached the superiority of Slavic peoples over Europeans, a cult of an ancestral morally unpolluted nation (Lindo, 2018). The contact with the European continent made him reject Muscovite Russia even more, with "[…] its rigid class structure and aristocratic civilization" (Fedotov, 1942: 30), placing him on the side of the Westernizers. But Herzen still idealized the Russian people. The people (peasants), according to the Slavophile heritage, also bore the truth. As Herzen writes to French historian Jules Michelet: "truth is always spoken among the narod. The life of the narod cannot be false" (Ely, 2021: 46).

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These insights were not unique to Herzen. During the emergence, eruption, and decline of populism, many revolutionary currents in Russia understood "the people" as the new nucleus about to emerge in the country. Moreover, many other names were associated with Russian populism, according to the most relevant historian of the movement, the Italian Franco Venturi (1964), a list which may include different strands of revolutionary movements. Moreover, the mythification of peasants may involve many names, among which, Bakunin, Peter Lavrov, and Nikolai Chernyshevsky, for example. Indeed, few ideological lines separated these men, and they often contributed with each other, including their role in the Russian press as journalists. Even Lenin used the concepts of populism. Later, Stalin rejected the movement as he aimed to sacrifice peasants in favor of his industrialization program (Bachman, 1970).

However, from the point of view interesting us, Herzen was the first to bring the *Narodnik* movement closer to printed materials (leaflets, newspapers, and books), definitely seeing them as a means of propagating the central idea of Narodism: it was necessary to go to the people, the peasants, and make them seize power. His activity in the Russian press made him the most influential journalist in 19th century Russia (Prymak, 1982). Herzen believed newspapers should spread propaganda, educate[8], and, finally, lead the "true" people to power against the tsar. Thus, Russian populism found a path to disseminate its ideology in printed media (and other forms of communication, as we shall see). The combination of communication and politics of the *Narodnik* movement would be one of the main drivers of the development of newspapers from then on in Russia and propaganda would occupy a central place in it.

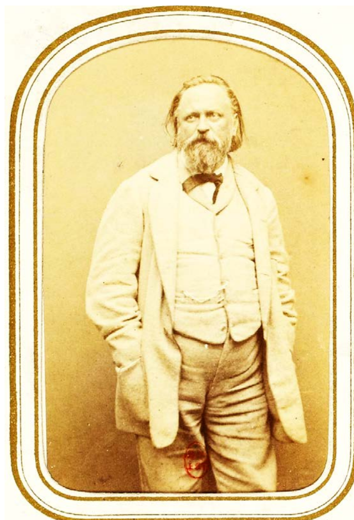

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Figure 2 – Alexander Herzen.

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PRESS AND PROPAGANDA IN RUSSIAN POPULISM

The *Narodnik* movement worked, at first, with two possible forms of propaganda: settlement and flying. The former focused its actions on orality, speeches, the practice of conversation, and propagandists' immersion in the life of the commune, in which revolutionaries "[…] had to be prepared to live the daily life of the common man in order to spread propaganda and win sympathizers" (Ely, 2021: 6). The latter deemed that its actions should be carried out quickly, with propagandists moving between various communes and urban centers, "[…] trying to sow seeds of unrest everywhere" (Pedler, 1927: 32). As a movement arising from educated and urban classes, Narodism had little more than a vague idea of what peasant life would be like, and both forms of propaganda encountered obstacles.

The first obstacle referred to the fact that the very notion of propaganda was unclear to movement members. As a 19th century phenomenon beginning to take on defined contours in countries with a substantial expansion of mass media, propaganda activities were only groping their way in the dark of tsarist Russia. Thus, *Narodniks* understood that propaganda was fundamental but knew as little about how to carry it out "as they knew about foreign parties" (Venturi, 1960: 565). Faced with a scant idea of how to conduct it, the *Naroditschevo* message found disparate supports, such as leaflets, speeches, painting, literature, and music, among others, as a way of reaching out to the population (intellectuals or peasants). All these materials reinforced the moral and material force of the *obschina*, peasants, and the essence of an incorruptible Russia in the rural world in which religious visions still persisted. Without a more detailed organization, this intuitive propaganda had the advantage of building an organic and intense imagery which involved many of the great Russian artists of the period, but its attempt to aggregate peasants to the revolutionary movement proved ineffective.

On the other hand, Russian populist art (also a form of propaganda), amassed many artists, constituting a period of extreme fecundity in Russia.

> […] Russia's two greatest novelists (Dostoievsky and Tolstoy), the most prominent school of nineteenth-century painters (The Wanderers), and one of Russia's greatest composers (Mussorgsky) were neither socialists nor revolutionaries but sufficiently close to populism that they have all been referred to as "populist" artists (Ely, 2021: 127)

Source: Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain.
Figure 3 – *Portrait of an Old Peasant* (1872), Ivan Kramskoi.
Example of the representation of the peasantry in Russian art.

Source: Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain.
Figure 4 – Tolstoy at the Plow (1887), by Ilya Repin

The second obstacle would only be recognized after the failure of both propaganda formats: peasants resisted the presence of *Narodniks* in their daily lives, deeming them external elements to life in the communes. So, they looked at them with suspicion. On the other hand, reality overlapped with the idealization of peasants. Previously perceived as an indefatigable force, it proved unwilling to a peasant revolution. Peasants, despite the revolts of the period (no less than 378 uprisings between 1830 and 1849), trusted the tsar, to whom they devoted religious feelings. Thus, "[...] the peasants' very real hunger for the land was not accompanied by a wish to rebel. All their bitterness was directed against the squires and officials, all their hopes were centered on the Tsar" (Pedler, 1927: 135). Reality clashed with the dream. It was hard to integrate peasants with the ideals of the intelligentsia making up the *Narodnik* movement (Belfer, 1978; Canovan, 1981; Fedotov, 1942; Pedler, 1927; Venturi, 1960). It was necessary to focus efforts on other tactics.

Once again, Herzen created the new communication strategies that would be adopted to form public opinion in favor of the idea that the people in power should necessarily be those of the *obschinas*. He redirected his propaganda to the portion of the population he understood required convincing: the Russian intellectual elite. Consequently, the press (especially the immigrant one, produced outside Russia, since Herzen was living in England) would transmit the message of populism.

According to Camila Arbuet,

> Herzen elaboró una estrategia comunicacional que a la vez que sostenía que la clase revolucionaria era el campesinado hacía que su principal interlocutora, su inicial paradestinataria, fuese la aristocracia letrada, intentando que ésta recordase sus viejas hazañas decembristas y se plegase a la liberación de los siervos y al proceso de reforma social que este hecho abriría (Arbuet, 2016: 2).

In 1853, exiled to London after six years in prison in Vyatka (today Kirov)[9], and after remaining isolated in Russia until 1847, Herzen founded the Free Russian Press (Vol'naya russkaya tipographiya). Thus, the dream of a free Russian press came about abroad. Lenin recognized the creation of the Free Russian Press as Herzen's most significant achievement, his distinguished legacy for Russia. "Herzen created the free Russian press abroad — therein lies its great merit" (Lenin, 1977)[10]. Furthermore, its advent made Britain the largest center for Russian-language publications until the 1917 Revolution (Slatter, 1995). The Free Russian Press was founded with the support of the well-established Polish community in the English capital. From the beginning,

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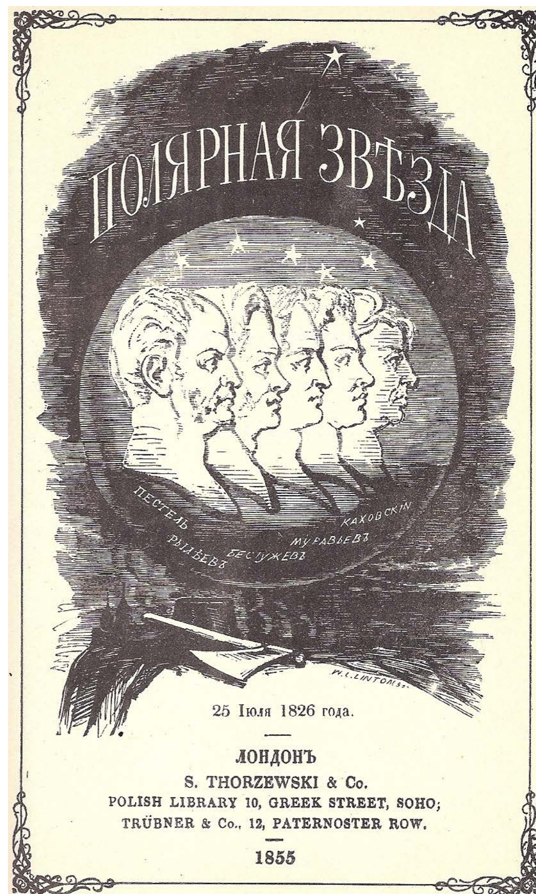
Herzen had Nikolay Ogarev's help. Publishing abroad enabled *Narodniks* to escape censorship at home, leaving them only with the problem of distributing their publications.

The first published title was the almanac the *Pole Star* (*Poliarnaia Zvezda*), printed eight times between 1856 and 1968. Its cover featured an illustration of five leaders of the Decembrist Revolt who were condemned to death. Next to them, the slogan "long live reason," a phrase by Alexander Pushkin, considered the greatest poet of Russian Romanticism.

With few issues, the *Pole Star* functioned as a kind of preamble to Herzen's remarkable editorial success, the *Bell* (*Kolokol*)[11], the longest-lived and most preeminent newspaper of the *Narodnik* movement, whose first issue came out in 1857 and whose activities ended 10 years later, in 1867. Its longevity is noteworthy as a high number of published periodicals were ephemeral, lasted only a year (50%), and about ⅛ of these periodicals released only one issue (Williams, 2000).


ПОЛЯРНАЯ ЗВѢЗДА

25 Іюля 1826 года.

ЛОНДОНЪ
S. THORZEWSKI & Co.
POLISH LIBRARY 10, GREEK STREET, SOHO;
TRÜBNER & Co., 12, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1855

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Figure 5 – Cover of the first issue of *The Pole Star* (*Poliarnaia zvezda*).

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Despite the strict censorship and control of communication in Russia, the *Kolokol* developed a vast clandestine distribution network in the country. According to Isaiah Berlin, the journal was "[…] read in the highest offices of the state bureaucracy, including the study of the Tsar himself" (1982: xv). The *Kolokol* was still one of the few newspapers to work with topics the tsarist censorship prohibited (such as peasant revolts), making it very desirable among immigrant press consumers. Moreover, the *Kolokol* carried out the *Narodnik* agenda of opposition to tsarism. A large part of its publications denounced abuses of power by Nicholas I's regime officials and exposed financial and administrative scandals and the oppression and despotism of the Russian Empire (Venturi, 1960). Other periodicals followed the *Kolokol*.

> Tolstoy's followers were responsible for titles such as *Svobodnoe slovo*; Petr Struve and his supporters published *Osvobozhdenie*; there were titles associated with *Narodnaia volia* such as *Vestnik Russkoi revoliutsii* and *Narodovolets*; a number of less well-known groups also published periodicals (Williams, 2000: 48)

Another important point to note is that, unlike the translated news from early Russian journalism, these newspapers tried to establish a level of credibility based on the idea that what they published was true. The truth would be part of an effective advertisement, leading to a conception that "if it is printed, it is because it is true" (Williams, 2001: 118).

Thus, publishing the truth was part of propaganda efforts and corroborated the moral issues permeating the constitution of the *Narodnik* movement. Speaking the truth made *Narodniks* oppose the Tsar even more, who they characterized as a liar. Publicizing it would harm the Empire as a whole, according to the tsarist elite. Thus, *Narodniks* "[…] took good care to provide their claims with a foundation of current facts and historical data. Journalists and professors alike vied with each other in investigating the subject of serfdom status and the former of peasantry" (Reddick, 1944: 49-50). Publishers' reputation for accuracy was a credit to them (Williams, 2000). This is a curious aspect of *Narodnik* propaganda and opposes the idea of propaganda always linked to deception, as it would prevail in the 20th century and 21st centuries (Lopez, 2020; McDonald, 2006; Wilcox, 2005).

КОЛОКОЛЪ

ПРИБАВОЧНЫЕ ЛИСТЫ КЪ ПОЛЯРНОЙ ЗВѢЗДѢ.

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ПРЕДИСЛОВІЕ.

Россія тягостно молчала,
Какъ изумленное дитя,
Когда неистово гнетя
Одна рука ее сжимала;
Но тотъ, который что есть силъ
Ребенка мощнаго давилъ,
Онъ съ тупоуміемъ капрала
Не зналъ, что передъ нимъ лежало,
И мысль его не поняла
Какая есть въ ребенкѣ сила:
Рука—ее не задушила,
Сама съ натуги замерла.

Въ годину мрака и печали,
Какъ люди русскіе молчали,
Гласъ вопіющаго въ пустынѣ
Одинъ раздался на чужбинѣ;
Звучалъ на почвѣ не родной—
Не ради прихоти пустой,
Не потому, что изъ боязни
Онъ укрывался бы отъ казни;
А потому, что здѣсь языкъ
Къ свободномыслію привыкъ
И не касалася окова
До человѣческаго слова.

Привѣта съ родины далекой
Дождался голосъ одинокой,
Теперь юнѣй, сильнѣе онъ...
Звучитъ, разкачиваясь, звонъ,
И онъ гудѣть не перестанетъ,
Пока—спугнувъ ночные сны—
Изъ колыбельной тишины
Россія бодро не воспрянетъ
И крѣпко на ноги не станетъ,
И непорывисто смѣла—
Начнетъ торжественно и стройно,
Съ сознаньемъ доблести спокойной,
Звонить во всѣ колокола.

Полярная Звѣзда выходитъ слишкомъ рѣдко, мы не имѣемъ средствъ издавать ее чаще. Между тѣмъ событія въ Россіи несутся быстро, ихъ надобно ловить на лету, обсуживать тотчасъ. Для этого мы предпринимаемъ новое повременное изданіе. Не опредѣляя сроковъ выхода, мы постараемся ежемѣсячно издавать **одинъ** листъ, иногда **два**, подъ заглавіемъ **Колоколъ**.

О направленіи говорить нечего; оно тоже, которое въ Полярной Звѣздѣ, тоже, которое проходитъ неизмѣнно черезо всю нашу жизнь. Вездѣ, во всемъ, всегда, быть со стороны воли—противъ насилія, со стороны разума — противъ предразсудковъ, со стороны науки — противъ изувѣрства, со стороны развивающихся народовъ — противъ отстающихъ правительствъ. Таковы общіе догматы наши.

Въ отношеніи къ Россіи, мы хотимъ страстно, со всею горячностью любви, со всей силой послѣдняго вѣрованія, — чтобъ съ нея спали наконецъ ненужные старые свивальники, мѣшающіе могучему развитію ея. Для этого мы теперь, какъ въ 1855 году (*), считаемъ первымъ необходимымъ, неотлагаемымъ шагомъ:

ОСВОБОЖДЕНІЕ СЛОВА ОТЪ ЦЕНСУРЫ!
ОСВОБОЖДЕНІЕ КРЕСТЬЯНЪ ОТЪ ПОМѢЩИКОВЪ!
ОСВОБОЖДЕНІЕ ПОДАТНАГО СОСТОЯНІЯ ОТЪ ПОБОЕВЪ!

Не ограничиваясь впрочемъ этими вопросами, Колоколъ посвященный исключительно русскимъ интересамъ, будетъ **звонить** чѣмъ бы ни былъ затронутъ — нелѣпымъ указомъ или глупымъ гоненіемъ раскольниковъ, воровствомъ сановниковъ или невѣжествомъ сената. Смѣшное и преступное, злонамѣренное и невѣжественное, все идетъ подъ Колоколъ.

А потому обращаемся ко всѣмъ соотечественникамъ, дѣлящимъ **нашу** любовь къ Россіи и просимъ ихъ не только слушать нашъ Колоколъ, но и самимъ звонить въ него!

Появленіе новаго русскаго органа служащаго дополненіемъ къ 'Полярной Звѣздѣ' не есть дѣло случайное и зависящее отъ одного личнаго произвола, а отвѣтъ на потребность; **мы должны** его издавать.

Для того чтобы объяснить это, я напомню короткую исторію нашего типографскаго станка.

Русская Типографія, основанная въ 1853 году въ Лондонѣ, была запросомъ. Открывая ее, я обратился къ нашимъ соотечественникамъ съ призывомъ, изъ котораго повторяю слѣдующія строки:

"Отчего мы молчимъ?
Неужели намъ нечего сказать?
Или мы молчимъ только оттого, что мы не смѣемъ говорить?

(*) Программа Полярной Звѣзды.

Source: Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain.

Figure 6 – Cover of the first issue of the *Kolokol* (*Bell*).

The success of the *Kolokol* fostered the creation of many other newspapers by the Free Russian Press (and even within Russia) with a similar ideological political approach (although

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unpartisan) — political parties would only emerge in Russia at the end of the 19th century. Herzen even stated that "[…] the publishing of newspapers was at that time an epidemic" (Herzen, 1982: 364). The most prominent were *Vpered!* (Forward), *Obshchee delo* (Common Cause), *Iskra* (Spark), *Osvobozhdenie* (Liberation), *Revoliutsionnaia Ross* (Revolutionary Russia), and (the most popular) *Sovremennik* (Contemporary), legally published in Saint Petersburg between 1836 and 1856 by the same Alexander Pushkin whose phrase became the *Polar Star* slogan. Thus, the Free Russian Press unquestionably drove the development of the Russian press and forged the political constitution of these media, further propagating the ideas of the movement without, however, achieving the prestige of Herzen's newspaper.

In fact, the *Kolokol* was the most relevant channel of communication created by the *Narodnik* movement, influencing Russian public opinion toward changing the social order via a revolution which, according to the ideals of Russian populism, would amalgamate elites and the people in a life based on communes. Added to this panorama was the vision of the Tsar as a real demon, an enemy of the people. According to Venturi (1960), the *Kolokol* was the largest underground newspaper in Russian history and had a circulation of 2,500 copies per month. The newspaper *Sovremennik* peaked at 6,000 copies, which shows the feat of *Kolokol* as a banned newspaper.

Despite the late spread of mass media in the Russian Empire, the lack of differentiation between journalism and propaganda, Free Russian Press editors' (or of those who remained on Russian soil) lack of expertise, these publications became more professional. Newspapers and leaflets were quickly recognized as necessary to spread political ideologies; first populism and then the ideas which led to the 1917 Russian Revolution.

As pieces of political propaganda, newspapers, such as the *Kolokol*, disseminated ideas which were later considered naive or violent [in the case of *Narodnaia Volia* (People's Will), the Russian terrorist movement which led to Tsar Nicholas II's assassination] but these ideas sedimented Russian soil as fertile ground for growing socialist ideals. Although Russian socialism and previous trends diverged in several points, they converge on the notion that the people (industrial proletariats and peasants, respectively) should overthrow tsarism, the real cause of the evils in Russia. We can deem Russian populism, then, as one of the first great contemporary political forces to understand and use the power of the media associated with politics, despite its poor understanding of propaganda techniques. Mediatizing politics would become a constant in the following century, serving new and divergent populisms (and authoritarianisms), a process which remains to this day.

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Figure 7 – *Prison of a Propagandist* (1892), by Ilya Repin.

BRIEF FINAL REMARKS

Christa Deiwiks (2009) summarizes the general characteristics of populisms from an extensive literature review, trying to comment on the most famous populist movements in the Northern Hemisphere. When discussing Russian populism, the author states that the *Narodnik* movement has some of these characteristics but not others. It resembles other populisms by focusing on an idea of "the people," clearly distinguishing between them and others, their enemy (in this case, the Tsar). This idealization claims the existence of a real people, annihilating all who oppose them. These two aspects are very close to Mudde's (2017) general summary (as Deiwiks admits) of populism, which features a pole consisting of a pure people on one side and a corrupt elite on the other. Another similarity Deiwiks points out is that the movement stems from subjects outside these "pure" people. In the case of Russian populism, the 19th century Russian intelligentsia.

As discourse and ideology, populisms reduce the complexity among antagonistic social groups. It was also the case with the *Narodniks*. However, Deiwiks points out that the *Narodniks* distance themselves from most populisms in the 20th and 21st centuries by engulfing the

aspirations and struggles of the peasantry in Russia and advocating the organization of the *obschina* as it extends to all life in that country – including the movement's own intellectuals. Thus, Narodism is nothing like later populisms. The latter, for the most part, used and still use the idea of the people as a rhetorical, vague figure, without showing the slightest disposition to convert their leaders into part of that people, except as a propaganda element (which acquired a status of deception and error in the 20th century).

This study adds one more statement to those by Deiwiks (2009): Russian populism undoubtedly approaches the populisms which followed it, especially by perceiving the power of the media to disseminate its message, even if that the movement had little idea about how to efficiently use the media and propaganda. Herzen and his compatriots' work in the Free Russian Press (and the press later legalized in Russia) confirms that Russian populism would be unable to have its contours if it separated press and propaganda activities. Consistent examples of this approximation between populist tendencies and the use of the media arose in Argentina, with Juan Domingo and Eva Perón, in the 1950s and 1970s; Getúlio Vargas, in Brazil, between the 1930s and 1950s; Fernando Collor de Mello in the 1990s in Brazil; Donald Trump, in the United States, and Jair Bolsonaro, in Brazil, in the last decade, etc. All used the media and advertising as springboards for their actions.

Santaella (1999) found in Saussure and Peirce's work an independent awakening of a semiotic consciousness in which studies on signs proliferated in several countries. The use *Narodniks* made of the press and propaganda also seems to prove the demand for these phenomena in the face of the new social configurations which were approaching industrialization, an *esprit du temps*.

In this use of media, however, the discourse used among Russian populists is far from what would come later: while, in the case of the former, we find an aim to approach "the real people" and become as them, the latter shows these people as closer to Laclau's (2005) empty meaning, shaped according to the political intentions which has accompanied the claims of populist leaders elected to the highest positions in their countries. Russians, without a link to democracy, were much more concerned with a social reconfiguration via a social revolution in search of an ideal society.

Another relevant issue regarding the dissonances between the populist movements of the 20th century and those of the 21st century is their clear expertise (accumulated after the First World War) on using propaganda as a political weapon (as pointed out by the first researchers in Communication in the United States and Europe, such as Harold Lasswell). While *Narodnichestvo* built its media narratives without a specific notion of how to produce

propaganda, we must refrain from saying the same of the trends which followed the War. Many *Narodnik* propagandists believed their work propagated the truth[12] (unlike those who needed to convince an entire population that war between nations was beneficial). In the 21st century, the accumulation of techniques and theories about propaganda and the gaps in content editing control gates (publishers, journalists, publicists, etc.) in digital media made this process even more controversial, enabling the emergence of new actions and instances of deception, such as the notion of post-truth, disinformation, fake news, and firehosing.

Thus, *Narodnik* populists' use of the media understands these instruments as resources to reach the people, not in their defense but as mechanisms to convince a portion of the population, i.e., possible voters for these populists. Therefore, the *Narodnik* movement perhaps offers a constant between itself and future populists: that of the media and propaganda, which should be central when we analyze these phenomena today.

NOTES

1 *In*: https://www.economist.com/leaders/2017/10/26/a-tsar-is-born. Access: 13 jun. 2022.

2 *In*: https://time.com/5204733/russia-election-2018-putin-fourth-term/. Access: 13 jun. 2022.

3 The Decembrist Revolt was an uprising that took place on December 14, 1825, in which 3,000 soldiers protested the coronation of Tsar Nicholas I. The riot failed, and some of its leaders were hanged or sent into exile in Siberia.

4 Sometimes called Gertsen or Hertzen.

5 The Romans preferred to call their system *res publica*.

6 The idea of the people uncommonly emerges from the people themselves but from their analysts.

7 Herzen is often referred to in historiography as an illegitimate child. The author of this article considers that nobody may be an illegitimate child, so she abolished the adjective in this study.

8 As in the United States, the function of propaganda was commonly understood as an act of educating the masses.

9 Herzen was arrested in 1834 for subversive activities against the Tsar.

10 *In*: https://www.marxists.org/portugues/lenin/1912/05/08.htm. Access: 5 jun. 2022.

11 The *Kolokol* was created as a supplement to *Pole Star* but soon became the main vehicle for the Free Russian Press.

12 Which fails to mean they only struggled with the truth. The Tsar was certainly not a demon.

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