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The Formatting of Space and Time in Totalitarian Historical Discourse: On the Example of Soviet Historiography

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Abstract---The subject of this article is the influence of socio-political engagement in non-democratic societies on the formation of scientific and historical discourse and on its further functioning and use for non-historical – political and educational purposes. It is analyzed not only from the point of view of the unique features inherent exclusively to totalitarianism, but rather as a derivative of socio-political requests for history that arise and are realized in any society, constantly becoming more complex over time. For Soviet totalitarianism, a characteristic feature of such requests was the absolutization of revolutions, which were interpreted as pivotal, milestone events that signified the main content of the progress of social development at literally all its stages. Because of this, Soviet historiography and the historiography of countries dependent on the USSR was characterized by attempts to “conceptually update the status” of a number of historical events, even those that preceded revolutions in their generally accepted meaning. In addition, an in-depth study of revolutions was characterized by the introduction of new terminology into scientific circulation and the identification of new elements of the division of historical time and space within revolutions.

Keywords---historiography, revolution, scientific research, space and time structures, totalitarianism.

Introduction

Scientific historiography evolves to the extent of its ability to develop new perspectives on the historical past. What seemed to contemporaries to be “the exploits of Alexander the Great”, subsequent generations consider as the “Military campaigns.”, and later it is no longer reduced to the actions and motivations of the Macedonian king alone – it highlights components that refer historians to categories and processes at other levels: socio-economic, civilizational, and so on. A powerful multi-level background is added to the history of the “Military

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campaigns”: “Hellenism”, “pre-Hellenism”, “The Crisis of the Athenian Polis”. The campaign of Alexander the Great, it turns out, opens a whole new era of antiquity – the era of Hellenism. Thus, the development of new perspectives is, in fact, the development of new meanings. The statement of their identity reveals a hitherto undisclosed problem in the history of historical science – the issue of considering changes in the parametric characteristics of scientific research of the past. However, it is impossible to say that this issue was previously formulated and covered in this way. For a more detailed study of the topic, the method of analysis was used, particularly the works of the outstanding German historian R. Koselleck and other scientists. Romantic historiography of the 19th century began to actively draw attention to the events that led to radical changes in society, leaving no one indifferent. Accordingly, social revolutions become the subject of scientific interest. Revolutionary changes met with resistance from reactionary forces and led to the polarisation of society, which often resulted in external and civil wars. Therefore, the standard of perception in Modern period is the consideration of peculiar pairs “revolution-war”. The most striking example here is the standard of consideration of the French Revolution of the late 18th century, in which the presentation of revolutionary changes within the country is organically combined with the story of the intervention of European monarchies. The Napoleonic wars are also considered in an indissoluble connection with the revolution (later this will lead to a discussion in French historiography about the chronological boundaries of the French Revolution since it will no longer be possible to determine them without taking into account the revolutionary component in the Napoleonic Wars). Later the introduction of such objects was often motivated by non-historical goals (justification of pro-government ideologues) and was driven by the social order. In a 2018 article, we proposed a definition of such actions as a conceptual status update. An example of this is the attempt of Soviet Marxist historiography to introduce revolutions as objects in the study of the periods that actually preceded the first revolutions in the history of mankind (Samsonova & Shkilev, 2021; Antoniuk et al., 2021).

The use of new angles of observation in historiography has brought to life the processes that formed its essential feature in Modern and Contemporary history. Previously, historians chose and studied the objects of research in the form in which they were presented in the sources (that is, they processed them, giving their consideration a scientific character in accordance with the dominant standard of science), feeling that they had no power to change them. Now there is an idea to format research objects depending on their goals and even introduce new objects. Historical science ceases to recognise the structural integrity of objects, and, consequently, the inviolability of their chronological and geographical boundaries (Chekanov, 2018). Spatial and temporal coordinates of objects are actively changed and redefined by the authors of research depending on their research programs. But it's not just about new ways to divide historical space and time. The Modern History historiography also actively introduces completely new objects, unknown to the authors of sources: a classic example of such an experimental strategy is the “Hundred Years ' War” (a concept unknown to its contemporaries) (Basovskaya, 2007).

First of all, the application of new research strategies concerned interstate conflicts and wars, which by definition were not considered equally by the parties

involved in them. But even in relation to wars in which the “friend-foe” opposition has long lost its emotional colouring, which would make their perception “alive” and relevant for us, new trends are also becoming an effective factor. Such objects as interstate wars of the ancient world are actively reformatted; this is facilitated by the fact that the emotional attitude to events, for example, the Punic Wars, cannot be preserved if there are no direct indications of sources (Korabliov, 1981).

This is impossible due to the extinction of society and public consciousness – non-historical factors that determined the attitude of witnesses to events, partly reflected in the sources. As for the parts that have not been preserved, we cannot reproduce, say, the reaction to Hannibal's invasion of Italy during the Second Punic war, since we can no longer imagine a society that obeys its Council of Elders (the Senate) and is motley in terms of the civil status of ethnic groups in its composition (Roman citizens, allies, Italic peoples) (Chekanov, 2018). Accordingly, the perception of events reported by the authors of sources in a format that has lost its relevance for us is distorted: we perceive the Third Punic War (149-146 BCE) a priori as liberation and patriotic resistance to Roman aggression (Korabliov (1981), not only because of this definition in the narrative but because we see it through the prism of our historical experience. Nevertheless, we do not realise that the experience was formed in a positive way by the liberation and patriotic resistance of the French Republic to the coalition of European monarchies at the end of the 18th century. The historian and the history he describes have a different past (Chekanov, 2018).

If we return to the Hundred Years' War already mentioned above, then on its example we can understand the reasons for the introduction of innovations: unlike witnesses of events who experienced them directly, subsequent generations have a need to determine their vector in relation to them: there is a necessity to establish the significance of the Hundred Years' War for history. The fact that for contemporaries it broke up into a series of chaotic conflicts and reconciliations, among which it was necessary to survive and the engines of which remained hidden, did not provide satisfaction for this very need. Therefore, later historians introduced the name-identifier, under the auspices of which the events of 1337-1453 were first considered holistically. In addition, historians should take into account the difference between the conscious and unconscious (but realistic) nature of war and their mutual influence. In its identification, levels are distinguished that can be characterised from a "long-term perspective" or "human scale". The perception of war becomes more complicated depending on who considers it: a witness or a historian, a participant or a victim, from what time and spatial distance? (Favier, 2012). Wars and revolutions in historiography have become the objects to which their re-identification is being actively applied in Modern history: what contemporaries saw as a chaos of events that were not united by an inner meaning changes its character under the influence of seeing history as a process (Hovers & Vynkovicz-Mytel, 2020; Dasih et al., 2019).

Formation of objects of scientific and historical research

In relation to the events of ancient history and the Middle Ages, the use of the term “revolution” can only be applied by analogy inspired by comparison with later events. However, this application is absolutely inherent in totalitarian

thinking (Camus, 2017). In Soviet historiography of the mid-20th century, the concept of “slave revolution” was common and used to describe the destructive changes in the late Roman Empire, which accompanied its collapse (Zhukov, 1956). The speculative, artificial nature of this construction was obvious, it never managed to displace the key concept of “the Great Migration of Peoples” from the description of events, and after the collapse of the USSR, and it was gradually withdrawn from use. Modern science considers the destruction of the Roman Empire as a result of barbarian invasions, and this corresponds to the emotional perception of contemporaries of events, as far as the authors can reconstruct it according to sources (Musset & Nashestviia na Evropu, 2006). Marxist historiography has also introduced the concept of “Dutch bourgeois revolution (1566-1609)”, which was used to address the wars of the second half of the 16th – early 17th centuries in and around the Spanish Netherlands, related to the acquisition of independence of the Republic of the Seven United Provinces (Zhukov, 1956). This definition uses the already mentioned “revolution-war” pair. Here it is outlined more clearly than in the example of the “Great Migration of peoples”. Soviet science widely applied the concept of “revolutions”, since it allowed to consider the period of Early modern period as the time of the emergence of the trend of bourgeois revolutions, the sequence of which (and their rise to bourgeois-democratic) naturally and in accordance with the Marxist-Leninist schemes of dialectics of historical development led to the socialist revolution of 1917 in Russia. At the same time, both Dutch and world historiography do not single out the revolutionary component of these events, considering them as the “Eighty Years' War (1568-1648)”, where military, diplomatic and religious factors played no less a role than the socio-economic factors that Soviet historians emphasised (Chekanov, 2010). The terms “revolution” and “civil war” are also used Koenigsberger (2014), but serve a different purpose: they program the emotional perception of the events described, but do not fit into the trend. The definition of trends in western and Soviet historical science is completely different (Suryasa, 2016; Arnawa et al., 2019).

It is worth mentioning that the chronological boundaries of both objects do not coincide, but depend on their tendentious definition. Thus, formatting objects of scientific and historical research can change their chronological and geographical framework. The concept of “Eighty Years' War” is located in a broader geographical context: if the revolution was considered as purely “Dutch” because in neighbouring countries there were no socio-economic prerequisites (these relate to domestic life), the war involves broader territorial contexts (interstate conflict, intervention) and layers of various external influences (Reformation, spread of Calvinism). The participants and factors of the war are located within it, while from the point of view of the revolution, a significant part of the factors is located outside, their consideration in the context of events seemed arbitrary, and therefore they are taken out of this context, no longer “noticed” by historians who consider the events in the Netherlands of the late 16th – early 17th centuries as a revolution. So, the prerequisites for the “Dutch revolution” and the “Eighty Years' War” are also different, and this difference is again a consequence of the different formatting of the same object of research by historians. Thus, the introduction of new research objects served, on the one hand, to modernise historical knowledge, and on the other – contributed to the introduction of subjective approaches. The origins of this subjectivism can be different. These sometimes include the direct

application of propaganda clichés, which may be the result of the political position of the historian. However, it is also an effective means of placing objects in historical space and time. Such objects are not disputed in society and acquire the status of indisputable scientific and historical facts, because they are protected by law. Examples of such functioning can be prohibitions on non-recognition of certain historical facts (Kapinus & Dodonov, 2007). The use of such clichés contributes to the formatting of space-time structures and fixes them in the mass consciousness as self-evident (Rayward, 1996; L'Etang, 2014).

For example, the "Great Patriotic War" of Soviet and Russian historiography is located in a different territorial context than the "Eastern Front of World War II" of Western historiography, because it stands out as a separate historical event, and not as a component of a larger whole, with which it must be constantly correlated. On the contrary, the comparison of the "Great Patriotic War" with the "Second Front" (the actions of the Anglo-American troops in 1944-1945) gives this latter the significance of a subordinate event and introduces a gradation of historical material (the "second" front is perceived as secondary) Zhukov (1956), that is probably inconsistent with the real situation. Depending on the terminology, there are now other concepts used to describe the situation: "allies" (the concept is applied only in relation to Anglo-American troops on the Second Front), "allied assistance" (the concept emphasises the auxiliary, additional nature of allied actions in relation to actions on the "main", Eastern Front).

At the same time, for ideological reasons, the notion of "loyalty to the allied duty" is introduced, which describes the military actions of the Red Army (applied to the conscientious performance of this duty and emphasises that the USSR owes nothing to its allies after the end of the war). Therefore, the term "allies" had derivatives that successfully served as an ideological justification for the foreign policy actions of the USSR in relation to former allies at the end of World War II and during the Cold War. However, we note that there was no unified logic for applying the concepts of "allies" and "allied duty" in Soviet historiography. It is important to understand the role of ideology in formatting wartime space-time structures to compare these structures of World War II with similar structures of World War I. Since the concept of "allies" in the form promoted by Soviet historiography was used for non-historical, ideological purposes due to the realities of the bipolar world after World War II, it can be assumed that in Soviet historiography the concept of "allies" was not specifically applied to the troops of the Western Front of World War I. This is indeed true - the term is still used in Russian historiography as a synonym for the Entente in the plural, although some of the "allies" were not members of the Entente (Japan, Belgium, Serbia, Romania, etc.) (Lipinski, 2004; Miller, 2003).

Methodological introduction of historical research objects

The spread of new trends in historiography predictably resulted in the use of modified spatio-temporal structures relative to periods of long duration. After the Middle Ages, writing historical chronicles in the genre of "world history" temporarily fell out of use, but the spread in Modern History of considering history as a process drew attention to the possibility of building updated schemes of world history. We have seen how important inversions of political concepts that

form socially binding concepts of the past are for the process of historiography. Especially noticeable is their role in totalitarian societies, where they are introduced in a directive manner and can fundamentally change the identification of historical events ("elements of civil war" instead of "aggression" in the Ukrainian-Russian war (since 2014) or introduce new identifications for a number of historical events, and in the process of introducing such identification, its spatial and temporal structures are also developed. From a historical point of view, the concepts of "war" and "revolution" are the most controversial: they are associated with conflict segments of the past and, accordingly, cause conflicts of identification. If we remain in a purely scientific position, the answer to the question "What Is War?" depends on the location and the year of the war to which it is attached, on the social status of the witness through whose eyes the historian tries to see the event in order to understand it (Favier, 2012).

Examples of this can be such identifications as the "Triumphal Procession of Soviet Power" and the above-mentioned "Great Patriotic War". In the first case, Soviet historiography singled out in a separate series of significant events the sequence of acts of recognition and unarmed establishment of Soviet power in the regions of the Russian Empire from the end of 1917 to May 1918 (Golub et al., 1987). Notably, V. I. Lenin, at that time the head of the Bolshevik government, did not use such a term himself, but in March 1918 defined this process as a "civil war" Golub et al. (1987), since, after all, not everywhere it took place without conflict. The logic of the Bolshevik leader is clear here: not knowing in advance about the uprising of the Czechoslovak Legion in May 1918, which would lead to the separation of almost the entire east and south of the former empire from Bolshevik Moscow, he considered the civil war as a companion of the Bolshevik revolution already over. Therefore, he reduced it to events that later became considered only the first manifestations of the conflict, and this conflict will last until the end of 1920, in the Russian Far East – until the end of 1922. As we can see, there was a reformatting of historical time and a re-interpretation of historical events: the term "civil war" was significantly expanded, but its early manifestations were allocated into a separate sub-period, which in historiography was later called the "triumphal march of Soviet power". Soviet science included this term in the history of the October Revolution of 1917 as its final part, and in the history of the civil war as the initial one (Khromov, 1987). Early Soviet periodisation of the civil war defined its chronological framework as 1918-1920, while later periodisation was complicated: Soviet historians began to consider the first counter-revolutionary actions as early as the fall of 1917, which chronologically coincided with the "triumphal march of Soviet power", and the upper chronological limit was pushed back to 1922 (Khromov, 1987). At the same time, it was noted separately that the "sovietisation" of certain regions of the Far East continued until 1923, and the struggle against the Basmachi movement in Central Asia – until 1929.

The identification of the "triumphal procession of Soviet power" as a separate historical process was accompanied by the definition not only of its content but also of its chronological and geographical framework. The biggest problem was the latter, since the very identification of the object revealed its mobile nature. In the historical maps which began to accompany the description of events in the history books on the Revolution and the Civil War, the general vector of the process was

usually shown by the change in the density of red from the centre of the country to the east (Golub et al., 1987). In some regions, the dates of establishing the power of the Bolsheviks were indicated. They illustrated the peaceful victory of the Soviet government in this region. The events after May 1918, which were accompanied by the fall of a number of regions where the Soviet government had already allegedly won, were not included either in the cartographic display of the events of the "triumphal procession" or in its chronological framework. But at the same time, those regions where Soviet power was established almost from the very beginning were not excluded from the geographical framework. It is obvious that the introduction of the described object of historical research served not a scientific, but a political purpose, and showed the recognition of the regions of the former Russian Empire (including the "national outskirts") as a mostly peaceful, absolutely natural process. Resistance seemed to be limited to the position of only those social classes that did not accept the revolution at all, and not ethnic groups within the Russian Empire. In the context of the "triumphal march", this resistance was levelled regardless of whether it took place on the "national outskirts" or in other regions. Its participants were identified as "counter-revolutionaries" even if they were simply trying to separate their regions from Russia, whether revolutionary or imperial. This is where artificial identifications such as "White Czechs", "White Estonians", "White Kalmyks", which are difficult to understand for both foreigners and post-Soviet people, come from (Wagner et al., 2011; Young et al., 2006).

At the same time, the repeated fall of many of the regions was shown as forced, which occurred as a result of either the "Revolt of the Czechoslovak Legion" or "intervention" – a synthetic concept in which Soviet historiography began to include events related to the intervention in the civil conflict first by the Central Powers, and since 1919 – by the Entente Powers (Golub et al., 1987). The goals of their intervention were always different (let's take into account at least the fact that the intervention of the Central Powers occurred during the First World War, while the intervention of the Entente occurred at the time it ended), but Soviet historiography began to unite them into one complex of events of an anti-Soviet orientation; the reasons for the intervention were defined stereotypically as "fear of capitalists" (Zhukov, 1956). Thus, anti-Soviet speeches were shown as "unnatural", they were associated with an external factor whereby to which the "anti-Soviet elements" dared to "raise their heads". The methodological introduction of the "triumphal march of Soviet power" was an interesting example of how a new object of historical research appears as a result of reformatting the historical past for political purposes (the so-called "politics of memory"). In addition, we can see in this process manifestations of the use of methodological approaches, in particular, those derived from Thucydides: a separate consideration of internal and external events, presented as motivationally dissimilar and incomparable with each other (French et al., 1992; Manniesing et al., 2006).

The most commonly used concept of Soviet propaganda and historiography was the "Great Patriotic War". The concept was introduced by J. V. Stalin in a propaganda pamphlet. It separated the events of 1941-1945 on the Eastern front of World War II into a separate complex of events, seemingly unrelated to the military-political actions of the USSR in 1939-1941, as a result of which Nazi

Germany received military-economic assistance in the war with Poland and Western states, and the USSR received new territories as a result of unpunished pressure and direct aggression against Poland, Finland, Romania and the Baltic states. At the same time was "formed" a historical event with its own chronological and geographical framework (the Soviet-Japanese war of 1945 was not included in the "Great Patriotic War") (Zhukov, 1956).

A characteristic feature of such an "event" was that it was not recognised (at most, taken into account) by the international scientific community. The reason for this is obvious: its introduction was not for scientific, but for propaganda purposes. It did not contribute to the creation of a systematic view of the Second World War, but rather overshadowed it by introducing clichés that were understandable only to those who were under the ideological influence of Soviet propaganda. So, the propaganda component was a condition for the "correct" understanding of the "Great Patriotic War". Rejection of it automatically raised a number of questions to the new object of research, which were supposed to determine the meaning of its introduction. The concept of "Great Patriotic War" was introduced into the scientific circulation of Soviet historiography clearly by analogy with the Patriotic War of 1812 against Napoleon. A notable analogy that brought both events closer together was Russia's resistance to external aggression aimed at destroying the vital centres of the state, abandoned to the mercy of its potential allies in the West (for this, for example, the Crimean War of 1853-1856 was never considered "patriotic", and the First World War, despite attempts by official propaganda to proclaim it such, received the opposite emotional status of "imperialist"). A less noticeable analogy was the lost status of "ally" of the aggressor by Russia (and the USSR), acquired by Russia at Tilsit in 1807, and by the USSR as a result of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact in 1939. Accordingly, both wars (if viewed objectively) looked like the result of internal contradictions within the "aggressive" camp. It was only after about six months of fighting did Russia converge as a victim in both wars, with its potential allies in the fight against aggression, leading to the formation of the Sixth Coalition against France in the first case and to the formation of the anti-Hitler coalition in the second. As we see in both cases, the basis for recognising wars as "patriotic" was "treason" within the aggressive camp, to which Russia and the USSR joined forcibly (in 1807, as a result of the loss of the war and the signing of the Treaties of Tilsit, in 1939, as a result of the choice of Germany as a strategic ally in a pre-war situation, when neither Great Britain nor France showed interest in acquiring such a dubious ally as the Soviet Union) (Galam, 1986; O'brien, 1970).

Changes in the perception of the object "Revolution"

The object "revolution" is also an example of how non-historical factors influenced the presentation of events by historians. Until the end of the 18th century, "revolutions" were considered not the processes of radical changes in society, but on the contrary (as in the case of the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 in England), the return of the course of events to traditional ("evolutionary") rails, that is, "revolution". The Glorious Revolution was conservative, focused on the past. It was accompanied primarily by the restoration of the rights of subjects despised by the ruling regime (Koenigsberger (2014)), its consequences were indeed new as a result of the institutional change, but the revolution and this change were spaced in

time (begins in 1689, after which “the Parliament zealously passed laws that supported economic development” [Ferguson \(2020\)](#), contemporaries of the events did not perceive the revolution itself as an engine of innovation. The term “revolution” itself was well-known (it was used, in particular, by A. Smith), but it was only used as an event identifier, not a process the impact of which contributed to redefining the event vector and recognising its progress. The English Revolution of 1640-1660 was defined by contemporaries as a “Great Rebellion” ([Yurovskaya et al., 1983](#)). The change in attitude to such events falls on the French Revolution of 1789. It is connected with the ideology of the Enlightenment, under the influence of which revolutions as a means of destroying the outdated traditional system began to be attributed a positive meaning.

The awareness of the epochal and global significance of the French Revolution contributed to a change in the perception of “revolutions” as such: they are beginning to be considered not so much manifestations of chaos that require further “re-evolutions”, but rather modernisation processes of destroying outdated social structures that resist and make reforms impossible. If the concept of “re-evolutions” provided for the restoration of the pre-revolutionary state of affairs, then from now on this state is considered negative, and the post-revolutionary situation is ideally considered as a renewal of society and the introduction of more progressive foundations for its functioning. It is no coincidence that new concepts of “industrial” and “scientific” revolutions are being established in the European consciousness, which by definition provided for the modernisation of revolutionised objects. Revolutionary changes are becoming synonymous with progressive ones. Neither in industry nor in science, are “re-evolutions” impossible. The very intellectual progress of humanity led to the spread of a new concept of “revolution” and to the positivisation of its image in mass perception, which reached its peak already in the 20th century. The most noticeable in this regard was the absolutisation of revolutions in the Marxist paradigm, which during the 20th century became dominant and binding for scientific and paradigmatic application in the USSR and other countries of the socialist camp. The apogee was the creation of a holistic concept of civilizational progress of mankind, according to which the importance of its drivers was given to the revolutions. Moreover, in eras that did not meet the Marxist criteria of “prerequisites for revolution” and “revolutionary situation”, the function of “revolutions” was given to other processes – this is how the mentioned above concept of “slave revolution” appeared ([Zhukov, 1956](#)). At the same time, the identification of the “revolution” was attributed to historical events that had not previously been considered such, in particular, the struggle by the Netherlands for independence from Spain. Above we could see that an important sign of the consideration of revolutions by totalitarian historiography was the creation of connected pairs “revolution–war”, which corresponded to the concept of aggravation of the class struggle ([Werth, 1992; Ogarkov, 1976](#)).

Conclusions

Soviet historiography was also characterised by a failure to recognise the revolutionary nature of transformations in the humanitarian sphere that were not directly linked to the socio-economic context: for example, the concept of “technological revolution” was not used in the USSR, although the concept of

“industrial revolution” was used as such, which accompanied the transition from feudalism to capitalism, revolutionary in content according to the theoretical foundations of Soviet historiography. At the same time, the USSR actively introduced new objects of research that helped to characterise historical situations in different countries in accordance with these theoretical foundations: in the official versions of the stories of capitalist countries, the headings were distinguished by plot separations from the general context: “class struggle”, “strike movement”. In the history of the USSR, there are attempts to attach importance to historical periods to power initiatives: “the first Five-Year Plans”, “The Virgin Lands campaign”, “Perestroika”, etc. In that version of the history of the USSR, which has passed the test of time, only those that are connected with the contexts of broader social transformations remain: for example, the “first Five-Year Plans” lost chronological boundaries and were preserved only in the contexts of industrialisation and, especially, collectivisation associated with it (given the significant social consequences in terms of the number of victims, including in national regions); “perestroika” began to be considered in conjunction with the geopolitically significant disintegration of the “socialist camp”, and then the USSR.

The fall of the USSR and the final collapse of the totalitarian system at the end of the 20th century had the following impact on the situation in historical science: the concept of “revolution” will continue to be used only in the humanitarian sense (“Green Revolution”, “Revolution of Consciousness”, “Sexual Revolution”), as an emotional description of liberalising processes (“Gorbachev revolution”) or in relation to the next breakthroughs in the technological sphere. Former “social revolutions” have lost and changed their identity. The totalitarian historical discourse with all its works, which have since remained on the periphery of scientific and historical research, has also come to an end, as relapses of totalitarian consciousness that survive only where the re-identification of historical events is not caused by the current demands of a renewed society.

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