

# Past Wars in the Russian Blogosphere: On the Emergence of Cosmopolitan Memory

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**Abstract:** In Russia, for decades, the collective memory of World War II has served two major functions. It has provided the major source of legitimatising the state and the ethical ground for sustaining the collective identity of those whose country now is very different from the one defended by their grandparents. Along with the state-imposed versions of the war and tired rituals and clichéd expressions of pride and gratitude, new ways of reflecting on the war began emerging. These are facilitated by new socio-technical practices made possible by globalisation and, in particular, by the Internet. Based on an analysis of selected Russian-language blogs, this article argues that although the nationalistic master narratives continue to function as glue for the nation, they become combined with stories and recollections that are attuned to the growing openness and interconnectedness of the world, problematising exclusionary renderings of the country's contribution to the victory.

**Keywords:** cosmopolitan memory, nationalism, war, Russian blogosphere, World War II

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According to the Yandex Blog Search, in Spring 2009 there were 7.4 million blogs in the Russian language blogosphere, including 6.9 million personal blogs and more than 500,000 community blogs. 70 percent of all Russian language blogs use four platforms, LiveJournal.com, Blogs.Mail.ru, Ya.ru and LiveInternet.ru. According to the TNS, *LiveJournal* is the most often visited blog hosting: its monthly audience in March 2009 comprised 8.7 million. An average personal blog is read by 18 people while an average community blog is comprised of 112 bloggers. 2 percent of bloggers have more than 100 readers (RUNET Blogosphere 2009).

Blogging occupies an important stage in the history of mass communication in Russia because it functions as a 'greenhouse of communicative democracy' (Yusupovsky 2007). When compared to the one in the West, it is marked by 'seriousness' (Lock 2007) of discussions. Many discussions are devoted to various wars, past and present ones. For far too long, discussions and renderings of wars in the Russian media were characterised by the hegemony

of the one-to-many system (Gudkov 2005; Polyak 2005; Ramazashvili 2005; Zvereva 2005). The explosion of blogging and, more generally, the growth of Internet popularity in Russia broke this hegemony, and the dynamics of content production, distribution and consumption today look much more complicated than when propaganda, as a rule, remained undisputed. To give a general picture of how past wars are discussed in the Russian-language blogosphere, I use three categories outlined by Herring et al. (2004, 2007), namely, journal-style blogs with more personal content, non-personal or filter-style blogs that cover particular topics by providing links with selected websites and other blogs, and knowledge-logs which are archives of information and expertise (see examples in Appendix 1). A combination of two or all of the first three types is possible. There are also personal and 'community' blogs. In what follows, I call the last group 'blogs', although their members refer to them as 'community' blogs.

Based on a sample of Russian-language personal and group blogs<sup>1</sup>, this article argues that the nationalistic master narratives continue to provide a simplified symbolic framework that aim to hold the nation together. They become combined with the stories and recollections attuned to the growing openness and interconnectedness of the world, bringing to the fore cosmopolitan memory, and problematising exclusionary renderings of the country's contribution to the victory over the Nazi Germany. My interest has been in how a growing cosmopolitan consciousness can affect the discussions of wars. How, if at all, can the growing interconnectedness of people influence discussions of the events that are already framed in ways that amplify nationalism?

To assess the emergence of cosmopolitan memory, I use thematic analysis to examine two hundred blogs on *LiveJournal* and other hosts.<sup>2</sup> I read some of these blogs over a long period of time (more than five years), four-five times a week, while others were only studied on a daily basis in April and May, 2010, around the Victory Day celebrations. I selected blogs by searching for keywords such as 'World War II', 'The Great Patriotic War', 'Victory Day',<sup>3</sup> and by using tag based search on several blogging engines (Blog Directory 2010, Blogs on Mail.ru 2010, Blog Reader 2010, Yandex Blog Search 2010).

In this article, I try to achieve both a conceptual analysis and an empirical observation of a particular strand of the Russian language blogosphere. I will focus on the discussions of World War II and the ways it has been remembered in order to show a growing heterogeneity of people's opinions of the war and its importance. Placing this debate in an international perspective, I will first examine the ideological assumptions behind national frameworks of war commemoration and the emergence of cosmopolitan memory. Then I will try to explore the cosmopolitan predilections and attitudes within a corpus of Russian language blogs. Ul-

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<sup>1</sup> In the article, all postings and comments are provided in English translations; all translations are the author's.

<sup>2</sup> While reading the blogs, I assume the validity, sense and pertinence of all arguments, including those I personally find objectionable. I pay attention to the interactive nature of the blogs by going through the threads of discussions which often prompt the blogs' hosts to clarify their thoughts. On the other hand, interactivity of the exchange is taken into consideration as a reminder that blogging practices are, rather, the social action accomplished through sharing one's judgments with similar-minded people than production of meanings that can simply be 'read off' posts. I selected the blogs by combining a snowball progression that followed 'natural' networks, and a systematic sampling that diversified bloggers, where possible, along lines of social profile and frequency of their contributions.

<sup>3</sup> I searched for items using keywords in Russian: [Vtoraia mirovaia voina, Velikaia Otechestvennaia voina, Den' Pobedy].

timately, then, I support the view that Internet fosters a sense of connection with the world as a whole; however I go beyond the generalisations involved in the concept of cosmopolitan memory to show the specific ways in which cosmopolitanism is registered and negotiated in the contributions of Russian-speaking bloggers.

### **The Patchwork of Online Memories**

When addressing the topic of war, journal-style blogs and group blogs frequently link to each other and to other online materials. The quantity of war related information that circulates online by virtue of the endless storage and exchange capacities of the Internet is mind boggling. Apart from the vast online archive of war memoirs, there is an outpouring of personal recollections written by and collected from those who experienced the war and the victory first hand, as well as an enormous number of posts in which people recall war movies or admire a particular photograph of war time. The surge in mass communication flows linking different events and regions of the globe, coupled with the spread of visual recording technologies, results in the complex collages of ideas, memories and materials found on some blogs.

The Russian-language group blog dedicated to Winston Churchill contains facts about this political leader, discussion of war time rationing in Britain, photos of posters prepared by the British Ministry of Information in the event of a German invasion, and pictures from the sand sculptures festival titled 'Myths or Reality: The Riddles of History' (Community Life-Journal W.S. Churchill 2010) The festival opened in Moscow's Exhibit Centre in spring 2010, commemorating the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of Great Patriotic War. Items in the sand sculptures festival included a sand version of the famous photo showing Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin at the Yalta conference in 1945, compositions showing the eruption of Vesuvius in Pompeii and the mythical sunken city of Atlantis. One may ask, why these particular events? If the decision to depict the famous volcanic eruption that destroyed an ancient Roman city could be explained by the recent disruptions caused by the Icelandic volcano, the appearance of a mythic city next to recent and still painfully tangible events of World War II seems ironic. The simultaneous presence of these different images is just one example among many of the ways in which events and figures of past and present, and their numerous representations, are deemed to co-exist online.

Another example is the 'Memory Forum' on a web site dedicated to discussions of military computer games (Suddenstrike 2010). In the Forum, users tell each other about their grandfathers who fought in World War II. One posting includes a poem by Alexandr Tvardovskii, *Vasilii Terkin* (1941-1945), with the following commentary: 'Oh soldier of that war, I bend my knees before you. I thank you for the victory that you gave us. I believe that you are not dead, you live in my heart, and please, be assured: you are not forgotten, the memory of you will pass through centuries'.<sup>4</sup> How do family memories of *real* fallen soldiers affect the players in *Sudden Strike* and similar strategic games? Do they work as a source of inspiration or, perhaps, rage amidst a simulated landscape of military action? Or, on the contrary,

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<sup>4</sup> The original quote in Russian appeared on 17 May 2005 at 'Pamiati' forum / 'Protivostoianie' / <<http://www.sudden-strike.ru/history/detail.php?ID=3452>> (last accessed 11 November 2010).

it is one's imagination that both helps to feel empathy toward those family members who perished, and to identify with a virtual 'soldier of fortune'?

As an event of unquestioned certainty, war plays a significant role in legitimatising the nation-state. At the same time, as there are fewer and fewer living participants and witnesses of the Great Patriotic War, the place that the commemoration of the war occupies in the temporality of the present is somewhat similar to the cyclical time frame of archaic memory. Amidst all the contemporary changes and uncertainties, the war functions as a temporal anchor, as an outstanding and totalising experience, as an achievement no one should dare to question. Commemoration of the war becomes a suitable occasion to strengthen or review societal values, to reflect on the sacrifice that allowed these values to exist, and to take pride in collective identity evolving around that sacrifice. So as the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Victory Day was approaching, in Russia, state TV channels and independent bloggers alike were working hard to make the days of May 1945 as vividly present in people's memory as possible. At the same time, together with inspiring memories came sober reflections on how liberties were suspended in the name of the country's defense, or how the ways that war-related discourses operate in today's Russia are not dissimilar to the 'the war on terror' discourse that postulates, as Alain Badiou pointed out, the boundary between the righteous 'we' (who face 'terrorism' in one case and 'the enemy' in the other) and the various 'evil-doers' (Badiou 2003, 146).

### **National Frameworks of War Commemoration and the Emergence of Cosmopolitan Memory**

How is the balance between national and non-national forms of memory changing in a time of globalisation? To what extent do the forms of national memory find themselves in a dialogue with the transnational ones? Is it possible to trace the transcultural dynamics that memories of World War II have acquired vis-à-vis the enduring ways of remembrance as a major national achievement? When analysing the formation of a cosmopolitan memory in the Russian blogosphere, we must take into consideration the continuing influence of the national collective memory on shaping the content and form war commemoration.

Pierre Nora's influential project on places of memory provides one of the most impressive examples of a scholar's belief that it is the national framework within which memory crystallises in *lieux de memoire* (Nora 1996-1998). The strong connection between collective memory and national identity that saturate his oeuvre is derived from Ernest Renan's understanding of nation as being based on a rich legacy of memories (Ho Tai 2001, 909, 915). It would be impossible to instill a sense of belonging, so important for constituting a collective national identity, without imposing a particular interpretation of past events, represented coherently and convincingly in monuments, textbooks, photographs, and memorials. But it would be equally impossible to become a cultured person without absorbing at least one culture and one country's history – which, as it happens in the modern world, is predominantly national.<sup>5</sup> To know the past of one's country is to understand and feel, together with other things, the hardships that one's people had to go through to allow their country to continue

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<sup>5</sup> This is the argument that is powerfully defended, together with many others, by Tzvetan Todorov (1993).

flourishing. It does not mean, of course, that national memory is always homogeneous, as different groups can have their own versions of the national memory. Yet these versions are meaningful only as long as they are related to a unifying and coherent national frame. For instance, as Mark Connely convincingly demonstrates in the case of the British 'collective national memory' of the World War II, the British came to cherish 'a particular explanation and interpretation of events' (2004, 1). Although there are always ways to deviate from the general agreement on what this war was and meant, one inevitably absorbs, by a sheer virtue of growing up in one's country, its master narratives. In other words, if a sense of belonging is constitutive for one's formation, it is the sense of *national* belonging that continues to be the predominant one. There is a sense in which modernity's capitalist development has deprived people of a sense of belonging to something else: work collectives are too unstable to provide a sense of solidarity, and labour is too precarious to allow thinking about anything else except the next prospective employment. Yet the nation is always there – or so it seems. Generations of politicians and intellectuals worked hard to naturalise the national frames of reference to the extent that 'the nation becomes the only way to imagine community! Every imagination of a community becomes overcoded as a nation' (Hardt and Negri 2000, 107). Consequently, most people's memories are nation-specific – in particular, traumatic memories of events when their country's very existence was at stake.

In case of Russian people's understanding of World War II, the complex interaction of history and territory also needs to be taken into consideration. Pervasive images of the enemy that invaded the Soviet Union helped to obliterate the obvious: the country's borders were far from stable before the war<sup>6</sup>. However, for many people, both in the past and the present, national identity, territory and the sense of belonging are closely interlinked (Graham and Nash 2006). In the Soviet Union, this territorial dimension of collective belonging was amplified by the fact that the invading enemy was later expelled, and then defeated on its own territory (Levinson 2005). This is related to the popularisation of the victorious war that remains the rhetorical strategy of many official newspapers, TV channels and websites. Combined with political groups' employment of the war memory to influence present policy, both domestic and international and for current and diverse ideological purposes, the war-related national representational discourses become a source of conflicts which, in part, have to do with the fact that they circulate globally. For example, the meaning of the World War II and its outcomes have been actively questioned in the Baltic countries, Ukraine, Poland and the rest of Eastern Europe, discussing, in particular, collaboration with the Nazis and the contribution of the Soviet Union and the Soviet Red Army to the victory. The growth of nationalism and 'identity politics' in these post-socialist countries has led to revision of the outcomes of World War II and rendering the Soviet Red Army as an occupier of Eastern Europe (see Maler 2010). According to an Estonian expert, 'If the Baltic States (Estonia in particular) view the role of the USSR as both a liberator and occupier of Eastern Europe, Russian officials remember the role of the Red Army as the heroic liberator of Europe from fascism' (Kattago 2009, 390). These tendencies have led to the Russian government's efforts to counter what it called 'the falsification of history in Russia'. On 19 May 2009, a presidential

<sup>6</sup> Part of these changes comprised the following: '...in late 1940 and 1941... Russia tightened its grip on Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, demanded Bessarabia and Bukovina from Romania and attempted to dominate Bulgaria' (Best et al 2004, 193-94).

decree announced the establishment of a government committee, whose purpose was to counteract those versions of the twentieth century history that were seen as endangering Russian national interests. The heightened governmental concern regarding the ways past events are remembered has interestingly coincided with the general outburst of interest in history. Partly this had to do with people's growing dissatisfaction with the 'official' historians who continued to produce the most apologetic versions of history. According to the historian Pavel Danilin, this left the mission of defending historical memory against falsifications to amateurs and enthusiasts (Danilov 2009).

Researchers of World War II and other wars increasingly reflect on the globalised circulation of memories: as Susan Suleiman notes, war memories 'while nationally specific, transcend national boundaries' (Suleiman 2004, 2). Marianna Torgovnik claims that the role played by the Soviet Union in defeating the Nazi Germany has never registered in Americans' image of themselves (Torgovnik 2005, 4). National memory, then, is not only selective but also exclusive: working within the confinement of national boundaries, it precludes a cosmopolitan consciousness from developing (Maier 1993).

In contrast to national modes of memory, Daniel Levy and Nathan Sznajder argued in favour of 'cosmopolitan memories' (Levy and Sznajder 2006 a; b). In their work, they problematise the popular belief in nationally-bound memory by claiming that events that have a particular importance for one nation, such as the Holocaust, can be thought of as 'decontextualised events' (2006b, 98) They argue that 'nothing was more 'cosmopolitan' than the concentration and extermination camps of the Nazis' (2006a, 25). The widespread trauma of the Holocaust, they claim, can be healed by making the memory of the Holocaust cosmopolitan. Looking at numerous and controversial Holocaust representations and remembrances, Levy and Sznajder trace the transition from national to cosmopolitan memory cultures. Such transition occurs when people's views become enriched by a wider circulation of ideas and images. In their view, 'thecosmopolitanisation of Holocaust memories thus involves the formation of nation-specific and nation-transcending commonalities' (2006a, 12). Global media representations, they suggest, 'create new cosmopolitan memories, providing new epistemological vantage points, and emerging moral-political interdependencies' (2006b, 97). In their view, it is first and foremost the human rights discourse that is (or should be made) cosmopolitan. At the heart of this discourse lies the imperative 'never again!', which refers to the genocide of Jews. The commonly (indeed, globally) remembered atrocities of the Holocaust should become a foundation of global human rights discourse, providing a common framework in a world where many people are subjected to displacement and violence.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Of course, this line of reasoning is not without problems. Firstly, a call to decontextualise the Holocaust might seem premature to those invested in national historiographies – especially since it is hard for them to admit that the Holocaust also took place in their countries, and often with the consent of a large portion of the local population. Secondly, the human rights discourse can itself become the language of power, used by imperial projects and anti-democratic nationalisms (Brown 2004, 460). Lastly, scholars of memory are skeptical about cosmopolitan memories as universally shared. In Aleida Assman's opinion, if the Holocaust occupies a unique place in people's frames and practices of remembrance, it is happening because the Holocaust provides 'the paradigm or template through which other genocides and historical traumas are very often perceived and presented' (2007: 14). Thus, it becomes a common language for the conversations about other traumas. Assman differentiates between a global and a European Holocaust memory because of the strong connection of the latter with World

Together with historians and literary scholars, a similar but much broader argument has been formulated by the proponents of cosmopolitanism as a new research agenda for the social sciences in the twenty-first century. As the English geographer Doreen Massey emphasises, according to this agenda, 'specificity and identity are defined through linkage with elsewhere rather than counterposition against' (Massey 2007, 164). There now exists quite a substantial body of knowledge that questions the predominance of the 'container' metaphor in the traditional theoretical rendering of historical transformations, including nationalism and globalisation (Beck 2002a, Turner 2002, Delanty and Rumford 2005). According to this metaphor, the world, the continents, the countries, and the regions are unproblematically related, similar to a set of dolls of decreasing sizes placed one inside another (a nested-doll), as territorial containers of power, and as static, permanently given spaces. With relation to nationalism, dominance of the 'container' perspective often results in what Ulrich Beck describes as 'methodological nationalism': an insistence on interpreting every social phenomenon through the national gaze (Beck 2002b). In today's Russia, there are many tendencies that discourage people from thinking about 'linkage with elsewhere', while both online and offline discussions about things 'specifically Russian' are flourishing. It, thus, becomes particularly challenging to question parochialism and nationalism or indeed to teach about cosmopolitanism and to explore how one's identity, history and sense of place are linked 'elsewhere'. A substantial part of the research and teaching in Russia is engaged in strengthening the nationalistic narrative. As I and my co-author argue elsewhere, 'As in the society at large, for Russian academics, too, the question of who and what constitutes the Russian nation is among the most central issues. As experts struggle over the intellectual and political problem of how to define Russianness, how to apply social constructivist approaches, and for what purpose, charges about instrumentalising cultural identity and refusing to engage in socially useful work that promotes greater acceptance and tolerance of diversity abound' (Rivkin-Fish, Trubina, 2010, 31). In other words, of all the spatial 'dolls' or 'containers', it is the nation that definitely comes forward. Many scholars have been encouraged to elaborate and give a more sophisticated shape to the wishful images that the Russian Federal government constructs through nationalist narratives<sup>8</sup>. One dimension of this complex dynamic expresses itself in the rhetoric by which economic decisions that have been made in the interest of an often quite narrow group of people are justified by the active use of phrases like 'national prestige', 'a country's leading role', etc.<sup>9</sup> While persistently fighting the 'methodological

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War II. World War II was a common challenge, but it impacted each country differently. Assman believes that the different experiences characteristic for each country's history should not be ignored, and concludes that 'in Europe the trans-national memory runs up against a variety of national memory constellations and collisions' (2007, 14). Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer claim that Levi and Sznajder are, perhaps, too optimistic about the appearance of cosmopolitan memories. They argue that 'the field of memory' can – and should – be broadened by abandoning the strategies of appropriating suffering for nationalist purposes and by including not only others who suffered but also perpetrators and bystanders. The field of memory can then 'incorporate these memories into an enlarged global arena, making room for additional local, regional, national and transnational, testimonies about slavery, colonialism, genocide and subordination' (Hirsch and Spitzer 2009, 164-165).

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Tischkov 2007, Solovei 2005. Moreover, 'nationalism today got out of the governmental control and grows independently of wishes and goals of the current Russian establishment' (Pain 2007, 55)

<sup>9</sup> This theme has been actively discussed both in the blogs (see, for example, dolboeb 2010 and hans akkerman 2010) and in the newspapers. For instance, one author rightly claims that 'In Russia, the importance of patriotic

nationalism' characteristic of a considerable part of social theory and the social sciences, Ulrich Beck writes that 'the 'legitimatory achievement' of the nation-state lies in turning people's attention exclusively towards domestic issues, thereby banishing global inequalities from the field of vision of the (relatively) privileged' (Beck 2005, 839).

Privileged or not, many people who engage in today's discussion of wars seem to be aware of these developments, as well as of the fact that the exclusive nationalism of other people's understanding of wars can be detrimental for all concerned.<sup>10</sup>

### **Cosmopolitanism and Commemoration of Wars**

I believe that Levy and Sznajder's argument that the Holocaust can act as cosmopolitan memory should be expanded further in order to incorporate war memories. When tracing recent developments in online discussions of the war, one notices that along with traditionalist and nationalistic discourses, which I address below, other discourses also emerge – those that are attuned to the multiplicity of wars and to the fact that wars will continue for the time being. It is not only 'us' who suffered and fought. There is something fundamental about wars that forces people to relate them if not to the human condition in general, then at least to modernity's predicaments or to the history of the last two millennia. Such cosmopolitan dispositions in the bloggers' discussions are, however, far from pacifist. Through their active interests towards various wars, bloggers demonstrate a growing awareness of connections between wars; of conflicts at various level of intensity; of the destruction and of the bloodshed that might be brewing somewhere at this very moment. Their discussions move beyond simplistic renderings of warfare as something that can simply be stopped forever (although these can also be found (vega-est 2010)). For instance, the blogger called [oblachko-80], in the aftermath of Moscow metro attacks, laments about the aggressive state of part of Russian society, the arrival of the 'age of devil, age of anger and hatred, and time of war against all', and claims that while it is unbearably difficult to spend life in fear of losing a close one, 'we all live this way now, Russian and Chechen mothers. What mother, however, gave birth to a female suicide bomber?' (oblachko-80, 2010). In the theoretical discussion on [bacchusv]'s blog, the blogger called [kouzdra], controversially, states that the numerous wars that took place from 1500 to 1900 were the main factor which accelerated the technological and social competition between the two world powers (bacchusv 2010).

The blogging movement in Russia, based on ideas of self-archiving, information-storing, and continuous debating, is an interesting case of the interaction of different ideologies and discourse through dialogue and commentary. These, however, have only begun to attract the attention of researchers. Some, while relating the specifics of the Russian Internet to the peculiarities of the Russian national character, i.e. the principle of collectivism which supposedly expresses itself in the 'communal' use of Internet technologies, nonetheless believe that the Russian bloggers tend to be more liberal than Russian society as a whole (Gorny 2004, 29). Others, although admitting to 'active and sometimes rude debates and disputes' that take

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upbringing becomes greater, the worse things get with the medical services, public transport cost and hidden charges in the allegedly costless schools and hospitals' (Kostikov 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Still, when combined with a mythological reliance 'on our fathers' blood that was spilled 'for us', nationalism often remains the only meaningful way to understand a country' past – in Russia and elsewhere.



place on the Runet, claim that, as a rule, the users are skeptical about their chances to become politically influential (Fossato 2009, 95). While offering possibilities for individual self-publishing, blogging servers connects its users to a blogging network which, in turn, is part of a broader web of social relations, supported by a shared discourse. The freedom of self-expression, cherished by many bloggers, is often challenged by the bloggers' preoccupation with increasing their audience (Kosterina 2008, Idlis 2010). It is also often challenged by their reproduction – sometimes inadvertently and sometimes consciously – of the dominant views and versions of the past. At the same time, the blogosphere's interactive format sometimes prompts people to look critically at the views they have come to cherish. Some bloggers thus seem to be positioned at the intersection of different discourses so that the positions they take with regard to wars are regulated by at least two discourses, nationalistic (which is also changing) and, what I tentatively call, cosmopolitan. What is especially important is that it is not always up to the subject/blogger to choose which discourse to articulate or to rehearse. Schematic narrative templates, or generalised patterns of remembering may work subconsciously and unreflectively (Bartlett 1995, 45; Wertsch 2008, 24). The political times of (permanently) heightened security make one's identification with nationalism the most secure subject position to write from. Those who publicly distance themselves from or critically explore their childhood memories of the war, and those who suggest that their understanding of the war was somehow imposed on them often meet harsh and hostile criticism.

In the aftermath of Moscow metro attacks—June 1996 (4 people killed); January 1998 (3 injured); February 2000 (20 injured); April 2000 (13 killed); February 2004 (40 killed); August 2004 (10 killed); March 2010 (35 killed)—and especially after the latest one that took place on 29 March 2010, the discussions of past wars and those of the 'global war on terror' frequently overlapped. As a researcher, working at the time when terrorist attacks took place, I faced a difficult task of exploring the processes of online commemoration, while trying to take into account the growing interconnectedness of representations of different acts of warfare in many parts of the world (not to mention the international scope of the bloggers' community, where such warfare is discussed). It is often said that cosmopolitanism presupposes openness towards the other. According to Ulf Hannerz, cosmopolitanism is 'a willingness to engage with the other. It entails an intellectual and aesthetic openness towards divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrasts rather than uniformity' (Hannerz 1990, 239). How, then, do the cosmopolitan predilections of people coincide with their interest – and investment – in wars?

The very scope of discussions and diversity of wars that bloggers are interested in, as well as the great scope of discussions of war on the Russian web beyond World War II demonstrate that the nationalistic frame co-exists with others. In other words, those advocating for nationalism and patriotism, are usually fixated on just one war, The Great Patriotic War. They believe that the world is not grateful enough to the Soviet Union for its contribution to liberating various people (annacihevawey 2010). Others, who are oriented differently, express awareness of the fact that in addition to World War II, there were and will be many other wars. They thus set a different, cosmopolitan, context for reflections about wars. Their approach is often expressed in detachment from the official discourse on the Great Patriotic War, in interest towards other countries' involvement in that war, as well as a broader interest in other wars.

The list of groups that discuss wars, other than World War II, is quite substantial (for details see [community.lifejournal.warhistory](http://community.lifejournal.warhistory) 2010). Among the groups that define themselves as focusing on wars, many deal with the first and the second Russian wars. Other groups include those, dedicated to wars in Yugoslavia ([community.livejournal.ratovi](http://community.livejournal.ratovi) 2010), Afghanistan ([community.livejournal.afgan2010](http://community.livejournal.afgan2010)) and Vietnam ([community.lifejournal.vietnam](http://community.lifejournal.vietnam)). Posts about various wars also appear in group blogs on ‘war history’, ‘military history’, and many others. Although not a blog, the web site ‘Na Voine’ [at war] positions itself as a platform for publishing poetry and fiction, written by ‘the veterans of all recent wars and of those which continue across the whole world’. The site promotes the idea of using amateur literature as a means of psychological rehabilitation for the veterans (Navoine 2010). Interestingly, the site also includes recollections by former enemies of Russia under the rubric ‘From the other’s trenches’, allowing people from both sides to meet online and try to understand, together, why wars happen. The authors of the site claim that as a result of such encounters, a war could be seen from different points of view.

When it comes to commemorations of wars, one can also see evidence of the cosmopolitan framework. For example, claims are made in favor of turning the ‘Victory Day’ – national celebration that commemorates Soviet Union’s victory over the Nazi Germany – into the Veterans Day, that is, in order to honour and commemorate *all* those who fought, in one war or another. What is more, some bloggers choose to compare different wars and forms of commemoration, instead of focusing solely on the Great Patriotic War as a unique event. For example, one blogger called [langobard] wrote an entry about the evolution of the Victory Day celebrations, where he noted that future celebrations will become less and less pompous, compared to the celebrations, marking the sixties’ anniversary of the war. This is because for someone, living in the twenty-first century, in the culture of comfort and consumerism, the actual war becomes distant. It would therefore suffice, [langobard] suggests, to admit to a related heroism, to honor it and to show respect’ (langobard 2010a). In the discussion that followed his entry, one commentator expressed agreement, noting that a similar development has occurred in the USA. And instead of angry responses, attacking the person who dares to compare *our* country and *theirs* (something that would have occurred within the nationalist framework), the discussion turned to comparison, demonstrating participants’ willingness to put the history of one’s own country in a broader perspective, and conveying an active interest in how things work elsewhere.

Wars and conversations about them are also inseparable from the broader context of political history of the twentieth century. This history includes leaders whose thirst for power led them to turn an entire political system into a killing enterprise – most notable among them was Iosif Stalin. One of the most often discussed and, indeed, painful issues, is to what extent Stalin’s name should be used in contemporary commemorations of World War II. Many bloggers, especially those living outside of Russia, point out that this is a problematic issue in many countries, not only in the former Soviet states. For example, in Holland (severr 2010) and Belgium (severr 2008) there are streets, named after Stalin

Russian bloggers' ability to influence decision making is rather limited,<sup>11</sup> and, in part, that explains the reminiscing tone of many blogs and their turn to wars of the past. Wars and battles, their details, the weapons, the heroes, the generals, the rations – all these appear to interest some of the bloggers a lot more than today's events. And yet, one can also find vibrant and passionate discussions about the ways wars are remembered and understood, revealing the growing generational gap between those who lived through the Soviet times and the 'perestroika generation' of those born in the early 1990, ranging from shocking descriptions of ignorance that young people show of World War II (Vvyatsky 2010) to skeptical reflections about whether the particular Victory Day of 2010 celebration served to divert public attention from two blasts at Russia's largest coal mine Rospadskaya on the night of 8-9 May 2010, which have caused the death of at least 60 people and serious damage to the mine itself (Commentator 2009). In many blogs, the history of the Great Patriotic War (its accomplishments and Stalin's role) is included in the grand narrative of the Soviet era. The agenda of this type of blogs seems to be to defend the victory from all those who tend to underestimate its greatness. Many posts are based on existing sources and include scanned photographs from old albums or books, which, even if they are recently published, reproduce statements typical of the Soviet official discourse. When bloggers write in first person, they also often produce considerations full of praise for 'Stalin the wise' and the 'great Soviet family of peoples' (v-tretyakov 2010, usoyski 2020, community. Stalinistov 2010, sup-managed01 2010). The uniqueness of the Soviet people is emphasised against the background of all other nations, none of whom is seen to have done anything comparable to what 'we' did. Consider how a blogger called [ihistorian] makes a similar point:

There are many countries and many nations. Each of them uses legends about heroic ancestors in their children's upbringing [...] Only few nations can tell their children about victorious wars for freedom and independence of their Motherland. And only our nation can show its children the heroes who are still alive and who defeated the most powerful army that has ever been assembled to enslave the world [...] They have won because they had chosen Stalin the wise as their leader [...] it is on the memory of Stalin's soldiers' courageous acts that we should base our children's upbringing (Ihistorian, 2010).

Some of those 'heroes who are still alive', run their own blogs, too – and their views sometimes challenge the idealised image of 'Stalin's courageous soldiers'. For example, an eighty five year old veteran, blogging under the name [lomonosov], wrote the following in his praise of the memoirs written by another veteran, Nikolay Nikulin:

This book is [...] remarkably, almost naturalistically precise in describing the events of the war, revealing the disgusting nature of war with its beastly inhumanity, filth, senseless

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<sup>11</sup> In 2006, the bloggers were among those who organized meetings against the project to build an oil pipeline through the Lake Baikal basin in the immediate vicinity of the lake. In the face of popular protest Putin ordered that an oil pipeline be diverted from Lake Baikal. According to one expert, 'the bloggers know how the Russian government works better than those who don't use the Internet' (Kashin 2007). The community [pozar\_ru] emerged in Summer 2010 when hundreds of wildfires broke out across Russia and remains a very effective means of various volunteers' self-organization ([http://community.livejournal.com/pozar\\_ru](http://community.livejournal.com/pozar_ru)). Tellingly, there are no ratings of political bloggers currently in Russia. See also (Kovalev 2010).

cruelty, and the immoral disregard of human life by all military officers, from the battalion commander to the chief one. This [book] is a document for all those historians who are interested not only in the movement of troops in the theater of war but also [in the war's] moral and humanistic aspects [...] The most important question that arises when reading this book is why battalions and divisions often went obediently to inescapable death, obeying commanders' orders that were at times simply illegal. Patriotic literature gives the following answer: inspired by their love for their socialist Motherland and their hatred towards the enemy, they were eager to give up their life and responded readily to the call 'Hurray! For Motherland! For Stalin!' [...] Many people who visit my blog complain about their relatives' refusal to talk about the war. This book explains why (Lomonosov 2010).

In his long and elaborate post, [lomonosov] quoted a passage from Nikulin's book where the author reflected on the myth, promoted by patriotic literature that people had gone to their death, shouting 'For Stalin!' Nikulin argues instead, that

[u]p to the moment when bullets and splinters silenced the screaming gobs, what one could hear in the frontline were hoarse howls and dense scolding. When death was near, who could think of Stalin? So how come that now, in the sixties, this myth has resurfaced again – that we won only thanks to Stalin, and for Stalin? (Nikulin in Lomonosov 2010).

The writer's answer is that those who could have disputed the patriotic narrative of people fighting for Stalin's sake had died in the war. However those who served in NKVD, hid behind the troops and forced others to fight, are still alive. In [lomonosov]'s post the critique of Soviet political and military leadership and his emphasis on the war's inhumane effects are clear, even though they are made indirectly. And his reference to people's refusal to talk about the war points out to the difficulty in raising such critique openly. This is because for many people Stalin's name is inseparable from their understanding of the Great Patriotic War, from the triumph of their country and from the achievements of the Soviet time – in other words, from that version of collective national history that carries existential importance for them, providing an anchor of certainty in a sea of insecurity and instability.

The days of writing this article (Spring 2010) were marked by attempts to put up posters of Stalin on streets of many Russian cities (including Moscow's), in preparation for the anniversary of the Victory Day. Liberal Russian press expressed fierce opposition to this initiative. Many bloggers, on the other hand, suggested to that the question of Stalin's contribution to World War II should be considered in a calm and objective way. For example, one discussion that took place in [langobard]'s blog, focused on the fact that Stalin had killed millions of his own people. One participant suggested that the number of Soviet citizens who perished at the hands of Stalin exceeds the number of deaths that Churchill or other European leaders could be accused of. Another argued that if one takes into account the number of Indians who died during a famine, for which Churchill was responsible, it becomes less clear who killed the most (langobard 2010b). Similar work of comparison was conducted by other bloggers, too, indicating the cosmopolitisation of war memories. And if in this particular discussion the comparison revolved around measurements of politician's culpability, others questioned the greatness of the victory itself:

At the time of all the official rituals, the clatter, and the forever humiliated veterans,<sup>12</sup> the question emerges: was this victory such a great one? On the other side there were Auschwitz, Babi Yar, German occupation of Europe and the UK and potential nuclear attacks on Germany by America. What a choice.

The USSR of 1939 was an aggressor, but ended up being on the right side at the right time [...]. One cannot justify the senseless atrocities committed by the Soviet soldiers [in Germany].<sup>13</sup> But the Germans, most of whom idolised Hitler, got SOME idea of what their fellow citizens in arms were doing in Europe and Russia (borhud96, 2010).

Continuing to challenge the patriotic narrative of Germany as the ultimate evil and the Soviet Union as a noble fighter, and presenting both countries as guilty of atrocities, another blogger writes:

We threw bombs on the German cities [...] populated only by women, children and the handicapped – in other words, those not personally responsible. All others were on the front lines. I read the memoirs of one witness of Berlin bombing. He saw how the wave from the blast raised a little girl in the air and crushed her body onto metal wires of one of the destroyed building's the armature. One cannot imagine a greater horror. In the years that passed since the war no one reproach anyone for these bombings. They reproach only the Americans for the atomic bomb (Tareeva 2009).

And if some of the bloggers, like [borhud96], focus merely on comparisons between war crimes, others specifically praise Germany for not simply acknowledging its military crimes but taking collective responsibility for the past, something that, as [tareeva] suggested, had not happened in Russia (Community LiveJournal. Tver 2010, Tribuna/blogs 2010, [Vne-classhtenie], 2010, [teroganian] 2010).

But whether or not these and other war-related blogs can really shape alternative views of World War II or other, more recent wars remains an open question. Too often debates on war itself become obscured by various ideological divides, or get submerged in old master narratives. For example, many discussions are strikingly shaped by Soviet rhetoric and military jargon, depicting a black-and-white worldview of right and wrong, heroes and traitors, 'us' and 'them'. On one hand, there is a common understanding that many of those, labeled as 'traitors of Motherland' at the time of the war, had been wrongly accused. For example, [labas] contributes the long list of quotes from the historical documents that shed light on the appalling conditions in which Soviet prisoners of war were held (Community Livejournal War History, 2007). On the other hand, Soviet-style finger pointing is still com-

<sup>12</sup> The blogger refers to the destitute conditions in which most of the old veterans live today.

<sup>13</sup> Rape of German women by Soviet soldiers in the Soviet occupation zone has been actively discussed in several blogging entries (Blogs.privet, 2009; Womanstalk 2009; radulova 2009). In these discussions, the following argument was prominent: although rape is not uncommon in all wars, the time has come to question the 'winner takes it all' ethics. And even though it is important for many to include their grandparents in the heroic narrative of the war, facts about the cruelty of Soviet soldiers should also be widely known. Their acts of violence against civilian population should not be condoned or justified simply because German soldiers were cruel, too, or because Soviet soldiers defended their country.

mon, whether it is directed at ‘traitors and collaborators’ from the former Soviet republics in Asia and the Caucasus who had been photographed with German ammunition (Jane 66, 2010) or the ‘liberalist imposters’ – those supporters of liberalism that are seen responsible for the failure of democratic reforms and are subject of deepest distrust<sup>14</sup> in many parts of Russian society. ‘Liberalist imposters’ are also accused in promoting ‘incorrect’ versions of war history. The accusations include angry warnings: ‘Remember, you rotten liberal, the more you accuse Stalin, the more you praise Hitler and Hitler will come after you!’ ([Sceptic 2029]).

## Conclusion

It has been argued that apart from being a cornerstone of national identity, World War II provides a traumatic kernel of contemporary historical consciousness in Russia. This consciousness is multifaceted and cannot be grasped through rigid and simplistic oppositions of ‘manipulations’ of history (that result in mythologised and exclusionary nationalist narratives) versus ‘authentic’ accounts of past hardship and suffering. These oppositions are oblivious to the complex ways in which ongoing attempts to use the memory of the ‘victorious war’ for social cohesion and national unity are intertwined with people’s growing interest in the ways things happened – and continue to happen – elsewhere. Such internationalisation of collective memory can lead to stronger emphasis on the greatness of Russia’s achievements and on the uniqueness of its suffering during the war. But it can also bring cosmopolitan openness to other peoples and their histories, often emerging as a result of complex and uneasy work of comparison of hardships, leaderships, warfare and survival during war times.

It is important to remember that today’s memory work around World War II takes place in the age of globalisation, when national memories coexist and circulate together with international ones. Cosmopolitan memory cultures begin to emerge because people’s views become enriched by the wider circulation of ideas and images, new points of reference, processes of migration and mobility, etc. The coexistence of different histories and narratives is also amplified by the Internet. In that respect, recent developments in discussions on war in the Russian blogosphere are particularly telling because, along with traditionalist and nationalistic discourses, they reveal the emergence of other frameworks, where the ‘Great Patriotic War’ no longer figures as the only case of fighting and suffering. Instead, many bloggers become attuned to the multiplicity of wars, to their ongoing presence in people’s life, and to the fact that it was not only ‘us’ who suffered and fought the enemy. Bloggers occupying different and, at times, contradictory positions with regards to memory, nationhood and politics, are nevertheless aware of each other’s existence. Together, they contribute to the growing poly-vocality of war memory.

In this article, I argued that Levy and Sznajder’s argument regarding cosmopolitan memories of the Holocaust should be expanded to include memories of the war. Without questioning the heroism and the sacrifice made by the Soviet people during the war, the

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<sup>14</sup> In some cases, this distrust is intertwined with anti-Semitism; in others it is primarily linked to notions of ‘authentic’ and ‘fake’ liberal ideas. See, for example, the posts on (Picabu, 2010) and by ([sergeyhudiev] 2004). The question of what is understood as ‘liberalism’ in today’s Russia is extremely complex and lies beyond the scope of this paper.

emergence of cosmopolitan memory on the Russian Internet points to the growing dis-identification with the state-imposed versions of the past and practices of remembering. It shows people desire a more inclusive understanding of history and of what war might mean for humanity.

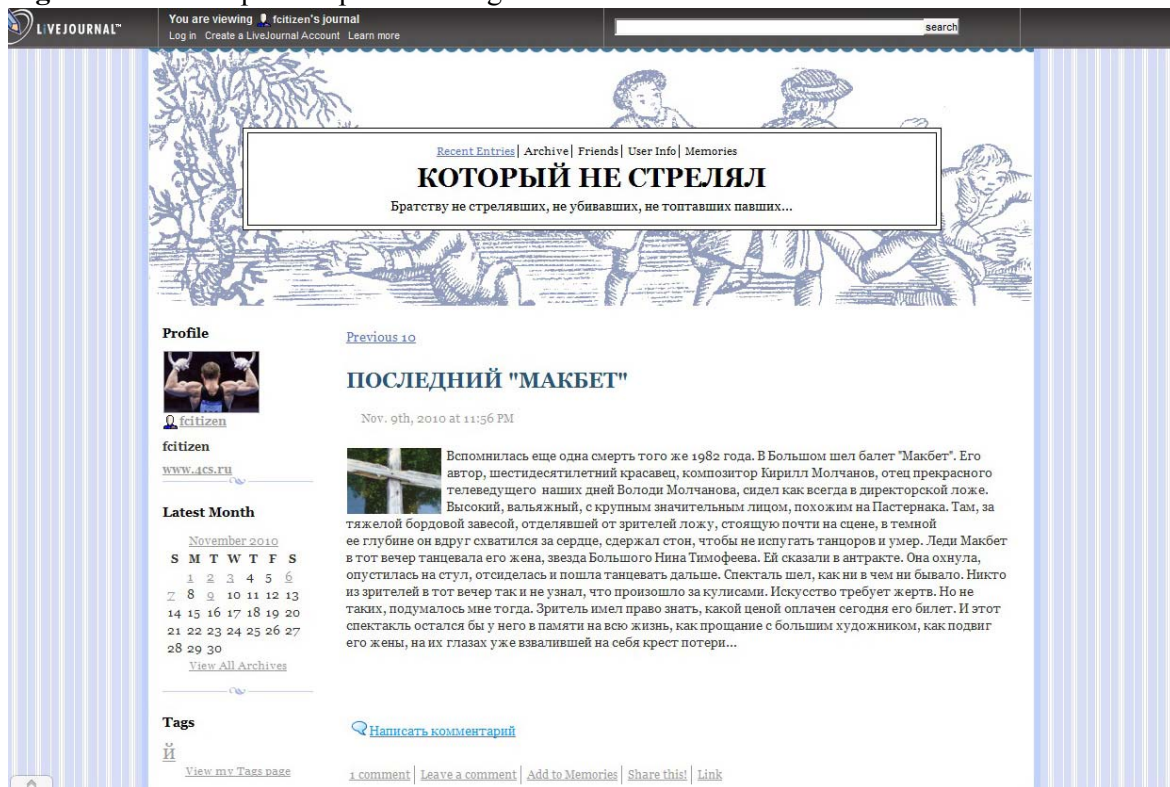
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**Appendix 1**

Figures 1-4 provide some examples of the types of blogs discussed in the article.

**Figure 1.** An example of a personal blog



Source: <http://fcitizen.livejournal.com/> (accessed 20 October 2010)

**Figure 2.** An example of a filter-blog.

Открыть доступ Сообщить о нарушении Следующий блог Создать блог

## Военно-исторический хронограф

За время существования цивилизации произошло много событий, но большинство из нас знает только самые значительные. Проект "Военно-исторический хронограф" создан с целью напомнить о войнах, битвах, юбилеях прославленных полководцев и о многом другом, ставшем историей.

СУББОТА, 31 ОКТЯБРЯ 2009 Г.

### 1 ноября 1911 года

В этот день впервые в военных действиях была применена авиация. Произошло это в ходе итало-турецкой войны в Триполитании. Командование итальянской армии отправило в Африку 35 самолетов, которые применялись в основном для ведения разведки.

1 ноября итальянец лейтенант Гавотти сбросил с своего самолета четыре бомбы по 1,8 кг на турецкие войска. В ответ на бомбардировку с воздуха турки заявили, что это негуманный способ ведения войны. С ними нельзя не согласиться! Достаточно вспомнить Дрезден и Хиросиму, города Северной Кореи и Вьетнама, Белград и Багдад, пакистанские деревни близ границы с Афганистаном!

Автор: Alex на 22:42 0 коммент. Ссылки на это сообщение

Ярлыки: авиация, бомбардировка, война

**Будет Ли Мировая Война?**  
Ее Угроза Снова И Снова Возрастает Что Нас Ждет  
Дальше ...  
kabmit.com

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### Постоянные читатели

**Читать**  
Инструменты Google для создания интернет-сообществ

**Читатели (1)**

Уже являетесь участником? [Войти](#)

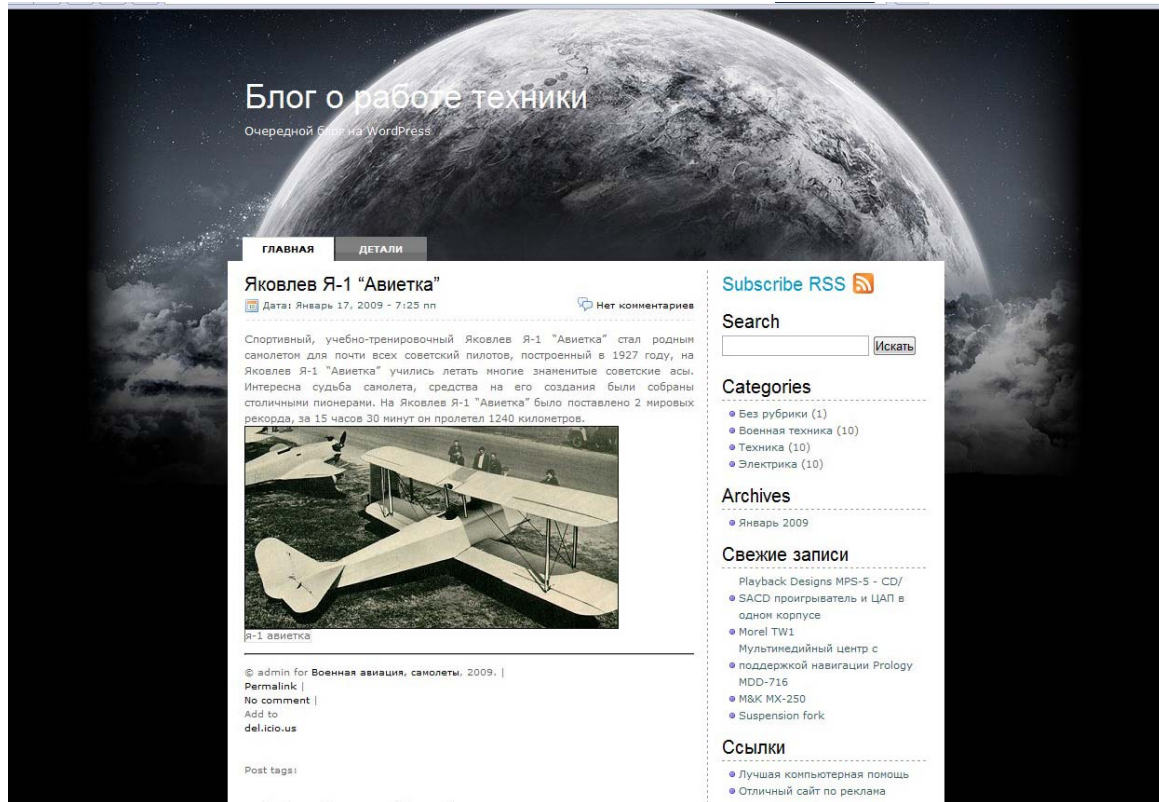
### Архив блога

- ▼ 2009 (62)
  - ▼ Октябрь (6)
    - [1 ноября 1911 года](#)
    - [24 октября 1912 года](#)
    - [21 октября 1912 года](#)
    - [19 октября 1911 года](#)
    - [18 октября 1912 года](#)
    - [8 октября 1912 года](#)
  - ▶ Сентябрь (3)
  - ▶ Август (4)
  - ▶ Июль (15)
  - ▶ Июнь (28)
  - ▶ Май (6)

[Обо мне](#)

Source: <http://wars-history.blogspot.com/> (accessed 20 October 2010).



**Figure 3.** An example of a knowledge-log.

Source: <http://job-techno.ru/?paged=2/> (accessed 20 October 2010).

Figure 4. An example of a community blog.

The screenshot shows a community blog on the My Mail.Ru platform. The page title is "Мироненко и Чепик – первые Герои афганской войны. Тайна их гибели". The main content consists of three blog entries by different users, each with a profile picture, a title, a short text snippet, and a comment count. The first entry is by Александр Юриков, the second by Сергей Астахов, and the third by Drake. The page also features a sidebar with navigation links and a search bar.

Source: <http://my.mail.ru/community/afgan-war-heroes/journal/> (accessed 20 October 2010).

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