

Fault Lines in Russia's Discourse of Nation: Television Coverage of the December 2010 Moscow Riots

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On 6 December 2010, four Spartak football fans became involved in a late-night altercation with a group of men from the North Caucasus in northern Moscow. The circumstances remain shrouded in controversy, but there is no dispute about the tragic consequences: one fan, Egor Sviridov, died after receiving four bullet wounds. Six men were detained, of whom five were later released. Aslan Cherkesov, from Dagestan, was later charged with Sviridov's murder. The event sparked mass demonstrations by Spartak fans, culminating in a violent riot on Manezhnaia Square in central Moscow on 11 December as fans gathered to protest the dual outrage of Sviridov's murder and the apparent incompetence (or, worse, complicity) of the law enforcement agencies. The rioters targeted their anger both at the latter and at people whom the Russian media typically refers to as being of "non-Slavic appearance." Numerous shocking beatings occurred.

It took the rearrest of two of the original suspects, interventions by Dmitrii Medvedev and Vladimir Putin on 12 and 13 December, respectively, and Putin's appearance at a Sviridov memorial meeting, all broadcast on prime-time television, before calm was fully restored in the capital and other cities where protests in solidarity with Moscow rioters took place.¹ Seen now as a milestone in the troubled history of interethnic relations in post-Soviet Russia, the Manezhnaia riots delivered a blow to the nation-building effort which, since the end of the last century, had been launched to create a sense of common purpose and overcome interethnic differences and separatist tendencies under the auspices of a supposedly powerful, confident state.² This Kremlin-sponsored national unification project entails simultaneously a discursive promotion of the concept of the civic Russian multiethnic nation (*grazhdanskaia rossiiskaia natsiia*) and

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1. REN TV *Nedelia*, 18 December 2010, reported that there were demonstrations in support of the Moscow rioters in five cities across Russia. See www.nedelya.ren-tv.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=4&layout=blog&Itemid=9&limitstart=50 (last accessed 21 September 2012)

2. Following an investigation into the riots, in April 2011 a Coordinating Council on Nation-Related Politics was established and the Movement against Illegal Immigration banned. In the state-controlled media, the period of intense coverage was succeeded by longer, televised discussions on the deep-seated interethnic tensions that Manezhnaia exposed. See, e.g., *Poedinok*, 14 April 2011, and *Tem vremenem*, Rossiia, 17 January 2011.

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a systematic utilization of ethnic Russian nationalism as a tool of political self-legitimation and popular mobilization.³

Since Putin's first accession to power, there have been a range of media responses to the Kremlin's increased attention to what is somewhat misleadingly termed "the national question." By the end of the first decade of the new millennium, mass-circulation, populist newspapers such as *Moskovskii komsomolets* and *Komsomolskaia pravda* were constructing highly negative images of people from the Caucasus and various groups of non-Russian "migrants" as constituent Others against whom Russian identity was defined.⁴ Yet this reductive approach, which both reflects what journalists believe public perceptions to be and shapes those perceptions in turn, should not be equated with the official discourse emanating from the Kremlin, even if the Kremlin bears some responsibility for fostering such approaches.⁵ Alarmed in particular by the intensified othering and criminalization of Chechens in the immediate aftermath of the Beslan hostage-taking crisis in 2004, Russia's top leaders have begun promoting a more nuanced image of Russia. On the one hand, leading politicians identify the country's multiethnicity as its major strength, assigning a positive role to its "traditional religions," including Islam, in community building.⁶ On the other, they call for the privileged place of ethnic Russians in state and nation building to be better appreciated.⁷ These two contradictory elements of the official discourse exist in constant tension. State-controlled television, part of whose mission is to disseminate the national cohesion principles articulated by Putin's and Medvedev's governments, thus has to perform a careful balancing act, negotiating the contradictory rhetorical discourses of top political leaders, on the one hand, and wider public (and media) representations of interethnic relations, on the other. This process provides the focus for our article.

In the current, information-rich environment, no media organ can

3. Marlène Laruelle, ed., *Russian Nationalism and the National Reassertion of Russia* (London, 2009); Alfred B. Evans, "Putin's Legacy and Russia's Identity," *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, no. 6 (August 2008): 899–912; Stephen Hutchings and Natalia Rulyova, "Commemorating the Past/Performing the Present: Television Coverage of World War II Victory Celebrations and the (De)Construction of Russian Nationhood," in Birgit Beumers, Stephen Hutchings, and Natalia Rulyova, eds., *The Post-Soviet Russian Media: Conflicting Signals* (London, 2008), 137–55.

4. A. M. Verkhovskii, ed., *Iazyk vrazhdy protiv obshchestva* (Moscow, 2007), 21, 26.

5. See Marlène Laruelle, *Inside and Around the Kremlin's Black Box: The New Nationalist Think Tanks in Russia* (Stockholm, 2009). On how the media not only teach their audiences what they should think about such complex issues as race but attempt to reflect particular public expectations, see Eugene McLaughlin, "Recovering Blackness/Repudiating Whiteness: The *Daily Mail's* Construction of the Five White Suspects Accused of the Racist Murder of Stephen Lawrence," in Karim Murji and John Solomos, eds., *Racialization: Studies in Theory and Practice* (Oxford, 2005), 165.

6. Stephen Hutchings and Vera Tolz, "Re-Inventing Russia in Television News Commemorations of the Day of National Unity: Mediation as Fracture" (paper presented at the annual convention of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies, Washington, D.C., November 2011).

7. Vera Tolz, "Russia: Exiled, Submerged, Restored," in Simon Dixon, ed., *Oxford Handbook of Modern Russian History* (Oxford, forthcoming).

completely ignore popular expectations regarding the coverage of topical issues. The growing xenophobia among the country's Slavic majority that the Manezhnaia events underscored is pertinent. Since the late 1990s this xenophobia has been reflected in opinion polls.⁸ In its ugliest and most destabilizing form, it has been manifested in the alarming rise of neo-Nazi hate crimes targeting ethnic minorities across the country.⁹

The growth in neo-Nazi extremism and interethnic tension is not unique to Russia. Most European countries have experienced such problems, often in the context of a reaction to the "threat" posed by Islamic fundamentalism. The peoples of the North Caucasus are predominantly Muslim, but the religious dimension of the tension is less pronounced in Russian cities than in other European locations, one of several reasons why the Manezhnaia case study gains significance in the comparative context that will never be far from our concerns; far-right forces in the United Kingdom, France, Scandinavia, and elsewhere now target what they term the "Islamicization" of European societies.¹⁰ Tellingly, the coverage of the riots we analyze makes no reference to Islam.¹¹

The media's role in both inciting interethnic tensions and promoting multicultural tolerance has been extensively studied in western European contexts.¹² The influence of the media (and particularly of television) on how "crises of multiculturalism" are played out in postcommunist countries is, if anything, greater than in western Europe, given the residual control that the state maintains over broadcasting in many of these nations.¹³ Yet the topic remains relatively underresearched. The majority

8. Marlène Laruelle, *In the Name of the Nation: Nationalism and Politics in Contemporary Russia* (Houndmills, Eng., 2009), 35–48.

9. See the publications of the Moscow-based human-rights monitoring organization Sova, most recently, A. M. Verkhovskii, G. V. Kozhevnikova, and O. A. Sibirtseva et al., *Ksenofobiia, svoboda sovesti i antiokstremizm v Rossii v 2010 godu (sbornik dokladov)* (Moscow, 2011). See also Martin Laryš and Miroslav Mareš, "Right-Wing Extremist Violence in the Russian Federation," *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 1 (January 2011): 129–54.

10. For example, the fastest growing far-right organization in the United Kingdom, the English Defence League, addresses the opening sentence of its mission statement to "patriotic people throughout the country fed up with Islamic Extremism, Islamism, and our government's spineless inability to address the issues." See englishdefenceleague.org/ (last accessed 21 September 2012). For the rise of neo-Nazi extremism in Europe, see Martin Schain, Aristide Zolberg, and Patrick Hossay, ed., *Shadows over Europe: The Development and Impact of the Extreme Right in Western Europe* (New York, 2002); Bert Klandermans and Nonna Mayer, eds., *Extreme Right Activists in Europe: Through the Magnifying Glass* (London, 2006).

11. The NTV coverage of the Manezhnaia events mentioned briefly that "anti-Islamic slogans" were heard during an anti-Caucasian riot in Rostov-on-Don that had taken place earlier in 2010.

12. See Antonis A. Ellinas, *The Media and the Far Right in Western Europe: Playing the Nationalist Card* (Cambridge, Eng., 2010); Christopher Flood, Stephen Hutchings, Galina Miazhevich, and Henri Nickels, *Islam, Security and Television News* (London, 2012); Simon Cottle, *Ethnic Minorities and the Media: Changing Cultural Boundaries* (Buckingham, Eng., 2000); Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London, 1994).

13. For a recent book that devotes a whole chapter to "the mediation of the crisis [of multiculturalism]," see Alana Lentin and Gavan Titley, *The Crises of Multiculturalism: Racism in a Neoliberal Age* (London, 2011).

of existing publications in this area are nonscholarly reports issued by various human rights agencies.¹⁴ There is a limited body of scholarly work in Russian, but it tends to focus on the print media and Internet rather than television and is mostly descriptive.¹⁵ There are also a small number of studies treating media reporting on Roma communities in eastern Europe, some of which deal with coverage of discrimination against those communities, while others trace media complicity in the promotion of anti-Roma stereotypes.¹⁶ Since these stereotypes are intertwined with notions of the inherent criminality of gypsies, there is a direct point of comparison with the criminalization of the peoples of the North Caucasus that played a part in shaping television coverage of the Manezhnaia crisis.¹⁷ The parallel was reinforced by an incident in Bulgaria in September 2011, when large-scale rioting by nationalists protesting the manslaughter of an ethnic Bulgarian by a “corrupt” gypsy baron, and against police leniency toward the baron, spiralled out of control.¹⁸

Indeed, Russia’s difficulties in managing ethnic diversity in the face of global mass population movements are shared across Europe. Speeches made in 2011 by Angela Merkel and David Cameron, and controversies over the expulsion of gypsies and the wearing of religious attire in public places in France, indicate a common crisis in European tolerance values from which Russia is not immune. Cameron’s pronouncement of the death of “state multiculturalism” could have been targeted at the Kremlin’s promulgation of its increasingly hollow Unity in Diversity formula.¹⁹ His denigratory depiction signals multiculturalism’s reversion to the status of an official mantra imposed against the grain of reality (that of tensions

14. For example, various references to media coverage of Roma can be found on the Web site of the European Roma Rights Centre, at www.errc.org (last accessed 21 September 2012).

15. Galina Zvereva, “Natsionalisticheskii diskurs i setevaia kul’tura,” *Pro et Kontra* 2, no. 29 (September–October 2005), accessible at uisrussia.msu.ru/docs/nov/pec/2005/2/ProEtContra_2005_2_03.pdf (last accessed 21 September 2012); Viktor Shnirel’man, “Porog tolerantnosti”: *Ideologïa i praktika novogo rasizma*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 2011), 2:277–84; Mikhail Kroz, “Ksenofobiia v rossiiskikh SMI kak proïavlenie ekstremizma,” in Marlène Laruelle, ed., *Russkii natsionalizm: Sotsial’nyi i kul’turnyi kontekst* (Moscow, 2008), 425–44.

16. An example of the former is Karmen Erjavec, “Media Representation of the Discrimination against the Roma in Eastern Europe: The Case of Slovenia,” *Discourse of Society* 12, no. 6 (November 2001): 699–727; an example of the latter is Peter Vermeersch, “Ethnic Minority Identity and Movement Politics: The Case of the Roma in the Czech Republic and Slovakia,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 26, no. 5 (September 2003): 879–90. See also Magdalena Ratajczak, “Representation and Visibility: Roma in the Media,” *Global Media Journal*, German Edition 1, no. 2 (Autumn 2011), at www.globalmediajournal.de/archive-volume-1-nr-2/ (last accessed 21 September 2012).

17. The criminalization theme is central to Colin Clark and Elaine Campbell, “Gypsy Invasion: A Critical Analysis of Newspaper Reaction to Czech and Slovak Romani Asylum-Seekers in Britain, 1997,” *Romani Studies* 10, no. 1 (June 2000): 23–47.

18. For further details, see Andrew Macdowell, “Anti-Roma Riots Engulf Bulgaria after Teenage Tragedy,” *The Independent*, 28 September 2011, at www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/antiroma-riots-engulf-bulgaria-after-teenage-tragedy-2361944.html (last accessed 21 September 2012).

19. See “State Multiculturalism Has Failed, Says David Cameron,” BBC, 5 February 2011, at www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12371994 (last accessed 21 September 2012).

induced by ethnic separatism) and of popular consensus (the desire for the ethnic other to assimilate or disappear).

Nor can the disjunction between the Russian state media's rhetoric of multicultural harmony and the realities of deep interethnic tensions within society at large be disassociated from similar mismatches elsewhere. In 1998, when France hosted, and won, the football World Cup, television screens were awash with image sequences uniting France's revolutionary history with larger-than-life photos of its multiracial football heroes gazing to a future in which France erases the interethnic tensions of the present, and the colonial misdeeds of the past, to realize the spirit of unity embodied in the great deeds of its founders. Seven years later, in October 2005, those same screens were dominated by scenes of disaffected Arab Muslim youths rioting in the *banlieues* of Paris as the French government declared a state of emergency and a television executive openly admitted to self-censorship in the interests of avoiding encouraging far-right politicians.²⁰ This relationship between news broadcasting, official multiculturalist nation building, and the rise of interethnic tension in Europe more generally is the first context in which our analysis of the Manezhnaia crisis situates itself.

Exploring the three-way relationship in its Russian variant, we focus on television's account of the riots, rather than on their causes, paying particular attention to the narrative struggle to reconcile official rhetoric with grassroots realities and broadcasters' own preexisting assumptions. The Manezhnaia riots put the main state-controlled television channels, as well as the official discourse they were expected to endorse, to a particularly severe test; these channels had hitherto tended to downplay incidents of ethnically and racially motivated violence, preferring instead to project an image of a harmonious, multiethnic Russia.

Inevitably actors interpret complex issues with the help of the conceptual apparatuses that are available to them and are often applied, without being interrogated, to the material at hand. We aim to identify and analyze the conceptual apparatus used by national television broadcasters in their coverage of Manezhnaia. We demonstrate that it consists of a single, but multifaceted, amalgam in which interpretations and terminologies of the Soviet period are modified through the influences of late imperial Russian intellectual traditions and western interpretations of societal diversity. This apparatus bears the impact of interpretative lenses (or prisms), which operate at various levels of the public sphere (official, pseudo-academic, and unofficial-demotic), possess a mythic resonance that accounts for their durability, and combine in a complex variety of ways.

In tracing how the apparatus shapes television coverage of the Manezhnaia disturbances, we consider its interactions with a discursive environment significantly different from its Soviet predecessor. Three differences are particularly important: the collapse of a single ideological framework (that of Marxism and Leninism) that results in a less consistent political

20. Claire Cozens, "French TV Boss Admits Censoring Coverage," *The Guardian*, 10 November, 2005.

lexicon and a more uncertain relationship between state and broadcaster; the media's growing infiltration by ideas and forms previously deemed "alien" (including global media formats underpinned by western ideological assumptions, and European concepts previously at odds with Soviet principles); and a greater need to respond to grassroots voices external to approved discourse (whence the populist inflections often detectable in Kremlin pronouncements). Thus, the second broader context to which our analysis belongs is that of the condition of official state discourse under Medvedev and Putin and its interrelationship with tensions within the public sphere more generally.

We examine news broadcasts from Russia's foremost national television channels: Channel 1, Rossiia, NTV, and REN TV.²¹ The hour-long weekend news bulletins of each channel, watched in full, provide our main source, but we also draw on the complete range of coverage across all four channels viewed throughout the two weeks in which Manezhnaia dominated the headlines. We focus on the weekend editions for two reasons. First, our comparative approach required a careful selection of bulletins for in-depth scrutiny to ensure that the basis for comparison is consistent. As stipulated by the qualitative paradigm we follow, we derived that selection from an inductive reading of the entire corpus.²² In the weekend editions, our selection revealed the "characteristic rhythms and patterns" that, for Martin Harrison, differentiates weekend news from weekday bulletins, and that, as Espen Ytreburg argues, distills into more "assertive" and more "dramaturgically" defined trajectories the disparate narrative fragments emerging from weekday broadcasts.²³ Second, the fact that, in conforming to Ytreburg's thesis, the Russian weekly overviews indicated the "settled" view adopted by each channel in relation to the breaking events that they reacted to spontaneously over preceding days meant that they were pertinent to our central concern with narrative coherence (the degree to which the various accounts the channels provide of the disturbances are consistent within and between one another).

We draw on the insights of historical genealogy, tracing the provenance, contextualization, and transformation of four key interpretative lenses underlying the media discourse around Manezhnaia. In order to

21. Although only part-owned by the state, Channel 1 has reverted to its traditional role as government mouthpiece under Putin. Rossiia is fully state-owned and is assigned the role of integrating local interests with the national perspective. NTV was Russia's first truly independent television channel, securing its oppositional reputation under Vladimir Gusinskii, but was effectively taken over by Gazprom, the state energy giant, in 2001. REN TV remains the only private channel with an independent voice and national reach (albeit with a small educated audience and a market share of only 5 percent). For further details, see Stephen Hutchings and Natalia Rulyova, *Television and Culture in Putin's Russia: Remote Control* (London, 2009), 8–11.

22. Gaynor Lloyd-Jones, "Design and Control Issues in Qualitative Case Study Research," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 1–20.

23. Martin Harrison, "Television Election News Analysis: Use and Abuse—A Reply," *Political Studies* 37 (1989): 652–58; Espen Ytreburg, "Moving out of the Inverted Pyramid: Narratives and Descriptions in Television News," *Journalism Studies* 2, no. 3 (August 2001): 362.

better understand the transformative process, we use some of the tools of media discourse analysis, addressing issues of framing (the ideological packaging of news so as to promote or exclude specific interpretations), narrative, voice, performativity (what a given utterance “does” rather than what it “states”), rhetorical strategy, lexicon, and visual imagery. This synthetic model is particularly well suited to unpacking televisual representations of the issues of ethnicity and nationalism underpinning the Manezhnaia narratives. For in its capacity constantly to bind individual viewers to an imagined community and to reconcile the discursive and the historical with the visceral and the present, television both articulates and obscures the place of ethnic identity within nationhood. Our method eschews both subjectivist and normative assumptions.²⁴ We apply it against the backdrop of pioneering studies of Russian television news frames by Sarah Oates and her colleagues and by Ellen Mickiewicz, which, however, do not adopt a discourse-analytical approach and which use the concept of framing in rather different contexts.²⁵ Proceeding by channel, we show how the transformative process (more or less “linear” in nature, according to each channel’s relative need to cleave to shifts in the governmental and/or popular accounts) leads to a partial convergence around a common line, while the contradictions within and between broadcasters remain unresolved and a coherent narrative fails to emerge. We adopt the principle that consensus, and the power relations that it reflects, is never more than the provisional fixing of dominant meanings within a complex system of antagonisms liable to disrupt and reconfigure those meanings

24. Our use of the concepts we deploy corresponds to that assigned to them in Norman Fairclough’s *Media Discourse* (London, 1995). We do not offer a data-driven, media content analysis aimed at identifying verifiable trends measured against normative beliefs about how the objective “realities” they reflect *should* have been reported. Nor, by contrast, do we relativize all knowledge. Rather, we follow Richard Sennett’s pragmatic formulation, aspiring to intersubjective “plausibility” by “showing the logical connections among phenomena” corroborated via the textual features that we intuit. See Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (London, 2002), 43. We adopt no normative principles other than broad adherence to a media pluralism compatible with the promotion of mutual tolerance and respect.

25. Sarah Oates and her colleagues examine Russian television news framing of terrorism and elections. But theirs is a largely quantitative method involving the coding of news segments by broad content areas (elections, the economy, terrorism, the military). See Sarah Oates, Lynda Lee Kaid, and Mike Berry, *Terrorism, Elections, and Democracy: Political Campaigns in the United States, Great Britain, and Russia* (London, 2009), 14. Oates and Laura Roselle employ similar tools in their comparison of campaign coverage on Russian state and commercial channels, but they do not use the term *framing*. See Sarah Oates and Laura Roselle, “Russian Elections and TV News: Comparison of Campaign News on State Controlled and Commercial Television Channels,” *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 5, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 30–51. Ellen Mickiewicz applies a qualitative concept of framing to viewer “trade-offs” in the interpretation of Russian television news, but her emphasis is on the mismatches between audience readings of news stories and the broadcasters’ framings of those stories. See Ellen Mickiewicz, *Television, Power, and the Public in Russia* (Cambridge, Eng., 2008). For further discussion of Russian television news frames, see Hutchings and Rulyova, *Television and Culture in Putin’s Russia*, 42–44. For an overview of Russian media and politics more generally, see Ivan Zassoursky, *Media and Power in Post-Soviet Russia* (New York, 2004).

at any point.²⁶ Post-Soviet Russian public discourse, we contend, offers a specific, particularly vivid, demonstration of that principle.

Our core argument, which has three interlinked components, can be briefly summarized as follows: rather than adhering to the edicts of a univocal state machine, post-Manezhnaia broadcasting reveals multiple fault lines whose partial convergence around a single narrative reflects less an imposed Kremlin version of events than the restricted logic of the available conceptual apparatus and a need to reflect the public mood; the emphasis within that apparatus on the perceived clarity and fixity of ethnic boundaries, a legacy of Soviet thinking, leads to the overinterpretation of the interethnic dimension of the crisis when other factors might be at work, and, conversely to the occlusion of that dimension when it appears to be at the very root of the problem; other European broadcasters are not immune to this paradox, which relates also to the contingent nature of ethnicity as a category—its tendency to be invoked in one situation, but not in other, ostensibly similar, situations. In elaborating upon these factors, we refer in our conclusion to their implications for the broader contexts we identified.

The Four Interpretative Lenses

Conflicting information about the Manezhnaia disturbances was refracted by the four channels through a set of consistently applied interpretative lenses. These lenses, reflecting official myths, (semi-)academic theories, and popular interpretations of events, are the friendship-of-the-peoples; ethnic-criminality; culture-conflict or interethnic-strife; and conspiracy-of-power theories. Possessing distinct genealogies, these interpretative devices have, as we show, acquired new life in the contemporary discursive environment. The second and the third lenses, in particular, have distinct racializing undertones. Racializing worldviews, while avoiding the articulation of crude biologically determined hierarchies, tend to essentialize ethnocultural differences and to transpose onto culture some of the prejudices commonly associated with biologically defined race. Such perceptions are typical of what scholars call “new racism,” which, in contrast to the “old,” biologically deterministic racism, focuses on ethnocultural, rather than on overtly biological, distinctions. These distinctions are essentialized and perceived as determining people’s behavior.²⁷

In fact, in most situations, public discourses poorly differentiate the ethnocultural and racial aspects of identity and attempts to disentangle them founder. In Russia, demotic, media, and semiofficial pronounce-

26. For this account of consensus, see Ernesto Laclau, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London, 1985), 135.

27. George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton, 2002), 151–70; Unni Wikan, *Generous Betrayal: Politics of Culture in the New Europe* (Chicago, 2002); Flora Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, *Racialized Boundaries: Race, Nation, Gender, Colour, and Class and the Anti-Racist Struggle* (London, 1992).

ments (for example, those of Duma deputies and regional and local politicians) often describe the cultural specificities of minority groups as being “in their blood” or “in their genes.”²⁸ Whereas many print media and Internet sites have little regard for the consequences of using crude techniques to “other” various groups in society, news reports on the main national television channels have adopted a more circumspect approach to difficult issues concerning ethnic relations or have avoided dealing with them altogether. The interpretative devices selected by those channels in the context of the Manezhnaia crisis are capable therefore of illuminating the state broadcasters’ struggle to explain such crises within the framework of the Kremlin-sponsored nation-building project, and the difficulties of the one channel that is consistently critical of that project with providing a coherent counterreading.

Coined by Iosif Stalin in 1935 and used until the late Soviet period, the friendship-of-the-peoples metaphor emphasized the importance of pan-Soviet unity and highlighted the central role allotted to Russians in achieving it. It signaled a major shift in the USSR’s nationalities policies away from the earlier approach of fostering the national self-expression of the non-Russian minorities, while stigmatizing ethnic Russians as members of an “oppressor-nation.” Yet, despite the fact that Stalin’s new slogan reversed the Russians’ role in sustaining the unity of the state-framed multiethnic community, it did not presuppose the transformation of the Soviet Union into a Russified nation-state, stressing instead the multiethnicity and multiculturalism of the Soviet community of peoples. In fact, paradoxically, the cultivation of separate national identities for all officially recognized Soviet nationalities, now conceived in primordial terms, further intensified.²⁹ In view of the formula’s original meaning, it sits awkwardly with the current Russian government’s attempts to construct a more unified national identity among citizens of the Russian Federation than the Soviet approach had allowed. Simultaneously criticized as Russification in disguise by nationalist activists in the non-Russian union republics and as a license to exploit the RSFSR for the benefit of the non-Russian nationalities by Russian nationalists, Stalin’s formula became discredited by the end of the Soviet period. Significantly, it was only within the context of the December 2010 riots that the friendship-of-the-peoples metaphor suddenly resurfaced in the coverage of the two main state-controlled channels.³⁰ The resurrection of this slogan, which lost its power under

28. Shnirel’man, “*Porog tolerantnosti*,” 2:278.

29. Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca, 2001), 432–61.

30. According to our project data—all news reports relating to interethnic cohesion issues broadcast on *Vesti* and *Vremia* from September to December 2010—the formula was not used once between the beginning of September and the second week of December 2010. The only acknowledgement of its existence came in a *Vesti* report of 20 September 2010 confirming that local Moscow authorities had proposed to name a new street “Alley of the Friendship of the Peoples.” See www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=393883 (last accessed 21 September 2012).

Mikhail Gorbachev, seems to indicate the political leadership's lack of a clear vision regarding the causes of, and solutions to, the Manezhnaia violence.

The genealogy of the ethnic-criminality concept connects it with late-nineteenth-century racial theories, particularly those of the Italian scientist Cesare Lombroso's school of criminology that linked particular anthropological types to criminality. Lombroso's ideas acquired their own life in Russia; as in the late imperial period a debate took place among Russian anthropologists about whether those ideas could be applied to entire ethnic groups, particularly the peoples of the Caucasus.³¹ Significantly, the works of the prerevolutionary experts occupying the most extreme position on the issue are currently being republished in Russia. Repeated particularly often today is the hypothesis, first articulated at the turn of the twentieth century and revived in the ideology of the European New Right since the 1970s, that social norms and social deviance were determined by the indigenous people (*korennoe naselenie*) of a given territory, whereas migrants (*prishloe naselenie*), deprived of links to their native soil, more readily displayed an inclination toward criminality.³² This theory's current popularity is also stimulated by the legacy of Soviet nationalities policies, which were based on a belief in a special link between single indigenous groups and particular territories and which fostered perceptions that only one group could have a legitimate claim to a given piece of land.³³

It is noteworthy that in the Soviet Union of the 1970s, in the context of the diminishing power of Marxist-Leninist ideology, leading Soviet ethnographers and certain historians were already claiming that an "ethnos" possessed "psychological specificities" (*psikhologicheskii sklad*) that determined "certain typical features of behavior" of its members. In this context, some legal scholars also began to concur that individuals' psycho-physiological features could at times influence behavior more than social circumstances.³⁴ The post-1991 period has witnessed a pro-

31. Marina Mogil'ner, *Homo imperii: Istoriia fizicheskoi antropologii v Rossii (XIX–nachalo XX vv.)* (Moscow, 2007), 358–96; Daniel Beer, *Renovating Russia: The Human Sciences and the Fate of Liberal Modernity, 1880–1930* (Ithaca, 2008), 103–15, 179–82.

32. See E. V. Erikson, "Ob ubiistvakh i razboiakh na Kavkaze" (1906), at www.velesova-sloboda.org/antrop/erikson.html (last accessed 21 September 2012). On the European New Right, see Douglas Johnson, "The New Right in France," in Luciano Cheles, Ronnie Ferguson, and Michalina Vaughan, eds., *Neo-Fascism in Europe* (London, 1991), 234–44. Works by Alain de Benoist, the ideologist of the New Right in France, have been translated into Russian on many occasions since 1991.

33. Victor Zaslavsky and Robert J. Brym, *Soviet-Jewish Emigration and Soviet Nationality Policy* (New York, 1983); Terry Martin, "The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing," *Journal of Modern History* 70, no. 4 (December 1998): 813–61; Valery Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and after the Soviet Union: The Mind Aflame* (London, 1997), 3, 8, 71–79.

34. For a comprehensive discussion of this issue, see Shnirel'man, "Porog tolerantnosti," 1:251–90. Particularly important here is Lev Gumilev's racializing perception of "ethnos" as a "phenomenon of nature." Having been disseminated in print since the 1970s, Gumilev's pseudo-scientific theories enjoy enormous popularity in contemporary Russia. See V. A. Shnirel'man, *Khazariskii mif: Ideologiya politicheskogo radikalizma v Rossii i ee istoki* (Moscow, 2012), 57–75.

liferation of publications claiming a deterministic link between ethnicity and/or migrant communities, on the one hand, and criminality, on the other, often on the basis of tendentious statistical data. In the media, as in various official state documents and academic texts, even seemingly neutral references to ethnic criminality as the occasional stratification of criminal groups along ethnic lines are frequently marred by racial undertones.³⁵

The culture-conflict notion was likewise first alluded to by European theorists of race in the late nineteenth century and then reformulated in politically more neutral terms in North American sociology of the 1930s. This approach suggests that in complex, multicultural societies, the practices followed by some groups (particularly immigrants) are liable to antagonize the dominant culture. Under such circumstances, migrant behavior may be viewed as offensive and even criminal by the wider society.³⁶ In turn, the ideologists of the New Right in Europe have reappropriated the notion of culture conflict in order to argue that the dominant European culture, which they represent as homogenous and static, is under threat from the incompatible cultural norms of migrant communities.³⁷ In today's Russia, the notion is in wide circulation with references to its multiple interpretations in the west.³⁸

In current public discourses, culture-conflict theory also overlaps with the Soviet-era idea of interethnic strife (*mezhnatsional'naia vrazhda* or *rozn'*, which translates more accurately as "internationality strife" but covers primarily ethnic conflict.). The latter defines a type of activity forbidden in Soviet and postcommunist Russian legislation.³⁹ As we will see, the two main state channels reflected the Soviet tendency spatially and temporally to externalize interethnic strife (as occurring elsewhere and/or to be resolutely avoided in the future). As deployed in today's Russia, culture-conflict theory and the interethnic-strife concept are based on an essentializing understanding of ethnic boundaries as clearly definable and fixed. Recent research into the origins of ethnic conflict has shown that narratives about ethnic criminality have a powerful potential to act

35. Shnirel'man, "Porog tolerantnosti," 2:109–42.

36. Tzvetan Todorov, *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge Mass., 1993), 57–60.

37. Alain de Benoist and Charles Champetier, "The French New Right in the Year 2000," *Telos*, no. 115 (Spring 1999): 117–44.

38. V. N. Burlakov, *Kriminologiya: Uchebnik dlia vuzov* (St. Petersburg, 2004), chap. 1. In this context, Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" theory is particularly popular among Russia's political and intellectual elites. Russian translations of Huntington's 1993 article and 1996 book were published in 1994 and 2003, respectively.

39. Article 29 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation; part 1 of Article 282 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. See the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation at www.ug-kodeks.ru/ (last accessed 21 September 2012). See also a useful discussion by Vladimir Sokolov "K voprosu o razzhiganii natsional'noi rozni" at m3ra.ru/2010/12/01/inciting-ethnic-hatred/ (last accessed 21 September 2012); and the USSR law of 2 April 1990, "Ob usilenii otvetstvennosti za poshiagatel'svo na natsional'noe ravnopravie grazhdan," at www.bestpravo.ru/ussr/data01/tex10976.htm (last accessed 21 September 2012).

as a catalyst for violence against the ethnic other, as they project onto “the future victims of violence the very impulses entertained by those who will victimize them.”⁴⁰ The culture-conflict argument, with its dehumanizing tendency, has its own conflict-generating power, albeit in a less pronounced form.⁴¹

Finally, sea-changing events tend to stimulate the appearance of conspiracy theories, suggesting that the events are not at all what they seem.⁴² In Russia conspiracy theories have historically performed important functions.⁴³ Thus, in Stalin’s period the notion of conspiracy was systematically used by the government to delegitimize political opponents and justify repressions. This legacy is still alive in contemporary Russia. The Manezhnaia disturbances were at times refracted in news coverage through a conspiratorial lens. Let us now examine how this, and the other lenses, shaped that coverage.

Channel 1

Prior to 11 December, Channel 1 had downplayed the Sviridov affair, reporting it as a series of “incidents” assigned to different news categories. On 11 December, however, it was presented as an integrated sequence leading from Sviridov’s murder, to a series of demonstrations, to the Manezhnaia riot. The newsreader’s opening statements referred to the disturbances as an “unsanctioned action” (*nesanktsionirovonnaia aktsiia*), a recurrent legalistic label masking the rioters’ motivations. Details of efforts to police the violence outweighed explorations of its causes. The crowd’s chants were described, evasively, as “non-football slogans” (*nefutbol’nye lozungi*), and the impression fostered was one of fans manipulated by “nationalist provocateurs.”⁴⁴ On 11 and 12 December, Rashid Nurgaliev, Minister for Internal Affairs, was quoted as misleadingly blaming “left-radical youths”—a term usually applied to “anti-fascist” activists.⁴⁵ At this stage, the only mention of interethnic tensions was a reference to the beating of “passers-by of non-Slavic appearance.”⁴⁶ The struggle to articulate the

40. Donald L. Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (Berkeley, 2001), 77.

41. Richard Arnold, “Visions of Hate: Explaining Neo-Nazi Violence in the Russian Federation,” and Alexander Osipov, “Minority Questions: Ethnicity, Discrimination, and Extremism in Russia,” both in *Problems of Post-Communism* 57, no. 2 (March/April 2010): 37–49 and 50–60.

42. Peter Knight, ed., *Conspiracy Nation: The Politics of Paranoia in Postwar America* (New York, 2002).

43. V. E. Bagdasaryan, “*Teoriia zagovora*” v *otechestvennoi istoriografii vtoroi poloviny XIX–XX vv.* (Moscow, 1999); L. Gudkov, ed., *Obraz vraga* (Moscow, 2005).

44. See www.itv.ru/newsvideoarchive/pd=11.12.2010 (last accessed 21 September 2012). All subsequent references to Russian news broadcasts are from the full recordings archived at the official Web sites of the four channels.

45. See www.itv.ru/newsvideoarchive/pd=12.12.2010 (last accessed 21 September 2012).

46. The adoption of the formulation “person of non-Slavic appearance” internalizes the homogenizing perspective of the very nationalist agitators whose motivations the formulation aims to silence.

relationship between fans and unspecified “extremists” dominated the Sunday 12 December report. Initially, the impression was of a large crowd whose justifiable concerns suddenly acquired a “radical” coloring.⁴⁷ The history of the disturbances was told only toward the end, depriving the initial footage of a coherent rationale. It included an extended complaint by Sviridov’s widow about the release of the assailants, an example of the way in which the global news report, with its obligatory space for “the voice of the ordinary victim,” has infiltrated post-totalitarian contexts.⁴⁸

In a final reformulation, the notion of extremists masquerading as fans was mooted to explain footage depicting an angry mob baying nationalist slogans. At this point, the question of agency remained problematic. But in the *Vremia* edition of 19 December, it was now recognized that nationalist sentiments were widely shared. By now, too, *Vremia* was acknowledging the extent of the violence directed against non-Russians. It included in its coverage the story of Gagik, a young Armenian boy set upon by adult males.⁴⁹ This story featured in the coverage of all the main channels because of the role of two Russian boys who were beaten for interceding on his behalf. For *Vremia*, they epitomized the multicultural ideal, simultaneously deflecting attention from the assailants’ motivations and revealing *Vremia*’s performative slant. Rather than “representing” events, their coverage was realizing the friendship-of-the-peoples principle underlying the approved version of how these events should be addressed.

By 19 December, Medvedev and Putin had uttered their definitive views, and a more settled narrative had emerged. In the Sunday report, the counterdisturbances on 15 December were portrayed, not as a vengeful reaction, but as the other side of a more generalized culture conflict, indicated by the fact that the illustrative footage belonged to a different day.⁵⁰ This angle reflected Medvedev’s long discourse on Manezhnaia, in which he combined condemnation of the violence with criticism of the migrants’ behavior. But rather than formulating a new official line, Medvedev simply reiterated the preexisting public representation of “migrants” and “ethnic minorities” as being prone to “criminal” disrespect.⁵¹ Medvedev couched his remarks in general terms but confirmed what eventually emerged as a key news frame (the “problem” with unintegrated migrant communities). In an effort to “balance” the Gagik story, *Vremia* later ran several tales of ordinary Russians attacked by armed Caucasians.

47. See www.itv.ru/newsvideoarchive/pd=12.12.2010 (last accessed 21 September 2012).

48. For the prevalence of the “ordinary person” in conflict reporting, see Tamar Liebes and Zohar Kampf, “Black and White and Shades of Gray: Palestinians in the Israeli Media during the 2nd Intifada,” *International Journal of Press/Politics* 14, no. 4 (October 2009): 434–53.

49. See www.itv.ru/newsvideoarchive/pd=19.12.2010 (last accessed 21 September 2012).

50. Ibid.

51. This representation has become particularly dominant among local politicians following the 2006 Russian-Chechen brawl in the Karelian town of Kondopoga. Shnirel’man, “Porog tolerantnosti,” 2:7–29.

Putin's and Medvedev's determination to root out all "extremism" implicitly elided nationalism (a political concept) with ethnic criminality (a sociolegal notion). The conflation was made explicit by the Orthodox Patriarch, Kirill, who, unlike the political leadership, openly invoked ethnic criminality." For Kirill, rather than Caucasians reacting to racist attacks, Russians were "provoked" by the criminal "radicalism" of the minorities; he willingly acknowledged that there was indeed a "majority" crowd acting on "understandable," if prejudicial, sentiments.⁵² Such differences between Kremlin politicians, church leaders, and state journalists indicate tensions within a post-Soviet establishment lacking firm ideological underpinnings.⁵³

There was no ambivalence in *Vremia's* decision to place Kirill's comments immediately before those of the Chief Mufti who, in warning of the threat to Russia's multifaith society, reinvoked the alarming prospect of *mezhnatsional'naiia rozn'*.⁵⁴ The juxtaposition revealed *Vremia's* commitment to reenacting through its very editorial practices the official line on interethnic unity. But the true significance lay in what went unsaid: by juxtaposing the Orthodox and Muslim hierarchs, *Vremia* foregrounded the fear of *disharmony* motivating their interventions.

In the second week, the theme of legal inertia (*khalatnost'*), barely broached during the first week, gained traction as it was implicitly linked to the more sinister themes of police corruption and ethnic criminality, illustrating *Vremia's* qualified concession to popular opinion. Equally, there was slippage between seemingly uncontroversial criticisms of migrant "behavior" and riskier condemnations of "ethnic mafias," as news frames oscillated uneasily between the four interpretative lenses. Of these, interethnic strife, too, emerged in developed form in the second week. It was fed on one side by the concealed frame of popular racism (a topic developed in complete form only at the liberal fringe represented by REN TV), and on the other by that of nationalist "radicalism" (a notion that contained the problem within small, ideologically peripheral groupings). This strategy allowed *Vremia* to deflect the focus from mainstream prejudices by presenting a conflict between two equally culpable, but marginal, protagonists: minority communities defended by misguided liberal elites, and xenophobes encouraged by nationalist extremists.

The final stage in the *Vremia* narrative coincided with the meeting of football fans on 21 December. Putin's attendance pointed to a partial resolution of the tensions within the narrative in favor of the perspective of "indigenous Russians" (*korennye russkie*). This impression was reinforced by Channel 1's decision to draw its own line at that meeting,

52. See www.1tv.ru/newsvideoarchive/pd=19.12.2010 (last accessed 21 September 2012).

53. For further discussion of how these tensions infiltrate state television, see Stephen Hutchings, Galina Miazhevich, Christopher Flood, and Henri Nickels, "The Impact of 'Islamic Extremism' on TV News Representations of Multiculturalism, *Intégration and Mnogonarodnost': A Comparative Analysis*," *Russian Journal of Communication* 1, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 43–70.

54. See www.1tv.ru/newsvideoarchive/pd=19.12.2010 (last accessed 21 September 2012).

and by an editorial sleight of hand that seamlessly conjoined Putin's apocalyptic warning about the dangers of the multinational Russian state collapsing (interethnic strife), to his call for migrants to respect host cultures (ethnic criminality).⁵⁵

In the Sunday edition of 26 December another shift occurred. Channel 1 distilled the narrative down to the banal details of an "everyday street fight" (*bytovaia draka*). Mentions of threats to multicultural Russia were purged as interethnic strife, and its mirror image (friendship of the peoples) receded: the focus was now on identifying the laxity of the authorities as the unambiguous "cause" of the riots, which were linked to other instances of public disorder.⁵⁶ In its efforts to shadow the Kremlin's modulating response to events, *Vremia* had turned full circle, repressing the interethnic subtext to what was once more the simple story of a mis-handled murder investigation.⁵⁷ But the ethnic cat had leapt free of its figurative bag, with "legal oversight" wedded firmly to "migrant crime."

Rossia

Rossia's *Vesti nedeli* also struggled to reflect what at each stage seemed to correspond to the official interpretation. It, too, operated within a highly dialogical environment, ultimately failing to incorporate conflicting interpretations within a single, coherent discourse. The coverage was correspondingly short on factual detail and marked by the fragmentation of the main narratives running through the first two broadcasts, with stabilization occurring only in the final program of 26 December. Owing to its explicitly domestic remit, however, *Vesti nedeli* differed from *Vremia* in the complexity of the angles it adopted and in the range of voices heard.

Of our four interpretative prisms, the representation of Russia as a multiethnic society unified by the friendship of the peoples was dominant for *Vesti nedeli*. Represented both as an ideal worth striving for and the actual state of affairs, Russia's harmonious ethnic relations were contrasted with interethnic strife, purportedly as unrepresentative today as it had been in the Soviet period.

Similarly to *Vremia*, the introductory remarks to the first Manezhnaia report on 12 December concealed the nature of the violence and the first images showed demonstrators attacking the police. The true situation was spelled out only at the end of this report, in an interview with a Rossiia journalist, Nikolai Svanidze, who admitted that "Nazi slogans were everywhere."⁵⁸ This interview did not fit with the dominant line attributing the rioting to unspecified "radical groups" and went well beyond what Channel 1 had acknowledged.

55. See www.1tv.ru/newsvideoarchive/pd=22.12.2010 (last accessed 21 September 2012).

56. See www.1tv.ru/newsvideoarchive/pd=26.12.2010 (last accessed 21 September 2012).

57. As Marlène Laruelle suggests, law-enforcement agents and politicians frequently resort to such denials. Laruelle, *In the Name of the Nation*, 37.

58. See www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=413460 (last accessed 21 September 2012).

Subsequent broadcasts continued to articulate contradictory narratives. *Vesti nedeli* felt more compelled than *Vremia* to incorporate populist endorsements of the events as legitimate, mass outrage and to respond to the opposition's criticism of the government for its handling of nationalities relations. Indeed, the 12 December report had already included an interview with Orthodox Protodeacon Andrei (Kuraev), who observed that even if the authorities were unable to control informal groups of "radicals," "surely it could control its own bureaucrats and officers."⁵⁹ The disturbing implication that the initial release of Sviridov's assailants reflected a crisis of corruption in the law-enforcement organs intensified Channel 1 intimations at schisms within official discourse.

The partial embrace of the populist-conspiratorial interpretation of the Manezhnaia riots as a reaction to corruption within the law enforcement organs facilitated a shifting of blame from unspecified "extremists" to the prime victims of the violence. A hint at the partial responsibility of North Caucasians for the popular animosity against them had already surfaced on 12 December when Svanidze invoked the culture-conflict theory referring to "people of alien religion and alien culture" who needed to be "taught the local norms of behavior."

At the end of the following week, this "balanced" distribution of blame, pitting nationalists and fans against Caucasian migrants, was legitimized within Medvedev's speech in Riazan', covered by *Vesti nedeli* on 19 December.⁶⁰ The "annual review" broadcast of 26 December further shifted responsibility further onto North Caucasians through selective coverage of Putin's speech at his 21 December meeting with the football fans. Yet this final annual broadcast also followed the trend established on Rossiia from 19 December of interpreting the Manezhnaia disturbances by representing multiculturalism and multiconfessionalism as Russia's distinctive feature. Despite Manezhnaia, Russia was portrayed as a place where friendship of the peoples still flourished. Cultural figures who in the Soviet period were seen as leading representatives of their own nationalities were interviewed to explain why they were now living in Moscow, and why Russian multiculturalism, as a continuation of its Soviet progenitor, should be cherished.

Whereas Channel 1's survey of 2010 represented Manezhnaia as a manifestation of public disorder, in *Vesti nedeli*'s final broadcast the coverage of the event was framed by a highly performative rebuttal of the alternative media's (for example, REN TV's) line that ethnocultural pluralism in Russia had acquired destructive forms, and the nationalist opposition's argument that Soviet friendship of the peoples was based on the exploitation of Russians by non-Russians.⁶¹ Appropriately, it fell to Putin to perform the final act in the friendship-of-the-peoples drama. Providing

59. Ibid.

60. See vesti7.ru/archive/news?id=22523 (accessed 28 December 2011; no longer available).

61. See an interview with Vladimir Zhirinovskii on REN TV's *Nedelia*, 18 December 2010, at www.nedelya.ren-tv.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=445:-qq-181210&catid=4:nedelya-s-mariannoy-maksimovskoy&Itemid=9 (last accessed 21 September 2012).

no context, the report depicted Putin's meeting with the Russian national martial arts team (in St. Petersburg on 22 December 2012), whose members, viewers were reminded, came from throughout the former USSR. In this officially sanctioned perception of sport as a mirror of Russia's multiethnicity there was no place for ethnically motivated violence. But the broadcast suddenly featured a challenge to the rhetoric of harmony. Following a report on Putin's post-Manezhnaia actions, details were given of the arrest of a retired GRU colonel, Anatolii Kvachkov, whose son participated in the riots. The report revealed that Kvachkov senior was accused of "wide-ranging nationalist subversive" activities. His arrest was widely reported in the print media and on the Internet, leaving *Vesti nedeli* little choice but to cover this.⁶² Significantly, Rossiia acknowledged that Kvachkov aligned himself with the seventeenth-century *opolchentsy* movement, whose march on Moscow to drive out the Polish occupiers dominated the symbolism of the officially instigated "Day of National Unity" celebration, marked a month earlier.⁶³

Through its rose-tinted friendship-of-the-peoples lens, *Vesti nedeli* portrayed a Russia interchangeable with former Soviet space. The use of the metaphor to designate both an aspirational ideal and a historical Russian reality reflects a nostalgic view of nationalities relations in the Soviet period, when universal compliance with common norms rendered culture conflict unthinkable. Beneath the surface of Rossiia's coverage, ruptures in the official sphere (the Kremlin/Orthodox Church) intersected with inflammatory convergences in the unofficial realm (ethnic crime/legal incompetence), undercutting the carefully managed idyll.

REN TV

REN TV interpreted the riots as part of a broader interethnic problem and was explicit in its criticism of Russian ethnonationalism. It projected a view of a country driven not by friendship of the peoples but by a toxic culture conflict. The blame for the riots was placed overwhelmingly on the government and law-enforcement organs. REN TV was also more explicit than other channels in considering conspiratorial explanations.

The first broadcast of the weekly news program, *Nedelia*, on 11 December treated the riots as a major challenge to the Kremlin. Accompanied by the sounds of crowds chanting "Onward Russians!" and "Moscow for Muscovites!" the first images stressed the demonstrators' extreme nationalist agenda.⁶⁴ The Manezhnaia story, first in the running order, was called

62. See www.novoteka.ru/seventexp/8807764; www.lifenews.ru/news/47624 (last accessed 21 September 2012); *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 24 December 2010, and *Kommersant*, 25 December 2010.

63. As *Vesti nedeli* pointed out, Kvachkov's movement styled itself "the Minin and Pozharskii People's Volunteer Mission," invoking the legendary duo whose names were intoned repeatedly during the November rituals. See vesti7.ru/archive/news?id=22783 (last accessed 28 December 2011; no longer available).

64. See www.nedelya.ren-tv.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=423:-qq-111210&catid=4:nedelya-s-mariannoy-maksimovskoy&Itemid=9 (last accessed 21 September 2012).

“The Spartacus Uprising,” evoking the fan club to which Sviridov belonged and the largest Roman slave uprising of the first century BC.⁶⁵ The historical semantics of the Spartacus myth convey a mass protest against authority. To awaken these associations while populist anger at alleged collusion between the authorities and migrant communities rages, poses risks. That it is the self-styled “liberal” REN TV that courts such danger, misappropriating the rhetoric of civic protest, is as indicative of the fluid uncertainties of Russia’s media environment as is Rossiia’s focus on the appropriation of the *opolchentsy* narrative by the antigovernment opposition.

On 11 December, *Nedelia* endeavored to avoid concessions to the far right, curtailing references to the behavior of the “diaspora” communities. The issue of uncontrolled “migration from the periphery to large cities” was briefly noted, but accompanied by a reporter’s observation that “Visitors [*priezzhie*] are arming to defend themselves from aggressive aborigines [*aborigenov*],” placing the main responsibility for the tension on the permanent residents.⁶⁶

While continuing to present Manezhnaia as a grim milestone, the program then began openly to portray the popular reaction to Sviridov’s murder as but one episode in “the epidemics of interethnic conflicts” afflicting Russia.⁶⁷ *Nedelia* highlighted two issues: the coexistence within one state of multiple incompatible cultures, and governmental incompetence. On 18 and 25 December the culture-conflict lens acquired dominant explanatory power. A shared perception of the responsibility of North Caucasians for social tensions in Russia’s European cities seemed to have unified elite groupings with the general public. Within this context, *Nedelia* also suddenly began to “balance” its opposition to Russian nationalism with a concern about the asocial behavior of North Caucasians. But, lacking an overarching metatheory, ideas drawn from hybrid sources (liberal critiques of post-Soviet failures in dealing with interethnic tension; native hostility to migrant communities) failed to gel.

The overreliance on a culture-conflict lens deprived of ideological moorings produced contradictions in REN TV’s coverage. While strongly condemning what it termed the racist tone of the demonstrations, *Nedelia* itself promoted a racializing worldview invisible to the moderator and reporters who subscribed to a narrow definition of racism, limiting it to explicit instances of the employment of Nazi symbolism.⁶⁸ (Indeed, the

65. Spartacus’s uprising has featured prominently in Soviet/Russian historical mythology since 1933. See Vera Tolz, *Russian Academicians and the Revolution: Combining Professionalism and Politics* (Basingstoke, Eng., 1997), 80–81.

66. See www.nedelya.ren-tv.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=423:-qq-111210&catid=4:nedelya-s-mariannoy-maksimovskoy&Itemid=9 (last accessed 21 September 2012).

67. It was acknowledged on 18 December that the Manezhnaia riots were replicated in other Russian cities, including St. Petersburg, Rostov, Krasnodar, and Nizhnii Novgorod. Significantly, the 25 December coverage of interethnic tensions in provincial Russian towns that predated Manezhnaia was accompanied anachronistically by footage of the Moscow demonstration.

68. See, for example, the following description of the disturbances by one of REN TV’s reporters in the 18 December bulletin: “Here [people] speak about the white race against

problematic nature of “new racism,” which claims a deterministic link between ethnocultural distinctions and social issues, is recognized only by a small number of liberal commentators in Russia.)⁶⁹

Nedelia depicted ethnic Russians/Slavs and Caucasians as two neatly demarcated groups with immutable behavioral norms. Like Rossiia and Channel 1, REN TV consistently racialized the words *priezzhie* and *gosti* (visitor and guest), using them as a collective definition of anyone non-Slavic, irrespective of citizenship or place of residence. This usage disregards the fact that North Caucasians residing in Moscow are Russian citizens. Likewise, the expression *korennoi moskvich* (indigenous Moscovite) was applied by *Nedelia* solely to ethnic Russians/Slavs, though the word *korennoi* (indigenous) merely indicates a long-term resident of a given location.⁷⁰

Contrary to Kremlin-sponsored projections of a multiethnic, civic nation, REN TV’s coverage of the December riots represented Russia’s different ethnic groups as separate nations (*natsii*), among whom only Russians were identified with the entire country.⁷¹ The Soviet conflation of ethnicity and nationality and linkage of ethnically defined nationality to discrete territorial space explains why even REN TV reporters implicitly assigned Armenians, Chechens, Dagestanis, and Ingush permanently residing in Moscow to the category of *priezzhie*. This perception was articulated by a Chechen student activist in the 25 December bulletin. Despite moving to Moscow as a child, he internalized the external definition of himself as an outsider whose personal behavior shaped a collective image of Chechnia in the eyes of the host society.⁷²

REN TV eschewed the other channels’ tendency to quote liberally from Medvedev’s and Putin’s speeches. But extreme nationalists and communists, on the one hand, and spokesmen for North Caucasian communities, on the other, were interviewed extensively. Also notable by their absence were members of the liberal opposition.⁷³ REN TV’s west-leaning

the background of red fires.” See www.nedelya.ren-tv.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=445:-qq-181210&catid=4:nedelya-s-mariannoy-maksimovskoy&Itemid=9 (last accessed 21 September 2012). See also Laruelle, *In the Name of the Nation*, 38.

69. Shnirel’man, “*Porog tolerantnosti*,” vols. 1 and 2.

70. See S. G. Barkhudarov et al., eds, *Slovar russkogo iazyka* (Moscow, 1958), 2:133. Between the 1860s and 1917, the expression *korennoi narod* was applied in official and popular discourses specifically to the Russian population. It is this usage, rejected in the Soviet period, that seems to be influencing today’s popular understanding of the word *korennoi*. See Vera Tolz, “Diskursy o rase: Imperskaia Rossiia i Zapad v sravnenii,” in Aleksei Miller, Denis A. Sdvizhkov, and Ingrid Schirle, eds., “*Poniatiiia o Rossii*”: *K istoricheskoi semantike imperskogo perioda* (Moscow, 2012), 2:180–81.

71. Tolz, “Russia: Exiled, Submerged, Restored.”

72. See www.nedelya.ren-tv.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=449:-qq-251210&catid=4:nedelya-s-mariannoy-maksimovskoy&Itemid=9 (last accessed 21 September 2012).

73. This is despite the fact that in earlier REN TV broadcasts about ethnic conflict and the rise of Russian nationalism, such figures as the leader of the Solidarity movement, Boris Nemtsov, acted as commentators. See *Nedelia*, 6 November 2010. This program is no longer available on the REN TV Web site, but it can be watched on www.youtube.com/watch?v=qeM3jxbO5BE (last accessed 21 September 2012).

credentials were, by 18 December, outweighed by the emerging cross-channel consensus, with its grounding in domestic strains of antiliberal, popular, and pseudo-academic discourses.

Nonetheless, the liberal critique never faded entirely. On 18 December, the attempts of First Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration, Vladislav Surkov, to blame the liberal opposition for teaching nationalists to stage unauthorized demonstrations were dismissed. In an interview with Marianna Maksimovskaia in the same bulletin, Yunus-Bek Evkurov, president of Ingushetia, blamed the media for the state of interethnic relations, arguing that they regularly highlighted the ethnicity of Caucasian criminals, while ignoring that of neo-Nazi skinheads.⁷⁴

On 18 December, Maksimovskaia claimed that one of the most active participants in shaping Putin's youth policy, Vasilii Iakimenko, bore direct responsibility for the rise of xenophobia, because, as leader of the Nashi movement, he helped divide the country into "ours and theirs," further implying that such outcomes were not necessarily an oversight;⁷⁵ the former president of Ingushetia, Ruslan Aushev, described the authorities' toleration of neo-Nazism in central Moscow as suspicious.⁷⁶ No attempt was made to reconcile hints at the possibility that the authorities stood behind the riots with the suggestion that they were genuinely terrified by them. Indeed, conspiracy theories, including suggestions that Putin, or the exiled oligarch Boris Berezovskii, was involved in organizing the riots, ran rampant within the oppositional media, penetrating the peripheral space within official discourse that REN TV occupies.⁷⁷ The absence of robust political metanarratives again permitted such fantasies to coexist side by side.

NTV

NTV was the mirror image of REN TV, both in terms of its sympathies (oriented to the populist-nationalist component of unofficial discourse rather than its liberal-oppositional antithesis) and its narrative trajectory (progressing from a pro-Spartak line to a reluctant endorsement of official multiculturalism, rather than from alarmist commentaries on racist violence to reluctant acquiescence in the emphasis on migrant deviance).

74. See www.nedelya.ren-tv.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=445:-qq-181210&catid=4:nedelya-s-mariannoy-maksimovskoy&Itemid=9 (last accessed 21 September 2012).

75. Ibid.

76. REN TV's program "Reporterskaia istoriia," broadcast on 9 December 2010. Although we accessed this program on 28 December 2011, it is no longer available on the REN TV Web site.

77. Contributions to REN TV's audience forum ranged from claims that the riots were deliberately organized by Putin in order to strengthen his new bid for the presidency, to suggestions that they were the work of the oligarch Berezovskii as part of his plot to destroy the Russian state. See www.ren-tv.com/forum/index.php?showtopic=36069&st=0&p=959181&#entry959181 (last accessed 21 September 2012) and, in particular, comments on 17 and 28 December 2010. See also Kirill Rogov, "Temnyi vsadnik na belom kone," *Novaia gazeta*, 20 December 2010.

The 12 December report of NTV's Sunday news roundup, *Segodnia: Itogovaia programma*, foregrounded the spontaneous "indignation" caused by the release of Sviridov's assailants (the "boiling point" of the title). The only mention of xenophobic slogans was as an "unfair accusation" from unknown sources. NTV adopted a viewpoint close to that of the Spartak crowds. The remainder of the account was narrated from a single perspective, and the suspicions raised by the authorities' (in)action was expressed in indignant questions posed as if by an irate fan.⁷⁸

The 19 December edition included two Manezhnaia reports, the first of which was sensationally, and conspiratorially, entitled "Battle with the Forces of Darkness." The report began with an account of the security situation on 15 December, when Caucasians gathered in a counterprotest. This context was acknowledged, but as part of a progression in which the emphasis shifts toward North Caucasian "criminality," the neutral, de-ethnicizing framing ultimately intensifying the report's inflammatory thrust. It opened with images of people in Moscow being patted down. The hitherto unspecific voiceover was accompanied by footage depicting young Caucasians denying that they are carrying weapons. But the film cut to a weapons haul. The reporter then "rebutted" the young man's verbal denial (complimenting the "rebuttal" of the visual edit).⁷⁹

The reporter's initial, evenhanded phrasing of a "general" problem was undermined by examples weighted against Caucasians. Investigating the reasons for the disturbances, he posed false alternatives articulated from within the nationalist perspective: "Why did it happen? Was it fear of the influence of criminal groupings? Or was it corruption?"⁸⁰ NTV was selective in its reporting of Medvedev's commentary, giving the biggest gloss to his brief remarks about ethnic criminality. The significance of the word *ten'* (shadow) in the report's title emerged as the symbolic embodiment of NTV's conflation of the ethnic-criminality and the conspiracy-of-power lenses.

As NTV's subsequent précis of Putin's press conference confirmed, the prime minister was himself an able practitioner of the "false dichotomy." In his comparison of Slavs living in the Caucasus, and Caucasians living in Moscow, both were urged to respect "host" traditions, but the onus was on Caucasians.⁸¹ The re-rendering of western "tolerance" (with its unconditional embrace of difference) as *tolerantnost'* (implying an acceptance of difference conditional on receiving "respect for the host" in return) dominated the remainder of the report.

NTV's preferred investigative mode sanctioned a transgression of the bounds of approved sources, and an indulgence in free-ranging, populist interpretations. This was apparent in the second report, which focused

78. See myi.ru/ru/videodetail.aspx?video=a28bc00a48724a51b6a22c298df4dab6&ap=1 (last accessed 21 September 2012).

79. See kinolot.com/peredachi/10014-segodnya-itogovaya-programma-yefir-ot-19122010.html (last accessed 21 September 2012).

80. Ibid.

81. Ibid.

on a parallel incident in Rostov-on-Don, when students instigated a riot against North Caucasians, following the murder of a Russian boy by a Dagestani peer. It illustrated how official positions (the disturbances as a reflection of popular anger at police inaction) are bolstered when translated into popular, “local” idioms. But the same gesture also universalized the problems, undercutting accounts of Manezhnaia as a spontaneous reaction to a one-off incident.

A *vox pop* quote (“They thrashed him periodically; he complained and they punished him even more cruelly for ratting on them”) elicited revulsion at the criminal, whose misidentification as a “migrant” enables the reporter to tap into the rich vein of antimigrant prejudice that Amandine Regamey perceives in contemporary Russian public discourse.⁸² Henceforth, the Rostov events tracked those in Moscow. One difference was that in Rostov, no confrontation with OMON occurred. This was attributed unambiguously to the self-control of local Russians.⁸³ Abandoning any pretense at balance, the reporter subsequently suggested that the police were dealing with an unintegrated Caucasian community. There followed alienating, middle-distance shots of youths dancing the *lezginka* (a regional Caucasian dance), with the highly partial justification for banning the dance left unchallenged.⁸⁴ Official variants on the media performance of friendship of the peoples required legitimizing minority community support. But in NTV’s case, the support coexisted in tension with the popular standpoint from which that same community was stereotyped according to the ethnic-criminality lens.

In its final report on 26 December, NTV came closer to the Kremlin-approved narrative, designating Putin’s attendance at the memorial meeting as the point of resolution of the crisis. The presence of several nationalities was stressed, and the camera dwelled on the darker-skinned participants, as if hinting that Putin’s admonitions were directed largely at them.⁸⁵ Then, the reporter moved from the Caucasian identity of Sviridov’s murderer to an implied suggestion that a root cause of the riots was migrant criminality. Here, NTV’s demotic orientation provided a direct link from the carefully crafted official narrative to the undercurrents of mass prejudice that narrative had struggled to ameliorate.

The same effect was achieved through a selective approach to Putin’s comments. The frame for the entire report was “problems with diaspora communities,” with Putin’s thinly veiled threat to target illegal migration highlighted.⁸⁶ In a false enactment of the friendship-of-the-peoples myth,

82. Amandine Regamey, “Obraz migrantov i migratsionnaia politika v Rossii,” *Antropologicheskii forum* 13 (2011): 389–406.

83. See kinolot.com/peredachi/10014-segodnya-itogovaya-programma-yefir-ot-19122010.html (last accessed 21 September 2012).

84. Ibid.

85. See kinolot.com/peredachi/6682-segodnya-itogovaya-programma-yefir-ot-26092010.html (last accessed 21 September 2012).

86. Similarly, references made by the Ministry of Home Affairs to Ethnic Criminality are singled out. By contrast, racism among the fans is transmuted into an outburst of spontaneous emotion (*emotsional'nogo vspleska*). Ibid.

in which the interests of ethnic Russians were assumed to be those of the multiethnic whole, the reporter depicted the mourners united in grief. Putin's encomium cued the final shots depicting Caucasian schoolchildren learning Russian, accompanied by a condescending voiceover suggesting they be taught Pushkin's fairy tales, "so that they don't feel alienated."⁸⁷

NTV's position at the boundaries of approved discourse rendered the interpretative substratum from which state media outlets constructed their narrative particularly susceptible to reinflexion by populist voices. Its former status as a repository of "progressive" infotainment formats only aided that cause. NTV's threshold position also explained its capacity for intertwining ethnic criminality and conspiracy of power with their shared demotic power and roots within vernacular culture.

Let us recapitulate the key elements in our argument, linking them to one another, to the broader contexts (the relationship between news broadcasting, multiculturalist nation building, and interethnic strife), to the condition of official discourse under Medvedev and Putin), and to the European comparative dimension.

(i) *Rather than transmitting a univocal state narrative, post-Manezhnaia broadcasting reveals multiple fault lines whose partial convergence is largely attributable to constraints imposed by the conceptual framework upon which all channels draw and to the fact that they felt compelled to reflect the perceived popular mood.*

We have shown that the transformation of the four interpretative lenses can be traced through contradictions expressed diachronically, via shifts in the Manezhnaia narrative over three weeks, and synchronically, via ideological and terminological conflicts present throughout. For Rossiia and Channel 1, the diachronic axis is foregrounded as these official outlets struggle to recalibrate their narratives in line with the shifting perspectives of their political masters and with popular opinion. On NTV and REN TV, the respective populist and liberal orientations are preset and, despite concessions to the official line or the perceived popular consensus, the synchronic axis prevails. This difference points to a further, "meta-discursive," dimension to the contradictions: that of a "mediasphere" structured as a spectrum running from center (Channel 1), through Rossiia, which leavens its official line with a strictly managed pluralism, to a periphery serving as a two-way filter to extra-official realms: demotic-nationalist (NTV) and liberal-progressive (REN TV).

The transformative process results in an apparent convergence around a common line related to a widely perceived problem with unintegrated migrants. Rather than the imposition of an unambiguous Kremlin view, it reflects the precise point at which state pronouncements intersect with "popular consensus." The convergence is partial and tensions between and within the different narratives, including that of the state itself, remain unresolved. All of the accounts are fractured from within and retain a strongly dialogic aspect. Thus, the official discourse is incapable of reintegrating the different layers of its mythological substratum and strug-

87. Ibid.

gles to “mainstream” the multiple voices (nationalist, liberal, populist-conspiratorial, and so on) it confronts. Its power to assert its dominance over a Russian public sphere characterized by relative discursive plurality is further undermined by the range of contradictory ideological frameworks that it uses in confronting major political and social issues. Indeed, in their final broadcasts of 2010, the two main state-controlled channels ultimately resorted to denying the full scale of the interethnic tensions they had earlier acknowledged. NTV’s consistently populist approach enabled it to maintain a more coherent line, which, however, came dangerously close to inciting ethnoracial prejudices, even while paying lip service to the friendship-of-the-peoples narrative its subordinated position compelled it to adopt. Notwithstanding its explicit condemnation of ethnic Russian nationalism and of the authorities for encouraging it, REN TV’s *Nedelia* paradoxically reinforced perceptions of impenetrable ethnic boundaries and irreconcilable interethnic differences to a still greater extent than the two main state channels.

The only full point of consensus shared across all the channels remained the unreflective equation of ethnic Russians alone with the Russian Federation as a whole—a view that contradicts the Kremlin’s ideal of a multiethnic civic Russian nation (*rossiiskaia grazhdanskaia natsiia*). The tensions we identified are indicative of a broader Russian political sphere whose ruptured discursive fabric belies the image of uniformity attributed to it by the western media. This is one of the two broader issues upon which, we argue, *Manezhnaia* casts valuable new light. It should be noted that, in their often unreflective reproduction of ethnoracial stereotypes, Russian television practices are not dissimilar from those of west European media. The tendency to emphasize the negative characteristics of ethnic “outgroups” and downplay or deny those of the dominant “ingroup” in reporting on ethnic minorities, the selective application of ethnic labels in coverage of crime and interethnic conflict construed from the perspective of the Slavic majority, and the equation of cultural and biological difference find parallels in western reporting.⁸⁸ Yet Russian television discourses betray such striking terminological laxity when treating issues of ethnicity and nationalism that the embedding and disguising mechanisms by which western reporting masks “ingroup” bias are wholly ineffectual.⁸⁹

(ii) *The emphasis within the shared conceptual apparatus on ethnic boundaries generates a paradox by which broadcasters are liable both to overstate and to underplay interethnic factors.*

88. See John Downing and Charles Husband, *Representing Race: Racisms, Ethnicities and Media* (London, 2005). For an earlier, seminal, analysis, see Teun A. van Dijk, *Racism and the Press* (London, 1991).

89. Describing the western media’s conflation of race and ethnicity, Downing and Husband argue that “the discourses which vilify racism are more than countered by the many discourses through which racism is made invisible, normative and even virtuous . . . The politics of ethnicity become vulnerable to the discourses of racism and the ideology of ‘race’ can be effectively disguised and embedded in the language of ethnicity.” Downing and Husband, *Representing Race*, 1.

The terminological laxity reflects deep uncertainties about how the Russian national community should be defined. First, these uncertainties are connected with the legacy of Soviet nationalities policies, based on a highly ambiguous approach to the relationship between Soviet (civic) identity and ethnonational identities, as well as to squaring the dominance of the Soviet Union's most powerful contingent (the *russkie*) with recognition of the ethnonational separateness of non-Russian minorities of vastly differing statuses. Thus, the prejudicial use of terms like *visitors*, *guests* and *diasporas* of people who are bona fide citizens of the Russian (*Rossiiskaiia*) Federation is the direct consequence of the division of first Soviet, then Russian, federal space into multiple territories inhabited by "titular nationalities." The fact that the one territory remaining without a titular nationality is Russia as a whole explains the inappropriately ethnized references to Moscow's "indigenous population."

Second, the state-sponsored nation-building project initiated in the twilight of Boris El'tsin's presidency has revealed with unprecedented clarity the conflict between a vision of postcommunist Russia as a multiethnic state of and for all its nationalities and a conception of the new nation as an ethnic Russian homeland. Under El'tsin's successors, the intensified advocacy of the latter vision at all levels of the public sphere, buttressed by references to certain late imperial Russian and western (pseudo)-scientific interpretations of human diversity, has only further exacerbated this conflict. Key to our interpretation of the discursive crisis to which the lexical confusion points is the notion that the interpretative prisms we identified operate at, yet cut across, different levels of the public sphere: vernacular (conspiracy of power); intermediate/academic (ethnic criminality); official (friendship of the peoples). Meanwhile, a notion of interethnic disharmony straddles the official/intermediate divide. It can manifest itself in "virtual" form: interethnic strife portrayed as a potential, but avoidable, consequence of the disturbances and realizable only "elsewhere." But it also exists in a realized version (the culture conflict perceived by REN TV as the actual cause of the disturbances).

The differential location of the four prisms generates multiple interpretations of the official discourse within which they interact. For instance, Channel 1 and Rossiia draw at times on the vitality of conspiratorial sentiment to *minimize* ethnonationalist and racist undertones and portray the disturbances as a singular act of resentment at an aberration resulting from nothing more than endemic legal inertia. Yet, the linkage elsewhere of conspiratorial thinking to ethnic criminality, which receives its most lurid expression in NTV's invocation of "Dark Forces," inevitably fosters *over*interpretation of those same undertones.

The dangers represented by ambiguities and contradictions in the discourses of national unity and ethnic conflict are symbolized in the ambivalent semantics of the Spartacus revolt evoked by REN TV. For in its contemporary setting, the revolt is at once a justifiable populist march on corrupt officials in conspiratorial collusion with "ethnic-criminal groupings"; a terrifying outburst of antimigrant rage; and a profound threat

to the integrity of the Russian state. Equally ambiguous is the *opolchentsy* narrative. Central to the artifice by which, since the introduction of an official Day of National Unity in 2005, Russia celebrates its multifaith, multicultural society, the story of the victorious uprising against a “foreign invader” galvanizes popular opposition to that very unifying project, as reflected in the story about the arrest of Colonel Kvachkov that Rossiia linked to its coverage of Manezhnaia.⁹⁰

(iii) *The overinterpretation/occlusion paradox generated by the conceptual apparatus relates also to the contingency of ethnicity as a category, a factor affecting other European broadcasters.*

The fact that the “foreign invader” remained a culturally hybrid mass gathered under the ethnogeographical umbrella of *Kavkaz* (the Caucasus) demonstrates the explanatory power of Rogers Brubaker’s insistence on “performative ethnicity” according to which, “by invoking groups, [ethnopolitical entrepreneurs] seek to evoke them,” and on groupness as an “event” rather than a phenomenon, or a mere “construction.”⁹¹

Brubaker argues that, because of the performativity of ethnic groupings, what is reported as ethnic conflict “may have more to do with thuggery, opportunistic looting and black-market profiteering.”⁹² An instructive contrast therefore emerges between Manezhnaia and the rioting that shook London in August 2011 before spreading throughout the United Kingdom. The latter commenced as a protest against the police for refusing to deliver justice to a wronged black family but degenerated into a looting spree devoid of interethnic content in all public representations and in popular perceptions.⁹³ The former began with football fans protesting police ineffectiveness but mutated into ethnically saturated violence. The radical contingency of ethnicity as a category (its emergence as a determining force in one situation but not in another, ostensibly similar one) is but one explanation for the difference, but if it is a factor at all, then the Manezhnaia disturbances might tell us something important about how the “crisis of multiculturalism” is playing out in postcommunist

90. The symbolic invocations bespeak a genuine threat, as polling data indicates. The All-Russian Centre for Public Opinion Research (VTsIOM) conducted a post-Manezhnaia survey in which 11 percent of respondents said they would consider participating in a similar protest action themselves. See wciom.ru/index.php?id=459&uid=111221 (last accessed 21 September 2012).

91. Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004), 10.

92. *Ibid.*, 19.

93. Post-riot headlines in the United Kingdom focused on issues of consumerist greed, youth amorality, parental indiscipline, and police timidity. In one of a later series of *Guardian* articles published as part of a collaboration with the London School of Economics and the Rowntree Foundation on ascertaining the causes of the English riots of 2011, Hugh Muir and Yemisi Adegoke acknowledge that foreign commentators were quick to brand the events as Britain’s “race riots” but they argue that other factors, including poverty, unemployment, alienation, and distrust of authority, were more important. See “Reading the Riots: Investigating England’s Summer of Discontent,” *The Guardian*, 8 December 2011, at www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/dec/08/were-the-riots-about-race (last accessed 21 September 2012).

space (the uncanny parallels with Manezhnaia revealed in the Bulgarian anti-gypsy protests are significant).

One ramification of the Manezhnaia events has been a noticeable increase in attention to interethnic relations within official discourse. In January 2012, Putin chose to dedicate one of his “election manifesto” articles to the “National Question.” In it, he made extended reference to collusion between corrupt law enforcement organs and migrants, linking it to the “radicalization of the host society.” But he also depicted in alarming words the “crisis of multiculturalism” afflicting west European societies, which he presented as being unable to cope with large migration flows, comparing “the west” unfavorably to Russia, where culture conflicts are easier to manage, given the fact that “for centuries Russia has existed as a multinational state.”⁹⁴ The narrative struggles around the Manezhnaia riots contradict this optimistic assessment and represent an example of the polemicizing, counterintuitive bravado to which Putin is habitually prone. Rather than fostering the friendship of the peoples, policies and discourses that consistently essentialize ethnic boundaries and cultural differences continue to drive individuals and communities apart. Elements of this Soviet legacy are being reinvented and revitalized by the evocation of non-Soviet concepts similarly based on the essentialization of ethnic and racial categories.

In a recent, ironic twist, a further post-Manezhnaia consequence has been the readiness of state broadcasters to highlight the endorsement by the popular anticorruption campaigner, Aleksei Naval’nyi, of the “Russia for Russians” and “Stop feeding the Caucasus” slogans (to which Putin’s article makes explicit, critical reference). Acquiring transformative momentum from the circumstances surrounding Sviridov’s murder, the slogans featured prominently in the protests sparked by Putin’s reelection to the presidency in March 2012, enabling the Kremlin to deflect some of the criticism leveled at it by its liberal opponents. Yet, by failing to distinguish Naval’nyi from such opponents, and in singularly ignoring the Moscow 2010 riots (they received not a single mention in BBC news bulletins), western media outlets exposed their own “blindspots.” Mirroring Russian broadcasters’ earlier reluctance to acknowledge the threats posed by interethnic tensions, they revert to comforting, pre-1991 conceptual frames when confronting the perennial mistrust of electoral democracy demonstrated by Russian leaders. The contingency of ethnicity as a category has transnational as well as national potency, guaranteeing that it will continue to resonate for years to come in Russia and beyond.

94. Vladimir Putin, “Rossiia: National’nyi vopros,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 23 January 2012.