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The ideological and symbolic dimension of Alexei Navalny's life and activities. The Russian intelligentsia and society against the state

SUMMARY Alexei Navalny, a Russian oppositionist and anti-corruption activist, has become a symbol of resistance against Vladimir Putin's authoritarian regime. His life and work embody the opposition that the Russian intelligentsia has directed against oppressive state power since the dawn of its existence. A study of the history of the Russian intelligentsia shows that the means of protest and social mobilisation used evolved, but the essence of the intelligentsia has remained unchanged. At the heart of the intelligentsia's ethos were: proclaiming the truth about reality, speaking on behalf of the voiceless, sacrificing one's own interests and, if necessary, one's life, in order to affirm the ideals. In Navalny's attitude to life and activities we can find these qualities.

The aim of the article is to verify the hypothesis that Navalny, as a symbol of the struggle against the oppressive political system, reflects the ideals of the Russian intelligentsia in a historical perspective. Referring to the intelligentsia as a group that acts as a mediator – an intermediary between the political power and the people/society, we will pose a question about the actions taken by Navalny in order to activate society and the chances of their continuation after the death of the activist. Will the movement he initiated towards individual freedom and the democracy of the system be stopped, as it was in the case of previous generations of intellectuals? What role does the society play today in the well-known clash between intelligentsia and the state power? Is it still passive, reluctant or hostile to the opposition's actions, or is it engaged? What forms does this engagement take: does it exist only on a declarative level or does it translate into activity?

The source material consists primarily of Navalny's texts: published on the oppositionist's website and blog, in the form of public statements and interviews, documentaries, reports and communiqués. The second group of source texts consists

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of the results of public opinion polls and available statistics on the protests. They will be used to examine the attitudes of Russian society towards Navalny on the one hand, and Putin on the other. The main research method is content analytics with an emphasis on conceptual analysis. It is complemented by a hermeneutic analysis of the texts.

The results of the research indicate that Navalny reflected the ideals of the Russian intelligentsia – this is evidenced both by the content he publishes and by his choice of life path, especially its final stage: arrest, unyielding attitude towards the regime, and death. The results of the research also indicate that the vast majority of Russian society presents a passive attitude, and thus the culturally familiar pattern of the “drama of the Russian intelligentsia”, which is alone in carrying out its mission to bring freedom to society, is being repeated.

KEYWORDS Navalny, Putin, freedom, *intelligentsia*, political culture

Introduction

The aim of this article is to reflect on the role of Alexei Navalny as a continuator of the tradition of the Russian intelligentsia. This social group, characteristic especially of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, has a long history of advocating for social and political change, both through the promotion of culture and through the fight against an oppressive political regime. The latter quality is the distinguishing feature of the Russian intelligentsia, the essence of its mission and identity (Abassy, 2022; Kochetkova, 2010; Kowalska-Stus et al., 2001; Pipes, 1960; Read, 2024; Zubok, 2009). As Russia’s prominent opposition leader and anti-corruption activist, Navalny has relied on the same values as the intelligentsia in previous eras to challenge the political regime. The tools of influencing and external forms of activism have changed as a result of the transformation of societies related to the progress of civilizations, including the mass media. Nevertheless, the ideal of fighting the system in the name of freedom and the individual’s right to self-realization remained unchanged. Through the analysis of Navalny’s texts referring to his life, beliefs and political activity, the hypothesis that the oppositionist embodied the values and principles of the Russian intelligentsia will be verified. Navalny’s commitment to promoting freedom of speech, individual agency, accountability, and democracy is in line with the historical goals of the intelligentsia in the fight against authoritarianism in Russia.

A key task of the Russian intelligentsia was the ethos of proclaiming the truth, speaking on behalf of those who had been deprived of their voice, and acting as a mediator – an intermediary between society and the authorities (Abassy, 2008, p. 28). The latter was implemented in various ways, including attempts

to awaken civic awareness in the society and shape political culture. The intelligentsia made attempts to educate the public. A personal example of sacrifice of one's own well-being, and in an extreme situation, also of life was an important part of the ethos of the intelligentsia.

Navalny's death brought about a change in the perspective of his activity: from a political activist and oppositionist, he became a symbol of the fight for human rights against an oppressive system. By analysing his ideological legacy, we can point to the mechanisms of interaction between the intelligentsia, society and the authorities, and forecast the directions of development of the struggle for human rights in Russia.

Navalny's experience as a lawyer and blog writer put him in the spotlight of the opposition public as a fearless critic of the Russian government (Glazunova & Adamoru, 2023, p. 188; Regolo, 2014, pp. 7–8). The number of visits to Navalny's websites also proves great interest towards him (Zinnatulin, 2023). Investigations into corruption among the country's political elite, top officials and oligarchs earned Navalny the support of a large part of Russian society, both in Russia and abroad. Navalny managed to articulate the frustrations of a large part of society. He was the first to dare to speak about issues that had hitherto been taboo or had not been challenged because they were part of a cultural pattern rooted in the mentality and therefore considered the norm. By initiating the investigations, Navalny broke a taboo: he called corruption theft, and the beneficiaries of the system – thieves. He also pointed out the reasons why Russia remained a country without prospects. The oppositionist gained the support of the younger generation, disillusioned with the lack of political freedoms and economic opportunities in Russia. Acting in the name of the public good, Navalny found himself in the spotlight of Putin and the ruling elite, posing a threat to the status quo. In response, the state set in motion the mechanisms used to eliminate political opponents since the days of the Russian Empire: silencing, imprisonment, an attempt on life, a death sentence, murder. Despite numerous legal challenges, including multiple arrests and a politically motivated poisoning attempt, Navalny remained consistent in his actions and his values did not change. After his death, he became a hero and a symbol of the struggle against power, and his legacy has been a resource for his successors. The nature of this resource, the contexts, whether it will be fully exploited and how are the main questions facing both researchers and Russian society after Navalny's death. The first step is to realize what Navalny left behind as a spiritual testament. The next step is to reach into the history of ideas in Russia, especially

those embodied by the Russian intelligentsia of pro-Western provenance, and to identify the mechanisms and circumstances that contributed to the defeat of previous generations of the Russian intelligentsia. An accurate diagnosis can help avoid defeat and honour Navalny's life with effective action. In this article, we will look at the ideological and symbolic dimensions of Alexei Navalny's life and work, as well as the role of the Russian intelligentsia and society against state power. By delving deeper into these topics, we hope to better understand the complex dynamics of contemporary Russian politics and the role of the intelligentsia as a mediator between society and the state. In the clash between Navalny and Putin – symbolic representations of the two concepts of state and legal orders – Russian society played, and continues to play, a key role. Keeping it passive or motivating it to act is a decisive factor in the course of events.

The state of the art

The scholarly literature on Navalny's life and activities is not extensive. Conducting research and drawing generalizing conclusions requires time and emotional distance. In the face of the recent death of the activist, such a distance is impossible. Nevertheless, it is possible to group the sources of knowledge and indicate the main thematic threads. Navalny himself is the author of texts that are a source of knowledge about his views and values. These include books, blog articles, interviews and current affairs programs. The latest monograph of the oppositionist, published posthumously, entitled: *Patriot* (Navalny, 2024) is memoirs, summarizing life and activity. Navalny began writing it at the end of 2020, after an attempt to poison him. As the publisher aptly pointed out:

In vivid, page-turning detail, including never-before-seen correspondence from prison, Navalny recounts, among other things, his political career, the many attempts on his life, and the lives of the people closest to him, and the relentless campaign he and his team waged against an increasingly dictatorial regime. [...] Written with the passion, wit, candor, and bravery for which he was justly acclaimed, 'Patriot' is Navalny's final letter to the world: a moving account of his last years spent in the most brutal prison on earth; a reminder of why the principles of individual freedom matter so deeply; and a rousing call to continue the work for which he sacrificed his life (*Britannica*, 2024).

The description of the content is complemented by a comment by the oppositionist's wife, Yulia Navalny:

Ta książka jest świadectwem nie tylko życia Aleksieja, ale także jego niezachwianego zaangażowania w walkę z dyktaturą – walkę, za którą oddał wszystko, łącząc ze swoim życiem. Na jej kartach czytelnicy poznają człowieka, którego bardzo kochałam – człowieka o głębokiej uczciwości i niezłomnej odwadze. Dzielenie się jego historią nie tylko uczci jego pamięć, ale także zainspiruje innych do stanięcia w obronie tego, co słuszne i do tego, by nigdy nie tracić z oczu wartości, które naprawdę się liczą (<https://www.amazon.com/Patriot-Memoir-Alexei-Navalny/dp/0593320964/>).

The promotion of the values that were the foundation of Navalny's life and for which he gave his life was accompanied by a great deal of pragmatism. It manifested itself in the search for tools for effective action. Navalny was inspired by the experiences of the Polish "Solidarity" movement and one of its leaders: Adam Michnik. The two books written together reveal the similarities in the attitudes of Michnik and Navalny, and at the same time contain an analysis of the differences in the socio-political systems of Polish and Russia (Michnik & Navalny, 2016; 2017). The theme of society and its readiness to engage in change is adjacent to the theme of intelligentsia. The latter is intended to set the direction of change and motivate as much of the society as possible to be active. While emphasizing the similarity between the Polish opposition in the 1980s and the Russian opposition in Putin's time, it is impossible not to notice that they function in diametrically opposed social contexts.

Most of the studies are journalistic in nature. Navalny's opposition activities, which are inextricably linked to his criticism of Putin, occupy a large part of them (Dollbaum et al., 2021; Herszenhorn, 2023a; Mick, 2024). The oppositionist is portrayed as a relentless man, convinced that it is possible to change the mentality of Russians and oppose the system. As noted by the publisher of the monograph *The Dissident* (Herszenhorn, 2023b):

The *Dissident* is the story of how one fearless man, offended by the dishonesty and criminality of the Russian political system, organized a relentless opposition movement and became President Vladimir Putin's most formidable rival – so despised that the Russian leader tries never to say Navalny's name (<https://www.amazon.com/Dissident-Alexei-Navalny-Hope-Russia/>).

The “relentlessness” of the opposition movement in Russia requires further research to verify the claim made in the book’s description. On the other hand, opinions about Navalny’s attitude have already been confirmed by the facts of the oppositionist’s life. The central idea around which Navalny organized the protests was to oppose corruption. The literature on Navalny’s fight against corruption includes commentaries on his documentaries, initiated investigations, and the government’s response. Navalny’s unmasking activity was one of the opposition’s tools to transform the system and make the desired vision of Russia’s future a reality. Developing effective ways of doing things is another topic discussed in the literature on the subject (Denisova 2017; Navalny & Michnik, 2017). Among the scientific studies, a lot of space has been devoted to the role of the media as the main means of disseminating content and influencing society (Belinskaya, 2021; Kazun, 2019; Kazun & Semykina, 2020; Spaiser et al., 2017). The theme of the characteristic features of Navalny’s statements and social media is adjacent to an analysis of the rhetoric of the traditional media, which remain in Putin’s hands (Gehlbach, 2010). Navalny’s activities have also been the subject of research by centers and think tanks dealing with Russia, human rights and democracy: Carnegie Center, Wilson Center, Center for Strategic and International Studies, The Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM), Levada Center, and many others. The death of the oppositionist caused an avalanche increase in the number of publications, press commentaries and statements in the virtual space (Domańska et al., 2024; Dumoulin, 2024; Groot, 2024; Klain, 2024; Otarashvili et al., 2024; Stent, 2024; Stoner, 2024), as well as speculation about the future of opposition movements in Russia and their potential leader (Jalaizai, 2024; Myles-Primakoff, 2024; Toosi, 2024; Trevelyan, 2024). At the forefront is the question of whether Navalny’s potential for opposition to the regime will develop into a revolution or whether it will be suppressed. So, on the one hand, we have a kind of “spiritual testament” of Navalny, and on the other hand, we have the potential executors of the will: Russian society.

Navalny’s death, although expected – the oppositionist himself assumed that he would pay with his life for opposing the regime – caused a deep shock. It is therefore not surprising that the overwhelming majority of votes are positive. Nevertheless, there were also opinions less affirmative of Navalny’s views and actions, in which he was accused of nationalism (Baniya, 2023). They did not affect the general image of the oppositionist, which was characterised by heroism.

Primary sources description

The source material consists primarily of Navalny's texts. Many of them were periodically difficult to access, such as the oppositionist's main website: *nawalny.com*, which was blocked by the Kremlin on July 26, 2021 (*The Moscow Times*, 2021). Content from Navalny's official website was also shared in the form of blog posts and regular posts on other sites, reaching a wide audience. In addition to regular content on his website and blog, Navalny and his associates promoted protests against abuses of power and corruption, as well as educational campaigns such as "smart voting". The concepts they contain, which are carriers of the ideas and values promoted by Navalny, will be the subject of research. The films about Putin, Dmitri Medvedev and other high-level officials are a source of information about kleptocracy as one of the main qualities of Russian political power. Navalny also ran two channels on the *youtube.com*: *Alexei Navalny* – where we can find 521 films and *Navalny LIVE* – 4506 films. The first channel, established in 2013, had almost 6.5 million subscribers, while the second, founded in 2017, had over 3 million. Their popularity was evidenced by the number of views: 1,549,369,107 and 1,682,619,172 views, respectively (as of March 2024). The main slogans of the programme of social and political change in connection with the situation in Russia have been disseminated by Navalny in the form of public statements, interviews, documentaries and podcasts. An analysis of the content of the above-mentioned sources and the documentary film by Daniel Roher (2021) that concludes them allows us to identify the values that guided Navalny.

As mentioned above, intelligence, due to its function as an intermediary between power and society, exists in relation to power on the one hand, and to society on the other. The reaction of both of these groups to the actions of the intelligentsia determines the place of the intelligentsia against the background of the epoch and the challenges it faced. For this reason, the second important group of analysed source texts are those that allow us to draw conclusions about the attitude of Russian society towards Navalny. This group of source texts includes the results of public opinion polls and available statistics on the protests. They will be used to examine the attitudes of Russian society towards Navalny. The largest source of data are articles and survey results posted on the Levada Center website. The results of the OpenMindInstitute (OMI) research and other available statistics were also taken into account.

Such diverse research material required unification of methodology. A classic content analysis was adopted to reveal the meaning of key concepts: freedom, democracy, courage, Russia/Russians. In accordance with the assumption that words gain meaning through their contexts, relational analysis was applied to texts and hermenutic analysis, taking into account the following contexts: social, political, historical, ideological. As a result, the sentences and phrases that are most often repeated in Navalny's statements were identified. They reflect the values that guided the oppositionist's actions.

Man against the system – system against man

The theoretical framework for the considerations in this section is taken from the concept of the Russian political scientist Alexander Obolonsky. In the monograph *The drama of Russian political history. System against individuality* (2003) proposed a juxtaposition of two models of understanding the relationship between the political system and the individual, defined respectively as the system-centered and person-centered approaches. This juxtaposition, although very general on the surface, aptly captures the essence of the interaction between Navalny and the autocratic state. Obolonsky writes:

In the personocentric value system, the individual-human being is the highest point, the measure of all things. All phenomena of physical and social reality are considered through the prism of the independent personality. In the personocentric system of values, the human-individual either does not exist at all, or is considered as an auxiliary element, used to a greater or lesser extent to achieve supra-individual goals (Obolonski, 2003).

Navalny's values can be read from his biography. It consists of actions and the underlying intentions. The oppositionist's life can be divided into three periods: his childhood – when he gained education and knowledge about the reality around him (1976–2007), his political activity initiated by a six-month internship for leaders at Yale University and ended with an attempt to poison him (2010–2020), and the period from his arrest at the Domodedovo airport to the day of his death in prison (17.01.2021 – 16.02.2024).

Even as a child, Navalny had the opportunity to observe that the Soviet authorities created reality by ignoring the facts about the Chernobyl disaster (Potter, 1990). He graduated in law and economics from Moscow universities:

the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (PFUR) and the Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation. While still a student, he joined the Yabloko party, which promoted liberal-democratic values and the principles of the market economy. The choice of the party's profile was in line with Navalny's interest in practical and effective action. In 2007, however, he was expelled from the party and one of the reasons was his nationalist leanings (Ray, 2024). A year later, Alexei began to act on his own. A short internship at Yale University in 2010 gave impetus to the political career of the then 34-year-old Navalny, and had a very strong impact on the development of tools for action. Michael Cappelo, the head of the program in which Navalny participated, summed up the Russian oppositionist's actions: "Alexey, at the time, was struggling to identify the mechanism through which he could affect social change in Russia" (Raab, 2024). Commitment, enthusiasm and leadership skills were also the qualities that were sought in candidates for the program:

Navalny was one of 15 fellows that year, selected out of a pool of over 1,500 applications. [...] "We look for people for whom the experience could change the trajectory of their career. In that sense, Alexey was exactly what our recruitment process tried to capture. His achievement was notable, but his greatest accomplishments were still yet to come. He had a serenity about him that you knew he was very passionate about what he was doing" – Capello said (Raab, 2024).

After returning to Russia, Navalny faced what he considered to be the biggest problem of the Russian reality, hindering the country's development and constituting an obstacle to the well-being of citizens – corruption. This was not a practice unknown to Russian society (Schulze & Zakharov, 2018, p. 4). Certainly, however, it was a phenomenon that was not talked about. Russians as a society were characterized by acceptance of abnormality, apathy and indifference stemming from the conviction that "nothing can be changed anyway". By breaking taboos, Navalny challenged the Russian way of thinking. This aspect of the oppositionist's anti-corruption activities is often overlooked in favour of high-profile his fight against figures on the Russian political scene. However, it is of fundamental importance: changing the Russian reality required the involvement of the Russians, which in turn was conditioned by a change in the way of thinking. The phenomenon of corruption arises as a result of insecurity due to unstable legal structures in the state, as a proxy mechanism for in-depth reforms (*ibid.*, p. 8). The fight against corruption requires the citizen to step outside

his comfort zone, to give up measures that, in his subjective opinion, provide a certain amount of security. Beginning in 2008, Navalny exposed fraud in large state-owned companies such as gas giant Gazprom and oil behemoth Rosneft. He used his blog and social media for this purpose. By becoming a shareholder in state-owned companies, he gained access to financial reports and was able to use his knowledge to expose acts of corruption. The published 300-page report marked a turning point in Navalny's anti-fraud efforts. On the one hand, it caused persecution of the oppositionist, and on the other hand, it brought about the desired activation of society. This activation had two faces: tracking and reporting abuses on a specially created website – RosPil – and street protests. Both activities were linked by Navalny's catchphrase "party of crooks and thieves" to describe Putin's United Russia. Protests that erupted after the 2011 parliamentary elections were held under the banner of the struggle for civil rights and political change (Robertson, 2013, p. 20). After returning to the presidency, Putin began to suppress dissent: Navalny was arrested many times, and his home and office were searched by the police. Not only did the oppositionist not withdraw from his activity, but he intensified his efforts. That steadfast attitude led to an increase in popularity, especially among young people. The generation of the 90s of the twentieth century did not have its heroes, and parents and grandparents were not able to give tips on how to find themselves in the new reality. To some extent, Navalny had filled this gap by gaining the support of very young people like him who were full of enthusiasm and faith that change was possible. A trace of the turning points in Navalny's biography allows us to conclude that he had a well-thought-out plan of consistent actions: to gain visibility in Russian society (social media, blog, website), to give society the tools of expression and to show the power of words (RosPil, protests), to try to gain political power on his own (Navalny declared own candidacy for mayor of Moscow, 2013, and for president of Russia, 2017), to transform political structures from within. All of these actions were blocked by the state, the more violently the more likely Navalny was to succeed: from arrests, through blocking channels of communication with the public, and defamation campaigns (similar to the Soviet-era "witch-hunts", including accusations of terrorism and being a foreign agent), to assassination attempts. Navalny's political success, visible in the increase in his recognition and the intensity of persecution by the state, also had another face, illustrating the lack of understanding by the general public of the essence of the values for which he was fighting.

The oppositionist was aware that the greatest threat does not come from the political structure and state power, but that it has its source in the mentality – indifference to events and apathy that allows the status quo to be maintained. In Roher's documentary, the oppositionist was asked, "If they kill you, what message will you leave to the Russian people" (*Navalny*, 00:38). Navalny evades the answer, suggesting that this question be left for the second part of the film. The same question is asked in the closing frames, and then Navalny answers, first in English: "Don't give up", and then, at the director's request, in Russian: "Don't give up. If they decided to kill me, it means that we are very strong. All that is needed for evil to prevail is the passivity of good people, so we should not be passive." (*Navalny*, 1:26:00). The main phrase of Navalny's website is: "Navalny. The final battle between goodness and indifference." They show that it is not the Russian state, but the Russian society that plays the main role in the events that have taken place.

Executors of Navalny's will. Russian society vis-à-vis the intelligentsia and state power

Let us recall that the concept of intelligentsia is not so much understood by a specific person or a group of people, but by values that are manifested in attitudes and actions. From this perspective, Navalny is seen as a symbol of values and the struggle to achieve them. Authenticity comes to the fore, closely related to the conviction that man has the right to shape reality according to his dreams. Authenticity is confirmed when the realization of the right to liberty requires courage, risking freedom and life. In the case of an authentic person, it is impossible to separate his life from his actions: ideas and thoughts are constantly confirmed by the word. In authoritarian states true enslavement manifests itself in apathy caused by fear and lies. It is the enslavement of the mind. Shouting the truth and proving it at every turn was the first stage of the destruction of authoritarian power. Navalny repeatedly said: "Do not be afraid", he also argued that strength lies in the group and one cannot remain passive in the face of evil. He tried to encourage others, even in the face of mortal danger: he interpreted the attempt on his life and the announcement of death as proof that the opposition's activity was bringing the desired results. Navalny has dedicated his life to providing the public with knowledge, showing ways to act, inspiring courage and uniting around the fight for a better future. The death of the oppositionist is a kind of summary of what he managed to achieve. The attitudes of Russians,

analysed and assessed on the basis of the results of surveys, allow us to determine whether Navalny's fate reflects the cultural pattern characteristic of the Russian intelligentsia: loneliness in the struggle against political power and alienation from the society for which and on behalf of which this struggle was undertaken.

The news of Navalny's death on February 16, 2024, spread relatively quickly. According to the results of the OMI's research, based on surveys and the analysis of the content of the posts, 83% of Russians knew about the death of the oppositionist on the same day, and according to the Levada Center – 69% (OMI, 2024). Only a small fraction of them experienced emotions. Most were indifferent. These results are consistent with the perception of Navalny and his activities by Russians since the first protests. Between 2012 and 2017, Navalny's recognition gradually increased: from 35% to 50%, with slight fluctuations of 1–2% (*Levada Center*, 2017a). In the year of the presidential election, the majority had an indifferent or reluctant attitude towards Navalny, at 35% and 23% respectively. There were definitely more people with negative feelings than those who described the presidential candidate with a word of positive character. To the question: "Could you vote for Navalny in the presidential election?", "yes" – answered by 1%, "rather yes" – 9%, and "rather not" – 20% of respondents and "definitely not" – 63%. Navalny's recognition grew when he engaged in election campaigns – as was the case in 2013 when he ran for mayor of Moscow – at 54%. However, it should be remembered that recognition can be the result of both positive and negative perceptions of a person or phenomenon. The recognition rate therefore does not translate into support for action. On the eve of the 2017 presidential election, the official authorities made sure that Navalny was associated with corruption – they used a tool that the opposition leader used to mobilize society against Putin. As Leonid Volkov, Navalny's chief of staff, noted: "Most people know about Navalny from TV, where they said that he stole the forest." (*Levada Center*, 2017b). In 2017, when asked: "Could you vote for Navalny in the presidential elections", 20% of respondents answered "probably not" and 63% – "definitely not". When asked to choose one word/phrase to describe their attitude towards Navalny, they chose: "neutral, indifferent" – 35%, in the group of negative terms – "I have nothing good to say about him" – 23%, "irritation" – 10%, "dislike" – 10%, in the group of positive terms: "respect" – 3%, "sympathy" – 4%, "I have nothing bad to say about him" – 9%. These attitudes were not the result of an analysis of the facts. Surveys conducted in the following years indicated that the vast majority of Russians were mostly not interested in Navalny's ideas or in the actions taken to bring about a change in political

culture or stimulate civic participation. In September 2021, when asked about one of Navalny's initiatives, called "smart voting," Russians replied that they did not know anything about the initiative – 65%, have heard about it but don't understand its meaning – 16%, they have heard about it but don't support it – 10%. The results show that Navalny has failed to educate the public about democratic values and the tools by which civil society participates in power. Surveys from 2022 showed an increase in criticism of Navalny. According to the results of the study:

14% of Russians approve of the activities of Alexei Navalny, 60% disapprove. A third of respondents believe that the new trial against Navalny was launched because "the authorities are settling scores with their political opponent", 44% – that "Navalny is being tried for violating the law, and this has nothing to do with his political activities." 23% of Russians rather support the inclusion of Navalny and his entourage in the list of terrorists and extremists, 31% rather do not support, the share of indifferent is 38%. (*Levada Center*, 2022).

Such results may have been the result of the start of the war, as the indicators of negative attitudes towards Navalny increased in the following year. In February 2023, the center reported that 9% of the respondents said they approved of Alexei Navalny. The level of approval decreased: compared to February 2022, when Navalny's actions were supported by 14% of respondents. Moreover, the proportion of the respondents who do not know who Navalny is, had increased. To February, 2023 89% of the surveyed knew that two years ago the court had sent Navalny to prison, 55% of the respondents in 2023 said that the sentence was rather fair (compared to 2022, when 44% approved of the court's ruling). Navalny's supporters were mainly young people aged 18–25, while the group most opposed to Navalny was people over 55. This fact points to a significant problem with the lack of social change leaders. Russian society is not ready to accept and carry out Navalny's will, which is simply "Do not give up." And it never was. Navalny emphasized the potential of the Internet as a means of popularizing his ideas and mobilizing society: "Navalny vows to keep fighting Putin by using his main tool to reach Russia's far-flung population — the Internet. He has more than 2 million followers on Twitter as well as 2 million subscribers to his two YouTube channels. "Probably you can call me a person of the Internet," he said. "It was a lifesaver not just for me but everyone else who suddenly found themselves under censorship" (Kim, 2018). The activist's popularity on social

media turned out to be a non-existent resource for the opposition. Observing, remaining a passive witness, is characteristic of virtual space. It is extremely difficult to transform such an attitude into active, thoughtful and long-term work on changing the mentality. Periodic activism, in the form of street protests, could prove both a commitment to the struggle for civil liberties and the result of suppressed social depression, manifested in sporadic aggression (Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013, pp. 888–889; Y Ni, 2020).

Navalny's closest associates were forced into exile or arrested. They are too small a group to survive under an autocratic regime. The history of the Russian intelligentsia shows that the émigré circles were not sufficiently coherent to bring about changes in Russia itself. The dispersion of the oppositionists was a phenomenon that Adam Michnik warned Navalny against when he shared his experiences from the "Solidarity" era (Michnik & Navalny, 2016). Physical distance from one's own society also weakens intelligence in its role as mediator. A society left under the rule of a dictator is not inclined to trust anyone who looks at its reality from afar. This observation is confirmed by Toosi (2024): "That distance means dissidents can operate more freely, but it can also weaken them. [...] Pro-democracy types don't like to admit that oppositions-in-exile often falter, fail or lose relevance."

Conclusions

Navalny is dead, and Putin has been elected president of Russia for the fifth time. Despite the fact that both the international community and members of the Russian opposition are fully convinced that the elections were rigged, the fact remains that the Russian public has not been able to protest effectively.

As with any symbolic representation, the figure of Navalny is idealized and heroized. This process began while the oppositionist was still alive: he was presented as a hero who single-handedly challenged a powerful political system, instilling fear in his opponent Putin. Meanwhile, Navalny, although he has gained wide recognition in Russian society, has failed to engage the general public in long-term activities. The values he proclaimed were recognized at the level of slogans, but they did not become part of the Russian mentality. Changing the latter requires a long time and contacts with representatives of Western culture, where liberalism and humanism are both elements of political culture and the foundation of the worldview. The war in Ukraine has caused Russia to cut itself off from the West. At that time, resentments, successfully used in official

propaganda, were also activated – that the West wants to humiliate Russia, and Putin is the one who restored the pride of Russians in their own country. Navalny's legacy is important as a cultural and intellectual phenomenon that contributes to research on the history of the Russian intelligentsia. In his numerous attempts to acquire the tools to influence society, he was guided by the thought he articulated: real change requires overcoming apathy and abandoning the belief that “nothing can be changed” (Kim, 2018). This is a necessary condition, although not sufficient. The imperative to maintain faith that change is possible is at the heart of Navalny's legacy and the creed of his spiritual testament.

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Ideowo-symboliczny wymiar życia i działalności Aleksieja Nawalnego. Rosyjska inteligencja i społeczeństwo wobec władzy

STRESZCZENIE Aleksiej Nawalny, rosyjski opozycjonista i działacz antykorupcyjny, stał się symbolem oporu przeciwko autorytarnemu reżimowi Władimira Putina. Jego życie i działalność ucieleśniają sprzeciw jaki rosyjska inteligencja kierowała przeciwko opresyjnej władzy państwowej od zarania swojego istnienia. Prześledzenie historii rosyjskiej inteligencji pozwala stwierdzić, że wykorzystywane środki protestu i narzędzia mobilizacji społeczeństwa ewoluowały, jednak istota inteligencji pozostawała niezmienna. W centrum inteligenckiego etosu znajdowały się: głoszenie prawdy o rzeczywistości, występowanie w imieniu pokrzywdzonych

i pozbawionych głosu, poświęcenie własnych interesów, a jeśli trzeba to również życia, w imię wyznawanych ideałów. W życiowej postawie i działalności Nawalnego odnajdziemy te cechy.

Celem artykułu jest weryfikacja hipotezy, że Nawalny jako symbol walki z opresyjnym systemem politycznym odzwierciedla ideały inteligencji rosyjskiej w perspektywie historycznej. Odnosząc się do inteligencji jako grupy, która pełni funkcję mediatora – pośrednika między władzą polityczną a ludem/społeczeństwem postawimy pytanie o działania podejmowane przez Nawalnego w celu aktywizacji społeczeństwa oraz szanse na ich trwanie po śmierci aktywisty. Czy zainicjowany przezeń ruch ku wolności jednostki i demokracji systemu zostanie zahamowany, tak jak to się działo w przypadku poprzednich pokoleń inteligencji? Jaką rolę współcześnie odgrywa społeczeństwo w znanym już starciu między inteligencją a władzą? Czy nadal prezentuje postawę bierną, niechętną lub wrogą wobec działań opozycji, czy też wykazuje zaangażowanie? Jakie formy owo zaangażowanie przyjmuje: istnieje wyłącznie na poziomie deklaracyjnym czy przekłada się na aktywność?

Materiał źródłowy stanowią w pierwszej kolejności teksty Nawalnego: publikowane na stronie internetowej i blogu opozycjonisty, w formie publicznych wypowiedzi i wywiadów, filmy dokumentalne, raporty i komunikaty. Drugą grupę tekstów źródłowych stanowią wyniki badań opinii publicznej oraz dostępne statystyki dotyczące protestów. Posłużą one do zbadania postaw rosyjskiego społeczeństwa wobec Nawalnego z jednej strony, a Putina – z drugiej. Główną metodą badawczą jest *content analysis* z naciskiem na *conceptual analysis*. Uzupełniamy ją hermeneutyczną analizą tekstów.

Wyniki badań wskazują na to, że Nawalny odzwierciedlił ideały rosyjskiej inteligencji – świadczą o tym zarówno publikowane przez niego treści, jak i wybór drogi życiowej, a zwłaszcza jej ostatniego etapu: aresztowania, nieugiętej postawy wobec reżimu i śmierci. Wyniki badań wskazują również na to, że rosyjskie społeczeństwo w ogromnej większości prezentuje postawę bierną, a zatem – powtarza się kulturowo znany schemat „dramatu rosyjskiej inteligencji”, osamotnionej w realizowaniu swojej misji, by przynieść społeczeństwu wolność.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE Aleksiej Nawalny, Władimir Putin, wolność, Rosja, kultura polityczna

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