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THE IMAGE OF THE URALS IN BRITISH MEDIA DISCOURSE

Olga Solopova (a)*
*Corresponding author

(a) South Ural State University (National Research University), Lenin Avenue, 76, Chelyabinsk, Russia, o-solopova@bk.ru

Abstract

Efforts on preserving the memory about the Great Patriotic war (GP war) have become increasingly important as the history of World War II (WWII) and the GP war as the Eastern front of the former encounters new interpretations. “Memory wars” based on competing memories and myths and abounded with controversial judgments occur worldwide. To get a full understanding of any war, one has to learn not only about the major battles and key figures of the war, but also about the way the war impacted society. The home front in the Urals had a major impact on the outcome of the war as the Ural region was an especially important industrial center in the years of the GP war. The source of the material used for analyzing the image of the Ural region was British media discourse. The purpose of the present study was to show the way British media of the GP war period modeled the image of the home front in the Urals. The research data were drawn from the British Newspaper Archive. The corpus of texts containing the search terms ‘Ural / Urals’ within the publication date range from 21 June 1941 to 09 May 1945 comprised 5413 documents. The core components of the image of the Urals are the following: a safe place, a storehouse of natural resources, a Soviet arsenal, industrial strength, a defence line, and a German objective.

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1. Introduction

The history of the Great Patriotic war (GP war), one of the most titanic battles in the history of humanity, is special for the Russians; the memory of this war has always been particularly venerated in the country. In the Soviet Union, in the Era of Late Socialism there was a kind of tradition to perceive the history of the GP war as a sacred and untouchable event, unliable to doubt, attack, or question. However, there have been significant changes in the world since then: the disappearance of the Soviet Union and the socialist camp, the radical change of the existing social structure and political system in Russia, the rapid development of new media and dramatic advances in mass communication. These changes have created a new information space, which differs fundamentally from the societal orders of the past and offers a new narrative of the history of World War II (WWII) and the GP war, also known as the Eastern front of the former.

Efforts on preserving the memory about the GP war have become increasingly important as the history of WWII and the GP war encounters new interpretations, with different social groups pushing their alternatives through newspapers and other forms of media. “Memory wars” occur worldwide, especially in the Post-Soviet states and in the Western countries. They stir up arguments and emotions. They abound with controversial judgments, including provocative assertions about the true causes of the wars, their aftermath, and the contribution of the Allies. These judgments are based on competing memories and myths, on different sources of information, various scientific conceptions and cultural traditions. Thus, “the Second World War is still being fought” (Krzeminski, 2005, p. 1).

2. Problem Statement

WWII and the GP war as its Eastern front remain in the focus of attention in a range of disciplines across social and humanitarian sciences: history, sociology, political science, discourse studies (Bernat, Chernysheva, Shatrovich, & Raevskaya, 2019; Chernysheva, Bernat, Raevskaya, & Shatrovich, 2019; Gubaydullina, 2019; Lightbody, 2004; Mawdsley, 2009; Mollin, 2018; Morgan, 2008; Solopova, 2019; Solopova & Saltykova, 2018, 2019; Solopova & Chudinov, 2018; Stout, 2011). The focus of the studies is the global nature of WWII; political, economic and social reasons of different countries for engaging in the war; the causes and effects of WWII; the language used to shape the images of the war and the images of the countries engaged in it, the reasons to use this language, etc. Thus, much of the current literature on WWII pays particular attention to its lasting impact on the countries around the world and the notable changes and trends brought about by the war. It was an event that affected the very fibers of societies all over the world.

The precise issue the present research addresses is the way British media of the GP war period modeled the images of the home front in the Ural region. To get a full understanding of the war, one has to learn not only about the major battles and key figures of the war, but also about the way the war impacted society. The home front was the region where the civilian population responded to the changes and challenges brought about by their nation at war. As the war impacted the whole society, life and hard work on the home front constituted an important component of the whole war effort. It was one of the most crucial issues with a considerable impact on the outcome of the war.

Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union and the speed of the initial advance of the Axis powers brought about drastic changes within Soviet society. Many important military factories had to be evacuated to distant areas that offered both safety to their inhabitants due to their isolated location and a mass quantity of resources to Soviet industries. One of these areas was the Ural region that became an especially important industrial center during the GP war. It housed steel and heavy iron plants, chemical and agriculture factories. Though suffering unimaginable deprivations, those who worked behind the front lines produced all that was needed for the war effort.

The source of the material used for analyzing the image of the Ural region in the research is one of European discourses, namely, British media discourse. There are two extradiscursive reasons for the choice of the discourse; they refer both to (1) the past (the war) and to (2) the present (the modern world).

(1) In 1941–1945 Great Britain and the Soviet Union had a common enemy and became allies in the fight against Nazism. Anglo-Soviet Treaty (signed in 1942) established a military and political alliance between the two countries during WWII, and for twenty years after it.

(2) In 2015 a survey conducted by ICM Research, Populus, IFop for Sputnik revealed that 24 percent of EU citizens polled were unable to say who had played a leading role in shaping the course of WWII. Only 13 percent of respondents said they believed the Soviet Union shaped the outcome of the war. (The survey interviewed 3,036 EU adults, including 1,045 British adults) (Russia to Challenge At..., 2015).

3. Research Questions

The research questions that the present study seeks to answer are 'how often did British media of 1941–1945 depict the events in the Ural region?', 'what images of the home front in the Urals were dominant in British media discourse of the period?'; 'did the alliance of the two countries in the war against Nazism influence the perception of the Soviet home front in British media discourse?' (The years of WWII were deliberately narrowed to the years of the GP war when Great Britain and the Soviet Union were the Allies that promoted the alliance to control the Axis powers and their aggression.)

4. Purpose of the Study

The present paper is a piece of a larger project on the image of the Ural region in Soviet and European military media discourses of the GP war period. The purpose of the present study was to show the way British media of the GP war period modeled the image of the home front in the Urals and to single out core the components of the image.

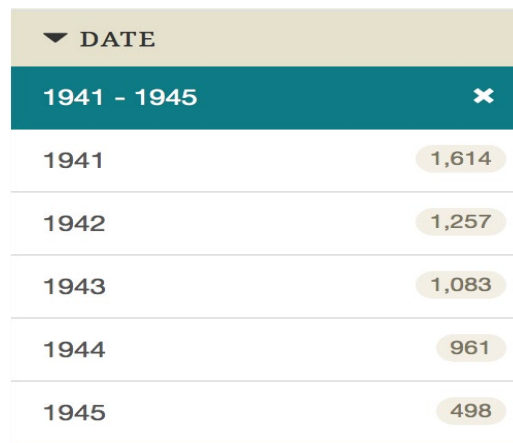
5. Research Methods

The sample was collected from British media discourse using the methods of corpus linguistics. After being retrieved from the corpus the data analysis required the use of textual analysis techniques, componential analysis, contextual analysis, conceptual metaphor analysis, and discourse analysis.

6. Findings

The research data were drawn from the British Newspaper Archive (2020). The British Newspaper Archive is based on the physical archive of the British Library whose newspaper collections are the richest in the world as they contain most of the runs of newspapers published in Great Britain since 1800. The British Newspaper Archive is a commercial online collection of more than three million pages of newspaper content that can be effectively used in discourse studies (Solopova, 2019; Solopova & Chudinov, 2018; Solopova & Saltykova, 2019; Vaguina, 2019; Vaguina & Solopova, 2019).

The search engine combines several powerful options: one may search the corpus using keyword(s), title, article type, specific date, region, etc. In the study the search terms included “Ural / Urals” in the ‘Exact Search’ checkbox, which excluded any related word variants from the search results. Other options that helped to refine the search and narrowed the selection included the publication date range (from 21 June 1941 to 09 May 1945), with ‘articles’ and ‘illustrated articles’ chosen among article types and with ‘results’ sorted by relevance.



▼ DATE	
1941 - 1945	✕
1941	1,614
1942	1,257
1943	1,083
1944	961
1945	498

Figure 01. The search results

The corpus of texts containing the search terms comprised 5413 documents (Figure 01). The figure shows that the texts published in 1941–1943 made up the majority of texts matching the search query in British media discourse.

All documents matching the search query were shown in the results panel (Figure 02). After images of the original sources being produced, a process called Optical Character Recognition (OCR) created the electronic text in a searchable format. It must be noted that the accuracy of the OCR procedure is not 100%, as it depends on “a variety of factors: condition of the original newspaper, quality of the paper, size and style of the font, column layouts”, etc. (The British Newspaper Archive, 2020). That’s why further processing of the texts required painstaking manual searching through all the documents.

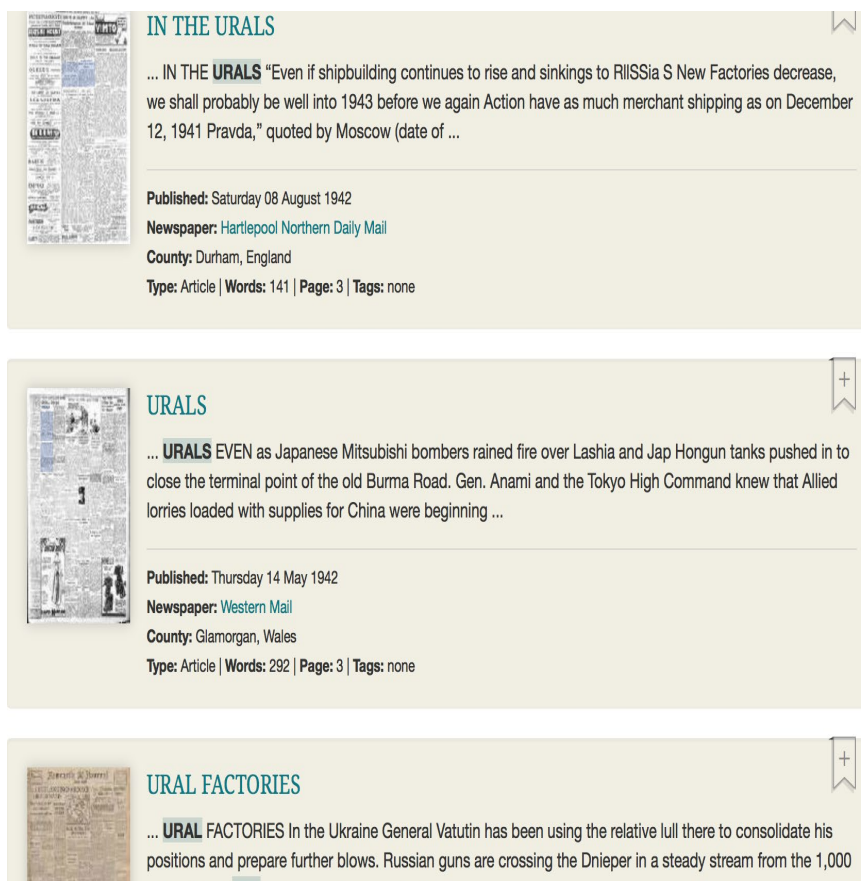


Figure 02. Several documents matching the search query shown in the results panel

The qualitative analysis in this paper centers around the key elements of the image of the Urals modeled in British media discourse in the years of the GP war. They are the following:

The Ural region as a safe place. One of the core components of the Urals' dominant image in British media discourse of the period was connected with a favorable geographical position of the region, situated beyond the reach of the German troops and bombers:

There is a Russia beyond the Urals that will still be beyond the reach of the Axis. One could go on mentioning the changes that have created a new Russia east of the Urals, changes which the outside world knows nothing about (Aberdeen Press and Journal, 1942, p. 2). Beyond the Urals. Huge new iron and steel works have been started in the Magnitogorsk district of the Ural mountains – *out of reach of Hitler's bombers and* (Belfast News-Letter, 06 January 1943, p. 5).

The Ural region as a storehouse of natural resources. Another distinctive characteristic of the Urals' image in British media discourse was related to its position as the largest supplier of various natural resources. The Ural region was considered a territory with heterogeneous natural conditions and resources that included metal ores, minerals, oil, coal, precious and semi-precious stones:

All the minerals from the Urals are going in ever-increasing quantities to the plants manufacturing planes, tanks, guns, and shells (Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail, 27 October 1941,

p. 4). *Soviet stores beyond Urals. Oil, Ores, Great Industries* (Aberdeen Press and Journal, 28 July 1942, p. 2). *The chief copper mines of the U.S.S.R., large deposits of bauxite (for alumium), an important chemical industry and a growing nickel smelting plant are all found in the Urals.* Equally important for the future are *the new oilfields between the Urals and Volga* which are in process of exploitation (Shields Daily News, 21 February 1942, p. 3).

The Ural region as a Soviet arsenal. Another central element of the Urals' dominant image was the idea of the Urals playing a colossal part in supplying the Soviet fighting front. The most significant aspect of the Urals home front was war production. From the outbreak of the war, there was a clear understanding that beating the Axis powers would require enormous proportions of armaments: guns, tanks, shells, etc. Ural workers played a significant part in producing all war-related materials:

Arms supply of the Urals is colossal (Derby Daily Telegraph, 27 October 1941, p. 3). *A great effort is being made to convert the Urals and Siberia into an arsenal* (Birmingham Daily Post, 27 September 1941, p. 5). *The miracle of the Urals. The present successes of the Red Army would have been impossible without the ceaseless flow of armaments from the industrial centres of the Urals and Siberia* (Birmingham Daily Post, 05 January 1943, p. 3). *The Urals – the mountainous region in the extreme east of European Russia – has now become Russia's defence arsenal* (Belfast Telegraph, 29 August 1941, p. 5).

The Ural region as industrial strength. Another core component was connected with the industrialization in the Urals and regarded as one of the major factors to achieve the strategic goal of the ultimate victory over the enemy. Mighty treks of men and machines from the occupied districts and the front line zones all converged on one district. The industrialisation of the Urals was intensive, it assumed colossal proportions, unequalled in the world's history. The programme included the squeezing of the maximum output from existing factories, the organisation of plants and their output evacuated to the Urals from the front line areas and the construction of new works:

The Ural power resources are now undergoing development for which the industrial history of the world has no parallel (Liverpool Daily Post, 17 October 1941, p. 4). *Urals Output Tripled. An industrial revolution, prompted by the war, has more than tripled production in the Urals, and made that region the largest centre of industry in the Soviet Union* (Belfast News-Letter, 23 November 1943, p. 3). *Russia's riches. Industrial Strength in Urals* (Falkirk Herald, 24 September 1941, p. 7).

The Ural region is a defence line. Another significant element of the image was positioning the Urals as one of the deciding factors in forging victory for the anti-Fascist coalition:

The Urals – a bulwark of the anti-Fascist coalition (Staffordshire Advertiser, 13 December 1941, p. 5). *The grey Urals took up the work of defence. Hardy, strong men of the Urals, young*

and old, women and girls created new style of work, naming it proudly – ‘the Urals style’ (Manchester Evening News, 04 August 1943, p. 5). There are *two great defensive positions* upon which, if all else fails, the Red Armies can fall back and wage a steady war of attrition for years *in the Ural Mountains*, and the mysterious area behind the Caspian Sea (The Sphere, 22 November 1941, p. 24-26). Hidden away in and behind the richest iron-producing Ural mountain area around Sverolovsk and Techeliabinsk, and extending from there down to the Caspian Sea, Stalin has built up a series of shadow factories capable of turning the mineral treasures of Central Russia into tanks, aeroplanes and guns as *a second line of defence* in the Russo-German War (Belfast Telegraph, 04 August 1941, p. 3).

Another key component of the Urals’ image, which was closely connected with the previous ones, was *the Ural region as a German objective*:

Urals. A German Objective. The Urals are now being mentioned in Berlin German objective, according to reports from Berlin correspondents of Swedish newspapers. *The Germans realise that the Soviet may conceal great surprises in this industrial area* (Liverpool Daily Post, 23 October 1941, p. 5). Berlin predicts *drive for Ural industries*. Berlin put out yesterday, through Swedish newspaper correspondents, hints that *the Urals will be a future German objective* (Dundee Courier, 23 October 1941, p. 3).

On the whole, in British media discourse of the GP war period the Urals’ dominant image may be seen as that of the region that occupied a special place in the gigantic arsenal of the USSR and, in fact, of the entire anti-Fascist world coalition. The mountains, stretching parallel with the front but separated from it by 900 miles, formed a powerful line of economic defence, a line of tremendously rich deposits, mines, factories, plants and industries that were raised to their position of world importance. The Urals’ strength became especially emphasized and pronounced in view of rapid industrialization of the country.

7. Conclusion

Images of any state are self-centred, based upon the interests, priorities, objectives, intentions, prospects of those international actors whose discourse is analyzed. The major ‘dimensions’ of such images are those of hostility and friendliness, and of strength and weakness. These ‘dimensions’ are emphasized and even sharpened in media discourse about war because of black-and-white thinking that underlies this discourse type. In the war the USSR and Great Britain unified to defeat one common enemy and strove to achieve the common goal together. The understanding of the crucial role of the Soviet army in the war had an enormous impact on British perceptions of the USSR in general and of the Urals as its part in particular: the war effort on the Urals home front was a total effort, which made the region one of the deciding factors in forging victory in the war.

Acknowledgments

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