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Tolz, V., & Harding, S-A. (2015). 'From "Compatriots" to "Aliens": The Changing Coverage of Migration on Russian Television'. *The Russian Review*, 74(3), 452-477. DOI: 10.1111/russ.12025

Published in:
The Russian Review

Document Version:
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:
[Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal](#)

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From “Compatriots” to “Aliens”: The Changing Coverage of Migration on Russian Television

VERA TOLZ AND SUE-ANN HARDING

On April 14, 2013, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitrii Rogozin ordered the sudden inspection of a train travelling to Moscow from Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, whence most of Russia’s labor migrants come. This staged inspection discovered drug and weapons smugglers, people suffering from contagious diseases, and other “undesirables.” Coverage of the event by Rossiia, a state-owned television channel, included a news presenter calling for the rapid closure of the border with Tajikistan, until “they [citizens of Tajikistan] grow up (*poka oni ne podrastut*).”¹ Commenting on Rogozin’s inspection on one of Rossiia’s talk shows, the controversial politician Vladimir Zhirinovskii demanded the deportation of all migrants from Russia because they “bring crime, illness and reduce the cultural level of our society.”² When Tajikistan’s Foreign Ministry protested against what it described as slanderous statements by Russia’s officials, it went unreported by the two main federal channels, and failed to provoke any review of reporting practices, even though the ministry commented on the negative role of the media in the affair.³

This article emanates from two research projects: “Nation-building and Nationalism in Today’s Russia (NEORUSS),” which is funded by the Norwegian Research Council, project code: 220599; and “Mediating Post-Soviet Difference: An Analysis of Russian Television Representations of Inter-Ethnic Cohesion Issues,” which is funded by the UK’s Arts and Humanities Research Council, project code: AH/HO18964/1. We would also like to thank Stephen Hutchings, Pål Kolstø, Peter Rutland, Elisabeth Schimpfoessl, Ilya Yablokov, and the Russian Review’s editors and anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and other help.

¹Sergei Brilev, “Dmitrii Rogozin: V’ezd v Rossiiu po metrikam ne dopustim,” *Vesti.ru*, April 20, 2013, <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=1077639&date=21.04.2013>. Unless otherwise noted, all websites cited in this article were last accessed on January 20, 2014.

²“Poedinok,” *Rossiia1*, April 18, 2013, http://russia.tv/video/show/brand_id/3963/video_id/349720. See also “Spetsial’nyi korrespondent,” *Rossiia1*, April 24, 2013, http://russia.tv/video/show/brand_id/3957/episode_id/357392/video_id/357392/viewtype/picture.

³See “Tadzhikistan otvetil notoi na predskazanie Zhirinovskogo,” April 23, 2013, <http://lenta.ru/news/2013/04/23/nota/> (accessed 27 April 2014).

The Russian Review 74 (July 2015): 452–77

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Rather than an extreme, isolated example, the coverage of this event was part of a sustained anti-immigration campaign on the two main state-aligned television channels, Channel 1 and Rossiia, which started in May 2012 and lasted for over a year, until a series of ethnic riots across Russia in the summer and the fall of 2013 seemed to have prompted a return to more careful reporting.⁴ During this campaign, the representation of migration changed drastically in comparison to the preceding period, with the two channels now systematically departing (often radically) from previous interpretations of ethnicity-related issues and from the Kremlin-endorsed view that migration was essential for Russia’s economy.

This article investigates this changing nature of television reporting on migration, asking what facilitated these changes, and what such orchestrated media campaigns during Vladimir Putin’s third presidency, of which a sustained attack on migrants was one, tell us about the relationship between the Kremlin, state-aligned broadcasters, and the public. It also considers the extent to which this coverage reflects fault lines and fluctuations in the official narratives of Russian nationhood and societal values. (Channel 1 and Rossiia deserve separate and special attention, because, for the majority of Russian citizens, they remain the most “trustworthy” sources of information.⁵) While some liberal Russian observers viewed the post-election public discourse as yet another indication of the country reverting to the past, we argue, in contrast, that noticeable shifts in this discourse and the role of the media in constructing and disseminating it represent a new development, rather than signalling a return to Soviet models.⁶

Several major factors ensure that, despite the regime’s increasingly authoritarian tendencies, current state-aligned broadcasting has maintained differences from that of the past. First, post-Soviet media culture is shaped by the infiltration of ideas and forms formerly deemed “alien,” including global media formats, and even state-aligned broadcasters depend on viewers’ ratings of their programs. This facilitates a certain pluralism of opinion, which most viewers expect, and it also means that journalists have more leeway than their Soviet-era predecessors to reflect and articulate their own views. Second, the regime’s failure to provide any sort of consistent ideological underpinning necessitates a more dialogical relationship between the Kremlin, the broadcasters, and the public, allocating to media personalities a greater role in the production of official narratives than was the case before.

With the eruption of public protests in late 2011 and early 2012, the regime identified a number of strategic priorities and then assigned the state-aligned television channels a major role in their realization. The earlier ideological vagueness and ambiguity of official discourse increasingly began to be seen as a potential problem, rather than a strength. This facilitated the regime’s desire to articulate a clearer ideologically informed agenda and to develop a broader set of consensual values. New ideologically charged narratives were

⁴Emil Pain, “From Protest to Pogroms,” *Open Democracy*, August 27, 2013, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/emil-pain/from-protests-to-pogroms>.

⁵According to a Levada Center poll of March 2013, over 57 percent of the Russian population still consider federal television the most trustworthy source of information, as opposed to only 11 percent who prefer the internet (<http://www.levada.ru/08-07-2013/otkuda-rossiyane-uznayut-novosti>).

⁶See, for instance, “Vozvrat k proshlomy,” *Kasparov.ru*, May 29, 2012, <http://www.kasparov.ru/material.php?id=4FC49C5C35B59>.

expected to represent the president as not only attentive to public concerns, but also as the sole political leader able to safely guide the country through a period of danger and address the challenges posed by increasingly vocal isolationist Russian ethnonationalism, whose prominent representatives had been highly critical of the Kremlin's policies.⁷ When this type of nationalism started gathering strength in the decade before, some observers blamed the Kremlin for the development.⁸ The extent to which this criticism is justified is debatable. What is clear, however, is that the Kremlin cannot control this nationalism and sees it as a serious problem. This type of nationalism regards a "Muslim migrant" as Russia's significant Other.⁹

For the last fifteen years, the issue of migration has been of increasing concern to citizens of most European states, and, as in Russia, the European media have been both reflecting and shaping this concern. In academic literature, definitions of migration are complex and often contradictory. As Bridget Anderson and Scott Blinder note, there is no consensus on a single definition of "migrants," who can be defined by foreign birth and citizenship as well as by their temporary or long-term geographical mobility across and within national boundaries.¹⁰ The confusion increases in the context of mass-media representations and in the discourses of politicians, who regularly politicize migration-related issues. Media outlets in European countries have been criticized for their discriminatory treatment of migrants, for using criminalizing terminology, and for engaging in a systematic process of "othering."¹¹ When covering migration, journalists throughout the world likewise tend to ethnicize the social and economic issues which are at the roots of migration trends.

Most of the myths that the Russian media disseminate about migrants are comparable to what many of their counterparts in the European Union also say about asylum seekers, refugees, and labor migrants. Russian broadcasters are aware of these negative sentiments in Western Europe; during the anti-immigration campaign they quoted from inflammatory Western media reports and invited anti-immigration campaigners from Western Europe to appear on Russian television. In both contexts, migrants are presented as a threat to European cultures and way of life, and references to a "clash of civilizations" frame many media reports.¹² At the same time, there are differences in journalistic practices between EU

⁷Marlene Laruelle dates the ideological shift among Russian ethnonationalists toward demonization of migrants to the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century. See her "The Ideological Shift on the Russian Radical Right: From Demonizing the West to Fear of Migrants," *Problems of Post-Communism* 57:6 (2010): 19–31. See also Nicu Popescu, "The Strange Alliance of Democrats and Nationalists," *Journal of Democracy* 23:2 (2012): 46–54.

⁸See, for instance, Galina Zvereva, "Diskurs gosudarstvennoi natsii v sovremennoi Rossii," in *Sovremennye interpretatsii russkogo natsionalizma*, ed. Marlene Laruelle (Stuttgart, 2007), 15–80.

⁹Laruelle, "Ideological Shift on the Russian Radical Right"; Yuri Teper and Daniel D. Course, "Contesting Putin's Nation-building: The 'Muslim Other' and the Challenge of the Russian Ethno-cultural Alternative," *Nations and Nationalism* 20:4 (2014): 721–41.

¹⁰Bridget Anderson and Scott Blinder, "Who Counts as a Migrant? Definitions and their Consequences," *Migration Observatory Briefing*, COMPAS, University of Oxford, UK, September 2013.

¹¹Samuel Bennet et al., "The Representation of Third-Country Nationals in European News Discourse. Journalistic Perceptions and Practices," *Journalism Practice* 7:3 (2013): 248–65.

¹²On the situation in Britain see Elizabeth Poole, "Multiculturalism, Religion and British Identity: The Case of Geert Wilders," paper presented at the conference "Ethnicity, Race and Nationalism in European Media and Film," University of Manchester, May 2013.

countries, as well as between media outlets within these countries. As we shall see, in their coverage of migration-related issues in the aftermath of the 2012 elections, Russia's two main television channels tended to adopt positions comparable to those of the media in Greece and Italy, where the main public service broadcasters uncritically reproduce extreme xenophobic and anti-immigrant views. Close parallels can also be found between Russian television coverage and Europe's tabloid press. In contrast, even though broadcasters such as the BBC can be criticized for biases, their work is regulated by well-developed guidelines designed to achieve impartial coverage.¹³ The BBC is therefore less likely than British tabloids (or state-aligned Russian broadcasters) to unreflectively reproduce crude stereotypes.¹⁴

Media and political discourse on migration often reflect broader understandings of national identity held by a society's dominant group.¹⁵ In Russia, official discourse of national unity and identity is neither coherent nor univocal. Throughout the entire post-Soviet period, and particularly since 2000, official discourse has reflected a contradiction, pitting the rhetoric of a civic pan-Russian nation (*grazhdanskaia rossiiskaia natsiia*) that embraces members of all nationalities as equal citizens, against the discursive representation of Russia as, above all, the national homeland of ethnic Russians.¹⁶ In the aftermath of the 2012 elections, however, new narratives began foregrounding the latter representation, marginalizing more inclusive definitions of Russian nationhood.

Russia's state-aligned broadcasters and politicians also have failed to recognize a second fault line, that between the new rhetoric of Russian national unity and community cohesion, on the one hand, and two reinvented narratives from the past, on the other. The first of these is the highly hierarchical account of cultural diversity in Russia (and across the globe) which has been shaped and reshaped in turn by imperial, Soviet, and European New Right legacies. For, despite the vision of a multiethnic civic Russian nationhood that official discourse has promoted in the past decade, the rigidity of the hierarchies and of the boundaries

¹³On the case of Italy see Giovanna Campani, "Migrants and Media: The Italian Case," in *Media and Migration: Construction of Mobility and Difference*, ed. Russell King and Nancy Wood (London, 2001), 38–52; Rinella Cere, "Globalization vs. Localization: Anti-Immigrant and Hate Discourses in Italy," in *Beyond Monopoly: Contemporary Italian Media and Globalization*, ed. Michela Ardizzoni and Chiara Ferrari (Lanham, MA, 2010), 225–44. On Britain, Greece, and the Netherlands see Bennet et al., "Representation of Third-Country Nationals in European News Discourse," 249, 254, and 255. See also a report assessing impartiality of the BBC coverage, including of migration, "From Seesaw to Wagon Wheel: Safeguarding Impartiality in the 21st Century," June 2007, available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/review_report_research/impartiality_21century/report.pdf.

¹⁴Greg Philo et al., *Bad News for Refugees* (London, 2013).

¹⁵Harald Bauber, "Immigration Dialectic in the Media and Crisis as Transformative Moment," in *Migrations and the Media*, ed. Kerry Moore et al. (New York, 2012), 34–35, 44–45; R. Cohen, "The Incredible Vagueness of Being British/English," *International Affairs* 76 (July 2000): 576; Oxana Shevel, *Migration, Refugee Policy, and State Building in Postcommunist Europe* (Cambridge, England, 2011).

¹⁶Oxana Shevel, "Russian Nation-building from Yel'tsin to Medvedev; Ethnic, Civic or Purposefully Ambiguous?" *Europe-Asia Studies* 63:2 (2011): 179–202; Marlene Laruelle, ed., *Russian Nationalism and the National Reassertion of Russia* (London, 2009); Alfred Evans, "Putin's Legacy and Russia's Identity," *Europe-Asia Studies* 60:6 (2008): 899–912; Galina Zvereva, "Natsionalisticheskii diskurs i setevaia kul'tura," *Pro et contra*, no. 2 (29) (2005), <http://www.panorama.ru/works/patr/> (last accessed April 1, 2014); E. E. Levkieskaia, "Russkaia ideia v kontekste istoricheskikh mifologicheskikh modelei i mekhanizmy ikh obrazovaniia," in *Sovremennaia rossiiskaia mifologiya*, ed. Mariia V. Akhmetova (Moscow, 2005), 175–206.

between communities defined by ethnocultural markers has paradoxically increased in comparison with Soviet times and the 1990s. The second, related, narrative, rooted in Soviet ethnic “federalism,” describes the non-Russian nationalities as belonging solely in their own sub-state administrative autonomous regions. These narratives inform how media personalities frame their news stories, and in the post-election period they helped to strengthen the exclusionary tendencies of representations of Russian nationhood, with direct impact on the coverage of migration-related issues, Russia’s ethnic minorities, and even one of Russia’s officially recognized “traditional religions,” Islam.

This article is based on a close reading of daily news reports and non-news programs concerned with events and developments to which broadcasters Channel 1 and Rossiia ascribed, whether implicitly or explicitly, an interethnic dimension, during the period from September 2010 until December 2013.¹⁷ In addition, in order to extend the findings derived from our analysis of actual broadcasts and to corroborate and contextualize our close readings, in February–May 2013 we conducted interviews with sixteen prominent television journalists. In our analysis we pay particular attention to the interpretative frames that broadcasters applied, showing “how surrounding features of the reporting discourse” might have influenced the way in which covered events were understood.¹⁸ As we will see, broadcasters often used ethnicity as a frame to represent events and situations that could have been attributed with other meanings. Offering a perfect example of the practices which confirm Rogers Brubaker’s conclusion that ethnicity and nationhood are “perspectives on the world rather than entities in the world,” Russia’s state-aligned broadcasters often used the notion of “ethnicity” to categorize a group and attribute collective responsibility to disparate people who in reality had little in common.¹⁹ In 2012–13, Islam became another common frame in the coverage of migration. Similarly to how Edward Said described representations of Islam in the North American media in the aftermath of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, during the anti-immigration campaign Russian federal broadcasters reduced Islam to a small number of negative characteristics associated with backwardness and threatening behavior, and represented it as the main Other of Europe’s Christian values,

¹⁷Our dataset was created as part of the “Mediating Post-Soviet Difference” project. There are remarkably few studies in any national context based on a corpus of daily television news recordings as large as the one which informs our findings. In the period between September 2010 and August 2012 we recorded “Vremia” and “Vesti” programs on a daily basis. We developed a coding system of news items based on key thematic categories, one of which was “migration” (stories centering on issues raised by population movements within and beyond Russia and the space of the former Soviet Union). Between August 2012 and March 2014 we continued to monitor Channel 1 and Rossiia news and feature programs, creating data sets around relevant key events and trends we identified.

¹⁸Norman Fairclough, *Media Discourse* (London, 1995), 83. See also Robert M. Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm,” *Journal of Communication* 43:4 (1993): 51–58. For a discussion of Russian television news frames see Stephen Hutchings and Natalia Rulyova, *Television and Culture in Putin’s Russia: Remote Control* (London, 2009), 42–44; 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* 5:2 (2000): 30–51; and Ellen Mickiewicz, *Television, Power and the Public in Russia* (Cambridge, England, 2008).

¹⁹Rogers Brubaker, “Ethnicity without Groups,” *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 43:2 (2002): 163–89; idem, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge, England, 1997), 23–54.

in order to buttress conclusions about the inability of “a migrant” ever to integrate into European societies.²⁰

We will start our analysis with a discussion of the Kremlin-endorsed interpretation of Russia’s interethnic relations, termed “the national question” in the official discourse. It is in this broader context that the country’s two main leaders, Vladimir Putin and Dmitrii Medvedev, tend to place their pronouncements on migration. We will demonstrate how most of the state-aligned television coverage prior to 2012 reflected Kremlin-sponsored positions rather closely. After outlining the wider discursive and political shifts which occurred during the 2012 presidential election campaign and its immediate aftermath, we will then consider what we see as the federal broadcasters’ significant departure from the line Putin had personally authorized during the elections. By marginalizing the three main frames used by the Kremlin—Russia’s multiethnicity as its strength, the country’s “unity in diversity,” and its success in managing multiculturalism in contrast to severe problems faced by Western Europe—the broadcasters suddenly redefined as “aliens” (*chuzhie*) migrants from Central Asia who hitherto had been referred to as “compatriots.” They also started to represent Russia’s North Caucasian citizens who ventured outside their ethnic autonomies as undesirable migrants, linked migration to what was now depicted as an Islamic threat to Europe’s “Christian civilization,” and began to draw parallels between Europe’s “failed multiculturalism” and the situation in Russia.

OFFICIAL POSITIONS ON THE “NATIONAL QUESTION” AND MIGRATION

In the lead-up to the 2012 presidential election, Putin published his campaign manifesto as a series of front-page articles in several major Russian newspapers. After the initial, introductory piece, the first in the series was on Russia’s “national question,” Putin’s first ever authoritative statement on the issue.²¹ The “national question,” he stated, “is without any exaggeration a fundamental one. Any responsible policymaker ... must realise that public and interethnic harmony is one of our country’s key requisites.”²² Within weeks of his return to the presidency, Putin proposed setting up a Presidential Council for Interethnic Relations.²³ The “national question” was an important issue for the Medvedev presidency as well, particularly after the ethnoracial street violence seen in Moscow and elsewhere in December 2010. “Maintaining civic peace and interethnic and interfaith harmony in our country” are “our biggest national priority,” Medvedev said in response to the violence.²⁴ A year later, a new federal program was announced on “Strengthening the Unity of the

²⁰Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York, 1997).

²¹“Rossiia sosredotachivaetsia – vyzovy, na kotorye my dolzhny otvetit’,” *Izvestiia*, January 16, 2012, also available at <http://izvestia.ru/news/511884>; V. V. Putin, “Rossiia: Natsional’nyi vopros,” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, January 23, 2012, also available at www.ng.ru/politics/2012-01-23/1_national.html.

²²Putin, “Rossiia: Natsional’nyi vopros.”

²³“V Rossii sozdan prezidentskii Sovet po mezhnatsional’nym otnosheniiam,” *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, June 7, 2012, also available at <http://www.rg.ru/2012/06/07/sovet-anons.html>.

²⁴“Stenograficheskii otchet o sovместnom zasedanii Gossoveta i Komissii po realizatsii prioretetnykh natsional’nykh proektov i demograficheshoi politike,” December 27, 2010, <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/9913>.

Russian Nation and the Ethnic and Cultural Development of the Peoples of Russia.”²⁵ The starting point of the rhetoric is that the multiethnic nature of the Russian Federation is one of its strengths, and both Medvedev and Putin have been optimistic about their country’s ability to manage ethnocultural diversity, an optimism consistently contrasted with the “failure” of Western Europe to manage its own “multicultural project.”²⁶

Yet this official discourse is ambiguous and allows ample room for multiple interpretations.²⁷ Leaving Russia’s imperial, colonial, and Soviet legacies un-interrogated, both leaders occasionally imply that any interethnic “tensions” that might exist are directly related to migrants and migration. Even as Medvedev proudly cites high immigration figures as indicative of Russia’s attractiveness as a destination, he goes on to describe the problems brought about by “this demographic pressure,” with increasing “internal migration ... changing the ethnic balance ... formed over the course of centuries.”²⁸ Putin talks with alarm about the changes wrought by “closed ethnic-religious communities.”²⁹ Admittedly, in Putin’s electoral article this problem is largely attributed to Western Europe, whereas in relation to Russia he introduces a positive note, linking migration with the alleged ability of the Russian people to accommodate and integrate “hundreds of ethnic groups.” The relative caution of the leaders’ pronouncements is understandable. The Kremlin-endorsed policy since 2005 has been that labor migration is not only essential (given Russia’s internal labor shortage and demographic problems) but also “a powerful instrument for consolidating the countries of the [CIS]” and a key factor in “build[ing] up our cooperation with our closest partners.”³⁰

PRE-2012 COVERAGE OF THE “NATIONAL QUESTION” AND MIGRATION

Putin’s references to the problems arising from global migration flows, tempered by his optimism about the strengths of Russia’s historically rooted multiculturalism (in contrast to the crisis in Europe), would have sounded familiar to regular viewers of Channel 1 and Rossiia. Up until Putin’s election for his third presidential term, coverage by the two state-aligned channels had been broadly following a framework similar to the one outlined in Putin’s manifesto article. Migration was not—in contrast to the situation in Europe—portrayed as any kind of serious challenge to Russia, and discussion of the issue was minimal. From our database of Channel 1 and Rossiia’s news coverage between September 2010 and May 2012, overall, stories coded as relevant to the issue of interethnic relations made

²⁵See Maksim Ivanov, “Rossiiskuiu natsiiu sozhdadut v grazhdanskoi forme,” *Kommersant*, February 8, 2012, also available at www.kommersant.ru/doc/1868125.

²⁶From Putin, “Rossiia: Natsional'nyi vopros,” and Medvedev’s statements of December 22, 2011, <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/14088>.

²⁷Shevel, “Russian Nation-building from Yel'tsin to Medvedev.”

²⁸Medvedev’s “Opening Remarks,” December 27, 2010, <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/9913>.

²⁹Putin, “Rossiia: Natsional'nyi vopros.”

³⁰This is clearly articulated in Putin’s speech at the Security Council meeting on immigration policy, March 17, 2005, <http://archive.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2005/03/85300.shtml>. For reasons behind this “more liberal approach to migration management” see also Irina Ivakhnyuk, “Russian Migration Policy and Its Impact on Human Development,” *United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Reports, Research Paper*, April 2009, p. 49.

up only a small portion of the total news coverage on the two channels—between 6–8 percent, respectively, in terms of frequency (number of news stories) and intensity (airtime) (fig. 1). Among these stories, migration was one of the least covered topics (fig. 2). Significantly, while the Russian print media were already featuring highly alarmist reports on the effects of migration on Russia, the two main federal television channels tended to follow the Kremlin’s general view of migration as essential to the Russian economy.³¹

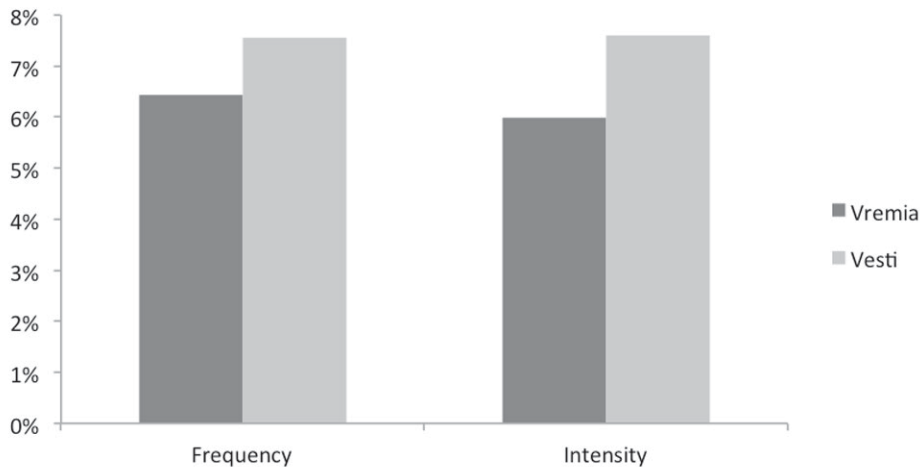


FIG. 1 Frequency and intensity of ethnicity-related news as a percentage of the overall news content of “Vremia” and “Vesti” (September 2010–May 2012).

Simultaneously, official pride in Russia’s historically rooted multiethnicity was reflected in the two channels’ consistent, positive coverage of various regional and cultural festivals and commemorations highlighting the country’s thriving ethnic minorities and harmonious ethnic relations. In marked contrast to stories about this supposedly well-managed multiculturalism, their coverage also included regular reports on deteriorating ethnic relations in Europe.³² Issues of poverty, social deprivation, and exclusion were reported as particularly European headaches, with the blame overwhelmingly placed on Western governments’ ill-advised policies, which in fact merely covered up indifference toward migrants and ethnic minorities.³³ Nevertheless, even as they placed the blame squarely on governments, the reports at times described migrants through tropes of suspicion, danger, disease, dirt, and disorder.³⁴

³¹Vladimir Malakhov, *Ponaekhali tut ... Ocherki o natsionalizme, rasizme i kul'turnom pluralizme* (Moscow, 2007).

³²See, for example, Mikhail Antonov, “Merkel’: Politika ‘multi-kulti’ provalilas,” *Vesti.ru*, October 18, 2010, www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=400748&cid=58; “Britanskii premer prizval otkazat’sia ot tolerantnosti,” “*Vesti nedeli*,” February 6, 2011, <http://vesti7.ru/archive/news?id=23423>; and Sergei Brilev, “Breivik – otrazhenie neofashizma,” *Vesti.ru*, April 21, 2012, <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=776743&cid=1620>.

³³See, for example, Kirill Brainin, “Bezhtensy iz Severnoi Afriki raskalyvaiut Evropu,” “*Voskresnoe vremia*,” April 17, 2011, <http://www.itv.ru/news/world/174842>.

³⁴Zhanna Agalakova, “Italianskii ostrov Lampedusa zakhlestnuli volny nezakonnoi migratsii i gumanitarnykh problem,” “*Vremia*,” March 31, 2011, <http://www.itv.ru/news/world/173811>.

Occasionally the channels turned their attention to the effects of migration on Russia itself. For “Vesti,” which paid more attention to the issue than Channel 1’s “Vremia,” the concern was Moscow, a focus linked to the appointment in October 2010 of Sergei Sobianin as the new mayor. The program portrayed Sobianin as key to solving the city’s chronic urban problems, which, along with traffic congestion, included illegal immigration, unregistered taxis, homelessness, and unruly market trading. (Sobianin will reemerge as a crucial figure in the post-election anti-immigration campaign, as we shall see later.) These last three problems were also, through the use of vague footage and repeated reports on various labor, sanitation, registration, and legal violations and irregularities, indirectly linked with the problem of “migrants,” that is, “other” people who should not be “here.”³⁵

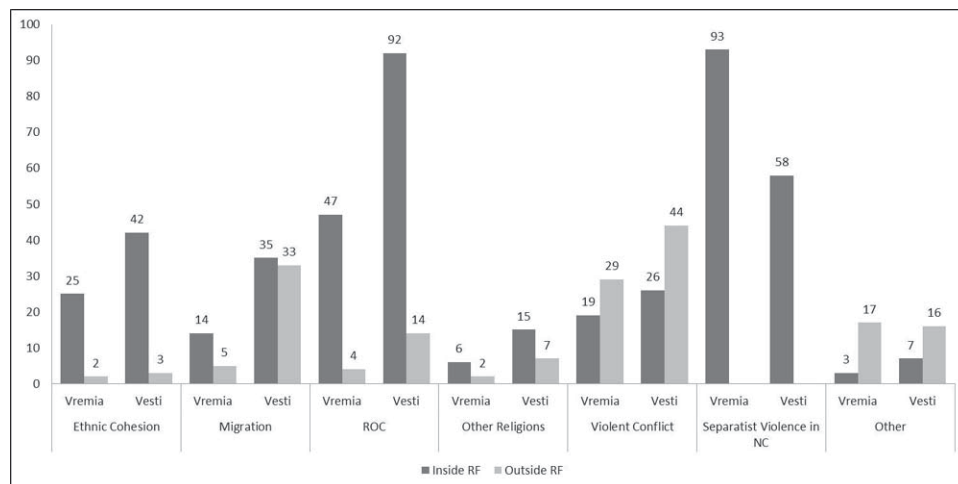


FIG. 2 Frequency of ethnicity-related news (inside and outside Russia) by category on “Vremia” and “Vesti” (September 2010–May 2012).

Yet in the context of celebrating Russia’s multiethnicity as a major strength, with its roots in imperial and Soviet history, broadcasters at times reiterated the pronouncements of Russia’s leaders to the effect that Central Asian migrants were “our former countrymen” (*v proshlom zhiteli odnoi strany*) and “today’s compatriots” (*sootechestvenniki*); following the collapse of the USSR they became foreigners in the legal, but not the cultural, sense—a generally sympathetic attitude.³⁶ Significantly, the state-aligned broadcasters rarely mentioned the religious affiliations of migrants, including those from predominantly Muslim areas such as Central Asia, usually taking note of it only in reference to religious holidays. Overall, then, broadcasters tended to follow the Kremlin’s line and described Russia’s

³⁵Aleksandr Buzaladze, “Zhizn’ gastarbaitera,” “Vesti nedeli,” November 28, 2010, <http://vesti7.ru/archive/news?id=22243>.

³⁶“Poedinok,” *Rossia1*, November 25, 2010, <http://poedinok.net/mixail-leontev-i-yulij-gusman/>. See also Oleg Glukhikh, “Gastarbaitery-nelegaly prosiat o vysylke,” *Vesti.ru*, August 26, 2011, <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=550142>; and “ChP na krasnodarskoi stroike: Migrant rabotali nelegal’no,” *Vesti.ru*, December 28, 2011, <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=673763>.

multicultural nature within the framework of centuries of peaceful co-existence between Orthodoxy and Islam.³⁷

At the same time, Russian television coverage of migration-related issues shared with media across the world the problem of amorphous terminology. Russian television stories on migration not only utilized the terms “migrant” or “emigrant” but also applied, often indiscriminately and interchangeably, such loaded, negatively charged labels as “illegals” (*nelegal'nye/nelegaly*) and “guest workers” (*gastarbeitery*).³⁸ Seemingly more neutral words, such as “newcomers” or “visitors” (*priezhi*) and “foreigners” (*inostrantsy*), were also used in ways which implied that migrants did not belong to the national community. Overall, then, this relatively careful coverage contained the potential for othering and discursive exclusion, a dramatic intensification of which we witnessed in the post-election period.

IDEOLOGICAL SHIFTS OF PUTIN’S THIRD PRESIDENCY

The presidential election and its immediate aftermath saw an important shift in official discourse, creating a new context in which the anti-immigration campaign on state-aligned television should be understood. Some of the trends in this period were not new, but they did signal the radicalization of earlier developments, such as the strategy, introduced in the middle of the last decade, of legitimizing Russia’s political regime by repeatedly identifying, and then demonizing, various groups purported to be “enemies” of Russia. Foreign enemies are usually located in the “West,” which is described as conspiring with a “fifth column” inside Russia. The concept of “internal enemies,” Stalinist in origin, is thus adapted to new circumstances and made part of the dominant Kremlin-sponsored discourse.³⁹ During Putin’s third term, the state-aligned media have intensified the search for “enemies” through well-orchestrated campaigns that tend to target people against whom there are widespread societal prejudices.

New trends are also evident. Among the main ones is the decision to move away from maintaining the legitimacy of the regime by appealing to broad sections of Russian society through a diverse, contradictory, and often deliberately ambiguous set of messages concerning the nature of Russian state- and nationhood. The new approach discursively divides society into a pro-Putin majority and others, defined as pro-Western, anti-Russian outcasts.⁴⁰ For “the majority,” new ideologically charged narratives have been articulated, designed in response to the public protest movement of 2011–12, which, to the Kremlin’s considerable concern, raised the possibility of pro-Western liberals and Russian ethno-

³⁷Aleksandr Balitskii, “Opasnost' razloma,” “Vesti nedeli,” November 20, 2011, <http://vesti7.ru/archive/news?id=29983>.

³⁸A German calque, in the Russian context, the term facilitates the discursive construction of migrants as not belonging.

³⁹Vladislav Surkov, as deputy head of the Presidential Administration, played a key role in the articulation of the Putin regime’s new discourse, based on the notion of the “internal enemy,” acting in cahoots with external forces to undermine the Russian statehood. See Surkov, “Natsionalizatsiia budushchego,” *Ekspert* 43 (November 2006), also available at http://expert.ru/expert/2006/43/nacionalizatsiya_budushchego.

⁴⁰Ilya Yablokov, “Pussy Riot as Agent Provocateur: Conspiracy Theories and the Media Construction of Nation in Putin’s Russia,” *Nationalities Papers* 42:4 (2014): 622–36.

nationalists coming together in a joint critique of Putin's regime.⁴¹ Pro-Western liberals have been a target of systematic Kremlin-sponsored attacks since the mid-2000s and were the focus of the particularly negative media coverage during the 2011–12 electoral cycle. In turn, isolationist ethnic Russian nationalism, which urges the government to "Stop Feeding the Caucasus" and turns a (Muslim) migrant into a threat to the Russian nation, was singled out for special criticism in Putin's electoral article on the "national question," and in a subsequent authoritative statement on Russian national identity he made in a speech at Valdai in September 2013.⁴² Indeed, this ethnonationalist vision of the Russian nation (which is framed by the explicit exclusion of the "ethnic other" from the Russian national body) contradicts the official Kremlin-sponsored representation of Russia as the center of the Eurasian Union, which includes parts of Central Asia and is built on a history of interaction between Orthodox Christianity and Islam.

Yet the most powerful new narrative which has crystallized in the first eighteen months of Putin's third presidency is able, as we will see below, to accommodate some of the arguments of isolationist Russian ethnonationalists. This new narrative represents Russia as the bastion of traditional, conservative values that have long been under assault in the West because of the ill-conceived multicultural policies of Western governments and misplaced "political correctness." Scholars tend to emphasize differences between the narrative about the defense of traditional values and the rhetoric of anti-Kremlin Russian ethnonationalism. Marlene Laruelle, for instance, emphasizes that, in contrast to Russian ethnonationalism, the promotion of a traditional-values agenda cannot create the foundation for a political movement that would pose a challenge to the Kremlin's legitimacy. In Laruelle's view, because the traditional-values narrative tends to stigmatize sexual minorities rather than ethnic ones, it lacks the potential to foster destabilizing ethnic tensions. This narrative, she argues, also can accommodate "the re-traditionalization taking place in Russia's Muslim regions."⁴³ Indeed, some of the country's Muslim leaders have welcomed the moral conservatism of this narrative.

This article offers a different understanding of the multifaceted societal and political impact of the new narrative. In fact, as we shall see, the television anti-immigration campaign revealed the narrative's potential to target not only sexual but also ethnic minorities, and to not only accommodate Islam but also to represent it as a violent religion directly undermining the very foundation of European (Christian) civilization. "Traditional values," of course, is a vague concept that can be filled with different meanings. In media reports and the Kremlin's rhetoric, these values embrace not only "multi-child families" and traditional marriages (as opposed to "same-sex partnerships"), but also, first and foremost, the religious and cultural traditions of "the majorities" in Russia and the West.⁴⁴ The latter

⁴¹Pål Kolstø, "Contemporary Russian 'National Democrats': What Kind of Nation, What Kind of Democracy?" Paper presented at the annual convention of the British Association for Slavic and East European Studies, Cambridge, April 2014.

⁴²"Zasedanie mezhdunarodnogo diskussionnogo kluba 'Valdai,'" <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/19243>.

⁴³Marlene Laruelle, "Conservatism as the Kremlin's New Toolkit: An Ideology at the Lowest Cost," *Russian Analytical Digest* (November 8, 2013): 2–4.

⁴⁴See, for instance, Putin's Valdai speech of September 2013, <http://www.rg.ru/2013/09/19/stenogramma-site.html>.

are often explicitly identified as Christian and European, thus carrying a strong potential for othering non-Christians and “non-Europeans.” The defense of a traditional-values agenda thus can become a tool for co-opting some Russian ethnonationalist sentiments into the official discourse.

One indication that such co-optation has become the regime’s strategy was the appointment as deputy prime minister in December 2011 of Rogozin, who has been acting in essence as an intermediary between the government and Russian ethnonationalists. Significantly, his staged raid on the Dushanbe-Moscow train, with which this article began, bore little relationship to Rogozin’s official duties in the government, but coincided with an ethnonationalist demonstration in Moscow calling for the introduction of a visa regime with Central Asia; Rogozin and the media depicted the raid as a response to public demand.⁴⁵

In Russia, exactly as in Western Europe, migration has emerged as a key issue of public concern.⁴⁶ Opposition protests during the elections sensitized the political establishment and state-aligned media to public opinion.⁴⁷ According to Levada Center surveys conducted in 1996, 2003, and 2012, attitudes toward migrants among Russia’s citizens have been getting progressively more hostile. According to the October 2012 survey, 71 percent of those polled believed that migrants contributed to the rise of crime in the country, and 65 percent agreed that migration should be reduced.⁴⁸ Federal broadcasters’ increased attention to migration issues in the post-election period should be understood against this backdrop. The popular perception of a migrant as “a destroyer of Russian culture,” which almost half of the respondents in the 2012 Levada poll supported, created the logic behind the direct link that has been drawn between the issue of migration and the new narrative about the need to defend traditional values in Russia and Europe.

Finally, it is important to reflect on how, and by whom, ideologically charged messages of the official discourse, for whose dissemination state-aligned broadcasters bear the main responsibility, are produced. In the absence of clear and relatively stable ideological signposts, which in the past were provided by Marxism-Leninism, since Putin’s accession to power, pro-Kremlin public intellectuals and media personalities (particularly prominent television journalists) have been playing a key role in developing narratives which aim to help the regime maintain power and legitimacy. It is inevitable that these personalities’ own views and prejudices make a significant impact on the nature of the official discourse. The agency of these figures is often underestimated, leading some scholars to represent the Kremlin and Putin personally as the main producers of ideological messages, while reducing the role of television journalists to passive disseminators. Thus, Putin has been credited

⁴⁵“V Moskve zavershilsia miting ‘Skazhi vizam da!’” *Russkii obozrevatel*, April 14, 2013, also available at <http://www.rus-obr.ru/node/23745>.

⁴⁶Among affluent “Western” societies, the most negative attitudes toward migration have been recorded in Britain, where the 2009–10 Citizenship survey indicated that over 75 percent of respondents favored a reduction in immigration (<http://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/uk-public-opinion-toward-immigration-overall-attitudes-and-level-concern>; and <http://www.bsa-29.natcen.ac.uk/read-the-report/immigration/introduction.aspx>).

⁴⁷See, for instance, Catherine Fitzpatrick, “Naval’nyi Answers the Hard Questions with Hard Answers,” www.interpretermag.com/navalny-answers-the-hard-questions-with-hard-answers.

⁴⁸See <http://www.levada.ru/28-11-2012/natsionalnaya-politika-i-otnoshenie-k-migrantam>.

with being the driving force behind the new “conservative morality” turn in Russian politics.⁴⁹ However, an analysis of his speeches suggests that he started explicitly utilizing the narrative about Russia as the bastion of conservative, traditional values only in the fall of 2013.⁵⁰ In the first eighteen months of his third term Putin was still referring to earlier commonly used concepts of patriotism and unidentified “spiritual values” (*dukhovnye tsennosti*).⁵¹

In the meantime, public intellectuals, media personalities, and the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church have been busy developing the regime’s new ideological narrative. The search for this new message seems to have begun when, following the first wave of protests in December 2011, representatives of the Presidential Administration, pro-Kremlin public intellectuals, and television journalists met to discuss how to react to growing public activism. Less than a month after this important meeting, representations of Russia as Europe’s last bastion of traditional (largely Christian) values began to appear on television.⁵² It is important to note that, according to the well-known writer and journalist Viktor Shenderovich, the Kremlin did not simply pass along its wishes to the journalists and other pro-Kremlin public figures attending the meeting. Instead, the two sides brainstormed about what to do.⁵³ In sum, at least temporarily, certain public intellectuals and media personalities were given greater responsibility in helping to determine the regime’s ideological direction.

Dmitrii Kiselev, who at the time we interviewed him was the deputy director general of the Russian State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company and later became one of the most active promoters of the traditional-values narrative, complained about the absence of consensual values in post-communist Russia and proudly described his role in constructing them.

I act as God, as Jesus Christ [in my programs]. On television I perform the role of the creator. This is not because I want this role. This is because since the Soviet times only twenty years have passed. ... If English journalists found themselves in such a situation, they would have done the same as us. We are obliged to colonize our own county, and the English are excellent colonizers. They imposed their values in many parts of the world.⁵⁴

It is unsurprising, then, that these personalities’ own views, perceptions, and prejudices would be reflected in the new narratives which the state-aligned media have been disseminating. Our interviews with television journalists indicate that they fully share the

⁴⁹Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, “The Pussy Riot Affair and Putin’s Démarche from Sovereign Democracy to Sovereign Morality,” *Nationalities Papers* 42:4 (2014): 615–21, also available at <https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/en/publications>.

⁵⁰For the first time Putin explicitly engaged with the agenda of the defense of traditional values in his Valdai speech of September 2013.

⁵¹See Putin’s comments during his meeting with the public in Krasnodar in September 2012, <http://kremlin.ru/news/16470>; and his annual address to the Federal Assembly in December 2012, www.kremlin.ru/news/17118.

⁵²Vesti.ru’s report “Patriarkh Kirill: Poias Bogoroditsy dal velikuiu nadezhdu,” January 7, 2012, became the first example of the promotion of the new ideological message (<http://www.vesti.ru/videos?vid=389143>).

⁵³See <http://echo.msk.ru/blog/shenderovich/837971-echo/>.

⁵⁴Interview with Dmitrii Kiselev, March 27, 2013. This journalist allowed us to quote him by name. In December 2013, Kiselev was made director general of the governmental news agency Russia Today, which aims to provide coverage of Russia’s policies for foreign audiences.

broader public’s strong resentment of migrants from Central Asia and representatives of certain North Caucasian ethnic minority groups. Xenophobic prejudices were expressed without any inhibition by those journalists who pledged their loyalty to the Kremlin, as well as those who presented themselves as critical of Putin’s regime. Even a journalist who was open about his sympathies with the opposition noted that “one can be triple-tolerant toward visitors (*priezzhie*), toward differences, toward Islam, toward Muslims, but this is clearly going too far.”⁵⁵ Such attitudes facilitated the use of the traditional-values narrative for the representation of migrants and Islam as a threatening other for Russia and Europe.

TRADITIONAL VALUES, MIGRATION, AND ISLAM

Broadcasters had virtually ignored the “national question” and the issue of migration during the presidential election campaign because, according to the journalists we interviewed, the authorities had instructed the state-aligned media to avoid dwelling on contentious and sensitive issues.⁵⁶ When this restriction was lifted after the elections, ethnicity-related issues received more attention than ever before, both on television talk shows and on news programs. That Putin had identified the “national question” as a key issue facing Russia no doubt helps to explain this increased coverage, yet it does not mean that broadcasters received any clear guidelines from the Kremlin about how to cover this complex issue.⁵⁷ When broadcasts are expected to reflect both a certain pluralism of opinion (which, even if it is staged, cannot be always fully controlled), as well as the (real or perceived) public mood, coverage of controversial issues can easily acquire forms which directly contradict the Kremlin’s pronouncements. Such contradictions are particularly likely in periods of intense ideological “creativity,” involving media personalities and public intellectuals; the year following the 2012 presidential elections was one of those periods. As we shall see, in 2012–13, in their coverage of migration-related issues, the state-aligned broadcasters, particularly Rossiia, radically departed from the interpretative framework Putin had authorized at the start of his electoral campaign.

The first wayward step occurred on Arkadii Mamontov’s “Special Correspondent,” a Rossiia show that combines quasi-documentary and talk-show styles to achieve a maximum impact on viewers. Mamontov is a controversial figure. On the one hand, his show tends to focus on issues which the Kremlin considers particularly important: the “Special Correspondent” episodes devoted to the Pussy Riot affair clearly seem to have been designed to pave the way for public acceptance of the controversial actions the authorities were about to undertake.⁵⁸ On the other hand, Mamontov’s radical views and crude reporting methods mean that his output sometimes attracts criticism even from those loyal to the regime.⁵⁹

⁵⁵Interview with a Rossiia journalist, March 26, 2013.

⁵⁶Interview with a Rossiia journalist, March 29, 2013.

⁵⁷Ibid.; interview with Channel 1 journalist, August 5, 2013. See also Elisabeth Schimpfoessl and Ilya Yablokov, “Coercion or Conformism? Censorship and Self-Censorship among Russian Media Personalities and Reporters in the 2010s,” *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 22:2 (2014): 295–311.

⁵⁸The series on the Pussy Riot affair, broadcast between April and October 2012, was titled “Provokatory.”

⁵⁹Interview with Mamontov, March 28, 2013. Mamontov allowed us to quote him by name.

In May 2012, Mamontov's program marked the start of what turned into a fully fledged anti-immigration campaign on Rossiia. He returned to the same issue in October 2012 and then again a year later. The very titles of the three broadcasts—"Chuzhie?" "Chuzhie-2," and "Chuzhie-3"—indicated the presenter's propensity for othering migrants.⁶⁰ Significantly, Mamontov first selected the title "Aliens" for an August 2010 program focused on foreign "mercenaries" fighting in Chechnia, non-Russian aliens in every sense.⁶¹ In 2012, however, the same label was applied to citizens of former Soviet states, particularly in Central Asia, who came to work in Russia.

Mamontov's first instalment of the series, "Chuzhie?" introduced the traditional-values concept as a frame for discussing migration. The issue of values was raised at the very start of the show when two members of the panel disagreed on whether migrants from Central Asia and Transcaucasia should be regarded as compatriots or aliens. A liberal journalist, Mikhail Gusman, insisted that these migrants were compatriots, people who shared with Russian citizens a set of values developed back in the Soviet period. An expert on Central Asia countered by suggesting that most current migrants were in fact aliens, young people who grew up in the post-Soviet period and so had values sharply at odds with those of the Slavic majority in Russia. Subsequent episodes featuring incidents involving migrants obviously intended to support the latter view. Migrants were depicted as assaulting traditional values of family (migrants killed our children), women as mothers of the nation (migrants sexually harassed and raped them), and respect for the elderly (a Second World War veteran was robbed by an Uzbek migrant). They also brought to Russia their "barbaric customs," such as eating food with their hands—one such scene was used as the visual background for an episode's discussion.

A majority of the panel, meanwhile, rejected the argument that the Russian economy could not function without migrants, and that multiethnicity was a source of strength for Russia. The moderator suggested to the agreeing participants that the turn toward exclusionary Russian ethnonationalism was inevitable in response to what seemed to be uncontrolled population movement. The program's participant, whose teenage daughter, Lena, was killed by a Tajik migrant, concluded: "On a daily basis the incoherent migration policies turn hundreds of people into nationalists." Mamontov immediately endorsed this conclusion by saying that Lena's parents had never been nationalists, "but are now on the verge" of being converted. Mamontov explicitly criticized the Eurasian Union, a pet project of the Kremlin to create a political and economic union between Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. "Let us see how a woman, a voter, feels about the Eurasian Union," Mamontov intoned, whereupon he opened the floor to a woman whom he introduced as the victim of an attempted rape by an Uzbek migrant.⁶²

⁶⁰"Chuzhie?" Rossiia1, May 30, 2012, http://russia.tv/video/show/brand_id/3957/video_id/130159; "Chuzhie-2," October 9, 2012, http://russia.tv/video/show/brand_id/3957/video_id/165399; "Chuzhie-3," October 2, 2013, http://russia.tv/video/show/brand_id/3957/episode_id/648564/video_id/648564/viewtype/picture.

⁶¹"Obratnaia storona: Chuzhie," August 31, 2010, <http://video.yandex.ru/users/warchechnya-ru/view/148/?cauthor=warchechnya-ru&cid=1>.

⁶²"Chuzhie?"

"Chuzhie-2," broadcast in October 2012, introduced another element into the discussion of migration, drawing parallels between, rather than contrasting, the situation in Russia and the West. A leading spokesperson, representing "the Western view," was Marine Le Pen, the president of France's right-wing French Front National. She condemned "the threat posed to French identity" by migrants who brought to France "a baggage of shocking customs," simultaneously praising Russia's determination to defend traditional European values. Mamontov's program then discussed at length the violation of "European norms" of behavior in the suburbs of Paris, home to many migrants from predominantly Muslim societies. It was their alien (Islam-influenced) gender relations and dietary habits that made these areas so unappealing to the "indigenous French," the program maintained. Even "traditional (French) butchers" were driven out of these areas, sometimes violently. Rather than identifying with traditional Islam in opposition to degenerate Western culture, Mamontov aligned himself with the West against the absolute alterity of the Muslim migrant.

Finally, Mamontov's series redefined the reasons for the reported failure of Western multiculturalism. As we have seen, in earlier television coverage Russian broadcasters had taken West European governments to task for their indifference to migrants and their unwillingness to integrate them.⁶³ Now, however, Western multiculturalist policy was accused of being too tolerant of non-European minorities' and migrants' deviant behavior, and for being unwilling to defend European Christian values. These dramatic representations of the "clash of civilizations" and "conflict of cultures" purportedly destroying Western Europe seem to serve a double purpose. They bolster demands for tougher measures against migration in Russia "before it is too late," and they also imply that, in contrast to Western Europe, the upper echelons of the Russian leadership do not suffer from misplaced tolerance and are, therefore, able to govern effectively.⁶⁴

This new representation of migrants on television, which Mamontov's show inaugurated, continued in news reports on both Channel 1 and Rossiia. Before 2012, although talk shows such as Mamontov's occasionally included controversial and provocative arguments, news reporting tended to be more balanced and controlled. As the anti-immigration campaign unfolded, however, this distinction between different television genres became blurred. In 2012–13 television news reporters began adopting new frames. Islam, which almost never had been referred to in connection with migration, now emerged alongside ethnicity as the main frame for explaining migrants' attitudes and actions. The migrant, identified as a Muslim, was now systematically contrasted and represented as a threat to the "indigenous European" citizen, identified as a Christian. The main societal cleavage in Europe thus appeared to be between Christianity and Islam.

Another frame became the binary opposition between European majorities and non-European ethnic minorities. Diverse elements were used to construct and contrast the two groups. Differences in culture and religion were particularly emphasized, while the theme of family values and sexual orientation played a subsidiary, yet still important role. The coverage revealed the tendency of both Russian and European media to draw sweeping,

⁶³"Chuzhie-2." For a detailed analysis of different interpretations of the multiculturalism notion in Russia see Elena Chebankova, "Contemporary Russian Multiculturalism," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 28:3 (2012): 336–37.

⁶⁴This argument is made, for instance, in "Chuzhie-2" and "Chuzhie-3" programs.

generalized conclusions on the basis of individual incidents, and to establish discursive links between seemingly unconnected issues.

Channel 1's "Vremia" systematically applied these three frames to discussing migration-relation issues in Europe, continuing the pre-election tendency of avoiding reporting on migration in Russia. Rossiia's "Vesti," however, covered migration in both Europe and Russia. In relation to the latter, in addition to voicing concerns about Central Asian migrants, "Vesti" also extended its negative coverage to "internal migrants" (*vnutrennie migranty*) from Russia's North Caucasus regions.

The first intensive wave of anti-immigration reports swept television news in December 2012–January 2013, around the time of Christmas celebrations. This coverage clearly demonstrated that the main focus of the new narrative about the need to defend traditional values was not on the promotion of patriarchal gender relations and stigmatization of sexual minorities, which attracted the main attention of Western observers of the Russian scene. Instead, the new narrative primarily focuses on the centrality of religion to the formation and maintenance of those values. In fact, the stigmatization of sexual minorities often takes place with reference to Christian beliefs.

Such a focus has been reflected in the television coverage since 2012 to be *subsequently* explicitly endorsed by Putin in his September 2013 Valdai speech and his annual address to the Federal Assembly at the end of that year.⁶⁵ Addressing the audience in Valdai, which contained many foreigners, Putin spoke about "the values inherent in Christianity and other world religions," which included Islam. However, most of the speech was about traditional values, which, in the president's depiction, were rooted in Christianity alone. These were the traditional values of Europe, "in the heart of which," Putin stressed, he was placing Russia. It is this Christian tradition, the president seemed to suggest, that allowed "democracy, freedom, absence of racial discrimination, and tolerance of secularism" to develop and flourish in Europe. Putin's interpretations implied the superiority of "European values," and their difference from the traditional values of others (Islam?) that were not conducive to democracy and not necessarily tolerant of secularism. It is significant that in neither of the speeches did the president make any references to non-European migrants in Europe or Russia. Even though, like his earlier pronouncements, Putin's speech reflected a hierarchical view of peoples and cultures, implicitly placing Russia and Europe at the top of the civilizational ladder, nowhere did he explicitly criticize Islam or other religious and cultural traditions.

Channel 1 and Rossiia, however, did not exercise such caution. Their coverage portrayed Christianity and its values as under mortal threat from migrant customs and beliefs that they represented as being influenced by Islam. A number of their reports blurred the boundary between "radical Islam" and Islam in general.

In December 2012, with the Christmas holidays as their backdrop, both channels began systematically expressing concerns about this "threat." A controversy over funding the erection of a Christmas tree in a public space in a small Danish town encouraged Russian news reporters to raise the alarm about "the cultural transformation of the continent" of Europe, which Western governments not only did not try to prevent, but ultimately

⁶⁵See the sources cited in footnotes 44 and 51.

encouraged through their policies of favoring minority cultures at the expense of the "indigenous" majority. A report on "Vremia," suggestively titled "Christmas Was almost Stolen from Denmark," informed viewers that a local housing association dominated by Muslim migrant residents did not hesitate to allocate €10,000 for a celebration of the major Muslim holiday of Kurban Bairam, but it refused to give a much smaller amount for buying a Christmas tree.⁶⁶ "Some new residents in our country do not respect our traditions," one local Dane was quoted as saying. "A Christmas tree is a symbol of a Christian holiday, and this is why it is so important to people," the reporter explained.

Similarly to what we would later find in Putin's Valdai speech, the reporter also linked Christianity to Europe's values of democracy and tolerance. But in contrast to the president, he explicitly contrasted these values to those of Islam. During the controversy around the Christmas tree, the reporter for "Vremia" explained, "indigenous Danes" responded to the "insult" they received from Muslim migrants with a calm and measured debate. In contrast, when a Danish artist produced cartoons of the Prophet Mohamed, Muslims resorted to senseless violence, threatening to kill the artist. "Currently," the reporter went on, "Danes have received a clear message about the level of tolerance they can expect when they become a minority" in their own country. The fear that Europeans could be turned into minorities was regularly whipped up by news reports, be they about Denmark, France, Norway, or Sweden.⁶⁷

While the issue of traditional gender and sexual relations seldom appeared in Channel 1's pronouncements about migrants and Islam, Rossiia intensively exploited it, particularly in "Vesti nedeli," its Sunday news roundup, which Kiselev edited at the time. His program made a direct link between what was presented as Western governments' misplaced tolerance of sexual minorities and the problems Western societies experienced with migration.

In January 2013, for instance, "Vesti" gave huge publicity to an incident in one of London's suburbs where a group of young Muslim men attempted to begin policing the way women dressed. Titled in a way to turn one incident into a general problem, "London Will Start Living According to Sharia Law," the report gave voice to a local "indigenous Englishman" who insisted that "the state supports other religions ... but when it comes to Christianity, the situation is different."⁶⁸ The reporter then explained that this person lost his job because "he refused to offer counselling to same-sex couples, as it contradicted his Christian beliefs." The individual was quoted as further explaining that "nothing like that could have happened to a Muslim, because this would be regarded as not politically correct."

A further escalation of the anti-immigration campaign on both channels took place in May 2013, in response to the murder in London of a British soldier by two Islamists of Nigerian descent and to riots in Stockholm. In its coverage of the murder, "Vesti" again resorted to linking into a single narrative disparate issues, some of no obvious relevance to

⁶⁶Mikhail Antonov, "U Danii chut' ne ukrali rozhdestvo," "Vesti nedeli," December 2, 2012, <http://www.vesti7.ru/archive/news?id=38864>.

⁶⁷See, for instance, *ibid.*; and Anton Chechulinskii, "Pogromy v Stokgol'me," "Voskresnoe vremia," May 26, 2013, <http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/233811>.

⁶⁸Aleksandr Khabarov, "London zazhivet po shariatu," Vesti.ru, January 27, 2013, <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=1016525>.

the incident. Noting that the murder shocked Britain, Kiselev argued that what had happened, in fact, followed its own logic, which Western governments were unable to comprehend because they were hostage to “political correctness” and their own multiculturalist rhetoric. “It’s time to shake off your stupor and begin recognizing certain things,” Kiselev appealed to Western elites:

Let’s begin with recognizing gender differences. There are men and women. They are different. There are different civilizations on this planet. And if you occasionally bomb them, you disturb the balance. Then be ready to accept the consequences: You will have more and more migrants from the civilizations you have disturbed. Your soldiers will be publicly hacked to pieces on the streets of your capitals.⁶⁹

That same month, riots in Stockholm afforded both “Vesti” and “Vremia” further opportunities to dwell on Europe’s migration problem. The coverage was framed by the narrative about the inherent inability of most migrants to integrate. More so than in any other reports, these represented Islam as the main marker of migrants’ identities, and the main obstacle to their integration. A “Vesti” reporter concluded, for instance, that whereas there were different views about the causes of the riots,

according to some observers, there are reasons, which are more frightening [than unemployment or poor education]. When rebels clashed with the police they shouted “Allah Akbar”; this means that it is precisely Islam that has become the main marker of their self-identification.⁷⁰

The reporter went on to criticize a parliamentary deputy in Germany for suggesting that Western governments do not do enough to integrate migrants (a conclusion Russian broadcasters had previously drawn themselves):

This lady, as all other ideological orators, has a gob (*glotka*), but no ears. She seems not to have heard how the London murderers [of the above-mentioned soldier] were saying “we” about Muslims in Afghanistan and “they” about the British, one of whom they had just murdered.⁷¹

Although never constituting the main frame for reporting about migrants, unemployment was also referred to in the coverage of the riots. These references, however, were used not in order to explain possible sources of discontent, but to further stigmatize migrants and Muslims, representing them as “parasites” on Europe’s welfare states. “Many [migrants] have never even tried to find employment,” and “43 percent of migrants in [France] have never looked for work,” viewers were told.⁷² The underlying message of many of these

⁶⁹Kiselev’s introduction to Aleksandr Khabarov, “Dzhikhad bednykh s podgotovkoi v internete,” “Vesti nedeli,” May 26, 2013, <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=1088327>.

⁷⁰Vladimir Kabeev, “V Shvetsii ne utikhaiut nochnye besporiadi,” Vesti.ru, May 27, 2013, <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=1088638>.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Olga Skabeeva, “Piataia respublika mozhet stat' musul'manskoi,” “Vesti nedeli,” February 24, 2013, <http://vesti7.ru/news?id=39796>; and “Voskresnoe vremia,” May 26, 2013, <http://www.ltv.ru/news/world/233811>.

reports was that while European governments “claim that visitors adapt,” it is “in reality ... the indigenous people who are expected to adapt” and they are turned into “refugees in their own countries.”⁷³

RUSSIA’S MIGRATION PROBLEM IN THE NEWS

In contrast to their earlier reporting, which like Putin’s pre-election article contrasted the ways in which Europe and Russia managed diversity, the broadcasters’ post-election coverage represented Russia as sharing with Europe the problems arising from migration and experiencing similar threats to the security, welfare, and identity of Russia’s “indigenous population” (implicitly equated with ethnic Russians or Slavs). As one news report on the Stockholm riots stated: “Here in Russia, we need to carefully follow these events. We live in a single world and, unfortunately, we share common problems.”⁷⁴

Threats to Russia, viewers were told, were further exacerbated by foreign intelligence services that tried to use migration and Islam to trigger the country’s disintegration. Thus in the context of the murder in London and the Stockholm riots, “Vesti” publicized a statement made by the deputy head of the Federal Security Service (FSB) to the effect that “foreign intelligence services” used illegal immigration to organize “subversive activity to the detriment of Russian security,” including terrorism.⁷⁵ FSB officials have in the past attempted to represent migration as a major security threat to the country, but while their statements were dramatically reported by Russian print and online newspapers, until 2012 the two main federal television channels had refrained from covering them.⁷⁶

During the campaign, “Vesti” represented Islam as the core identity marker of migrants from Central Asia and the Transcaucasian state of Azerbaijan, even though, for instance, in Azerbaijan the proportion of people who regard Islam as the core of their identity is reportedly below 10 percent.⁷⁷ The building of mosques in Moscow and other Russian cities with large concentrations of migrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus began to be framed with reference to the conflict of cultures and values, whereas in the past opposition from local non-Muslim residents would be explained with reference to logistics, such as transport problems. In a “Vesti nedeli” report of September 2012 about mass protests in the Moscow suburb of Mitino against the building of an Islamic center and mosque, a local resident was quoted as saying: “Please understand us, we want to live in our own cultural environment. We like it; we do not want anything else.”⁷⁸

⁷³Chechulinskii, “Pogromy v Stokgol'me.”

⁷⁴Kabeev, “V Shvetsii ne utikhaiut nochnye besporiadki.”

⁷⁵“Illegal Migration ‘National Security Threat’ – FSB,” RIA Novosti, May 30, 2013, http://en.rian.ru/military_news/20130530/181423829/Illegal-Migration-National-Security-Threat—FSB.html; “FSB: Sredi nelegal'nykh migrantov deistvuiut diversanty i shpiony,” Vesti.ru, May 30, 2013, <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=1089764>.

⁷⁶Vladimir Mukomel', “Rossiiskie diskursy o migratsii,” <http://polit.ru/article/2004/11/30/demoscope179/>.

⁷⁷Tadeusz Swietochowski, “Azerbaijan: The Hidden Faces of Islam,” *World Policy Journal* 19 (Fall 2002), originally available at <http://www.worldpolicy.org/journal/articles/wpj02-3/swietochowski.html>, but now currently available at http://www.islamawareness.net/Asia/Azerbaijan/aj_article002.html.

⁷⁸Aleksandr Rogatkin, “Ne rezinovaia?” “Vesti nedeli,” September 29, 2012, <http://www.vesti7.ru/archive/news?id=37263>.

In the past, television news reports on what the Russian media call “radical Islam” contrasted it to Russia’s “traditional, peaceful, and moderate Islam.” During the anti-immigration campaign, some reports implied that this “moderate Islam” was a thing of the past and had now been replaced by a new, violent tradition that had no respect for the Russian way of life and values. This juxtaposition between the past and the present framed a “Vesti nedeli” report on February 24, 2013. It began by discussing the erection of a mosque in the center of St. Petersburg in the early 1900s, on the occasion of the Romanov Dynasty’s tercentenary. This mosque, the reporter explained, was “a symbol of the allegiance of Russia’s Muslims to the crown of the Russian Empire.”⁷⁹ In contrast, the reporter continued, “the 400th anniversary of the Romanov Dynasty was marked by a huge fight, organized by Muslims from Azerbaijan.” The reason for the change, this and other reports suggested, was the loss of their own traditional values by migrants. These days, after prayers in one of the largest mosques in St. Petersburg, those attending the service visit “Mecca,” which “is not in Saudi Arabia,” the program told its viewers, but “is a shop with such a name.” The reporter thus suggested a causal link between Azeri migrants’ anti-social behavior and the commercialization of their religious tradition.

Other reports claim that migrants in Russia not only do not adapt to the Russian majority’s norms but also often forget their own values. How this argument relates to the claim that Islam remains the core of their identity is not explained. In a “Vesti nedeli” report of June 2013 with the provocative title “Ethnic Criminality Is Suffocating the Capital,” the reporter asserted that most armed robberies, thefts, and rapes in the capital were committed by Central Asian migrants and then asked rhetorically: “Imagine that you [an Uzbek] attacked an old woman not in Moscow, but in your own place, in Samarkand? They would kill you there for that. But because we will not kill you here, you allow yourself to behave in such a way.”⁸⁰ On the one hand, the report argued that migrants disregarded not only Russia’s values but also those of their own communities (respect for the elderly). On the other, it implied that the norms of the migrants’ own societies were violent and backward, as capital punishment appeared to be the only means of keeping people in check.

A similar idea about migrants forgetting their cultural and behavioral norms when coming to “Russia” also framed a “Vesti nedeli” report of October 7, 2012, about an event which received much publicity in the media—a shooting at a wedding in Moscow. Broadcasters called the people involved in the shooting “guests” and emphasized that they did not belong in the capital, nor, indeed, in Russia in general; the “Vesti nedeli” reporter, meanwhile, made sweeping, generalized conclusions about the “ethnic group” to which those involved in the shooting belonged. With reference to the controversial neo-Eurasianist thinker Lev Gumilev, the reporter told viewers that alongside instances where different ethnicities coexisted harmoniously, there could also be highly destructive patterns of cohabitation, in which one ethnic group lived as a parasite (*glist*) or a cancerous metastasis

⁷⁹Vitalii Lukashev, “Islamskaia ekspansiia,” “Vesti nedeli,” February 24, 2013, <http://vesti7.ru/news?id=39795>.

⁸⁰Evgenii Popov, “Etnicheskie kriminalnye dushit stolitsu,” “Vesti nedeli,” June 26, 2013, <http://www.vesti7.ru/news?id=40872>.

in the body of another.⁸¹ The fact that the “ethnic group” thus depicted were Dagestanis—residents of the North Caucasus and, in fact, citizens of the Russian Federation—did not stop the reporter from making such inflammatory comments.

Labeling *bona fide* Russian citizens who belong to certain ethnic minority groups as “migrants” has been a distinct feature of the Russian discourse of migration for a decade now. The origins of current understandings of “internal migration” (*vnutrenniaia migratsiia*) can be traced to the specificity of Russian imperial and Soviet nationalities policies. Those who call North Caucasians “migrants” (often unconsciously) evoke the former colonial status of the North Caucasus, the legacy of which the Soviet integrationist project did not overcome. Furthermore, the administrative division of the Soviet Union and today’s Russian Federation into multiple administrative units named after “titular nationalities,” and the representation of these units as national homelands, facilitate the prejudicial application of terms like “migrants,” “guests,” and “visitors” to Russia’s citizens from certain minority groups.

The fact that North Caucasians are Russia’s citizens had, until recently, placed restraints on how Channel 1 and Rossiia reported population movement from the North Caucasus to other parts of Russia. This “restraint” was manifested, for instance, in the channels’ coverage of the Manezhnaia riots in December 2010. Even though initial reports evoked such concepts as the “conflict of cultures” and “ethnic criminality,” the final annual bulletins of “Vremia” and “Vesti nedeli” purged from their coverage all references to “internal migration” and threats to Russia’s multiethnicity ideal arising from cultural differences.⁸²

In the course of its anti-immigration campaign, “Vesti nedeli” not only broadcast occasional news reports about incidents of antisocial behavior of North Caucasian “migrants,” but also carried a highly alarmist special series on the “internal migration” of people from the North Caucasus into “Russia proper.” The then chief editor of “Vesti nedeli” proudly noted in an interview with our team that under his leadership in December 2012 his program “practically staged” (*instsinirovali fakticheski*) the topic of the migration of North Caucasians into the Stavropol region in southeast Russia.⁸³ The December 9 broadcast included particularly dramatic representations of life in Stavropol, in which the reporter spoke about an “invasion” (*ekspansii*) of North Caucasians into this predominantly ethnic Russian region. The report divided residents of Stavropol, all of whom were Russia’s citizens, into two clearly demarcated and mutually antagonistic groups—North Caucasians and others (ethnic Russians and representatives of Russia’s other “European” nationalities, such as ethnic Germans). Their interaction was depicted through the prism of the “conflict of cultures,” in the course of which North Caucasians posed a threat to values and traditions of the Russian/European majority. As in many other reports on “migration” during the campaign, Islam emerged as a key marker of identity of the “out-group.” North Caucasians, the report emphasized, were threatening women, children, and the very way of life of

⁸¹Dmitrii Mel'nikov, “Natsional'nyi simbioz: Primeta nashogo vremeni,” “Vesti nedeli,” October 7, 2012, <http://www.vesti7.ru/archive/news?id=37544>.

⁸²Stephen Hutchings and Vera Tolz, “Fault Lines in Russia’s Discourse of Nation: Television Coverage of the December 2010 Moscow Riots,” *Slavic Review* 71 (Winter 2012): 887, 889.

⁸³Interview with Kiselev.

non-Muslim residents. “We are afraid for our children. Simply afraid,” one resident was quoted as saying. Russian women were also subjected to regular sexual assaults by Caucasians, the report told viewers.

According to the report, the North Caucasian “migrants,” like their counterparts from Central Asia, forgot their own customs and traditions. Abandoning Russia’s own peaceful and moderate tradition of Islam, they now brought alien customs and beliefs from Saudi Arabia, with which even local imams were powerless to deal. “I am a lonely warrior [against radical Islam] on a battlefield which is open to enemy fire from all sides,” one of the imams was quoted as saying.⁸⁴

In this coverage, it was not just foreign “extremist literature” that was depicted as a threat to Russia’s security and interethnic and interconfessional peace; the hijab also emerges as a symbol of an alien tradition, imposed on Russia’s Muslim women by their husbands and fathers, whom the report associated with violence and crime. The hijab, viewers were told, was not widely worn in the Caucasus in the prerevolutionary period, but now it was increasingly seen as an essential symbol of Islam, even though wearing it created conflicts in Stavropol.⁸⁵

In the course of the television anti-immigration campaign, the Kremlin refrained from making overt anti-migrant statements. In fact, in the course of his election campaign in January 2012, Putin himself warned against the application of the term “migrant” to citizens of the Russian Federation.⁸⁶ The only comment Putin offered with regard to migration from Central Asia came in his annual address to the Federal Assembly in December 2012, when he suggested that citizens of the CIS states, other than Belarus and Kazakhstan, would be required in future to use foreign passports, rather than domestic ID cards, when entering Russia. Significantly, “Vesti” misrepresented Putin’s statement, suggesting that the president promised to introduce a visa regime with the Central Asian states.⁸⁷ The introduction of visas and strict border controls with Central Asia is a demand of many Russian nationalist politicians and activists, often voiced in the media, and it has a popular resonance. It is unclear whether Rossiia’s report was merely sloppy reporting or a deliberate attempt to represent the president as responsive to popular demands.

Among influential Russian politicians, Moscow Mayor Sobianin emerged as the most prominent campaigner for restricting migration from Central Asia. Indeed, the television anti-immigration campaign partly coincided with and was linked to Moscow’s mayoral election in September 2013, in which most candidates, including the opposition candidate Aleksei Naval’nyi, made migration an important issue. Significantly, “Vesti” exaggerated the radicalism of Sobianin’s anti-immigration stance. In May 2013, for instance, it reported on a lengthy interview the candidate gave with a newspaper, covering a wide range of topics and including a variety of questions and answers about his electoral platform. But “Vesti” focused on a single provocative remark by Sobianin to the effect that “people

⁸⁴Evgenii Popov, “Kto podryvaet iug Rossii?” “Vesti nedeli,” December 9, 2012, <http://www.vesti7.ru/archive/news?id=38903>.

⁸⁵Mikhail Leont’ev, “Odnako,” Channel 1, October 23, 2012, <http://www.itv.ru/news/leontiev/218271>.

⁸⁶See Evgenii Rozhkov, “Natsional’nyi vopros: Vyzovy nashego vremeni,” “Vesti nedeli,” January 29, 2012, <http://vesti7.ru/archive/news?id=31563>.

⁸⁷Brilev, “Dmitrii Rogozin.”

who speak Russian poorly and who have cultures completely different [from ours] had better live in their own country.” It ignored, meanwhile, other statements that brought his position in line with that of the Kremlin—that is, that those Central Asians who knew Russian were “our compatriots”; that Russia’s multiethnicity was its strength; and that his Russians were traditionally welcoming to “guests.”⁸⁸ The overall result was to portray Sobianin’s position on migration as more uncompromising than, and therefore at odds with, federal policy.

In the summer and fall of 2013, Russia witnessed an increase in violent conflicts, which, in the eyes of many Russian citizens and observers, were linked to ethnicity. The most prominent of them took place in the town of Pugachev, in central Russia, and in Moscow’s Biriulevo district. Both arose from incidents between local Russian residents and “Caucasians.” One case involved a Russian citizen from Chechnia, the other a migrant from Azerbaijan. In both cases the incidents led to popular demands that the authorities deport “migrants.” Alarmed by the outbreak of major public disorder, yet unable to satisfy unconstitutional demands for deportation, which would target Russia’s own citizens, the authorities were keen to calm the situation quickly. Under the circumstances, the two main federal broadcasters’ reporting became more restrained. Rather than using the frames which would present as incompatible the values and norms of Russians and the migrant Other, they stopped labelling North Caucasians migrants and purged from their reports all references to conflicts of culture, ethnic criminality, and Islam, repeatedly insisting instead that local residents misunderstood the situation by introducing an ethnic factor into an ordinary incident induced by excessive drinking.⁸⁹ Following these events, the broad anti-immigration campaign on Channel 1 and Rossiia subsided. In addition, after the end of the mayoral election campaign in Moscow, public discussion of migration also notably declined.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between state-aligned television and the Kremlin following Putin’s reelection in March 2012 appears to be more complex than common assumptions about the regime’s increasingly authoritarian tendencies tend to suggest. Our analysis of the anti-immigration campaign indicates that, rather than being mere transmitters of the line articulated by the Kremlin, television journalists are highly proactive figures in the construction of official discourse. The first eighteen months of Putin’s third presidency was a period of heightened ideological “creativity,” as the regime felt it had to articulate a

⁸⁸See “Sobianin: Tem, kto plokho govorit po-russki, luchshe uekhat’ iz Moskvy,” *Vesti*, May 30, 2013, <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=1089939>. For the full text of Sobianin’s interview see “Sergei Sobianin ‘Moskovskim novostiam’: O migratsionnoi politike, grazhdanskoi aktivnosti i konkurentakh,” *Moskovskii novosti*, May 30, 2013, also available at http://www.mn.ru/moscow_authority/20130530/347635870.html.

⁸⁹For the coverage of the “Pugachevskii bunt” on *Vesti.ru* see <http://www.vesti.ru/theme.html?tid=104014>. See also Anatolii Lazerov, “V Zapadnom Biriulevo vobnovilis besporiadki,” “*Voskresnoe vremia*,” October 13, 2013, <http://www.itv.ru/news/crime/243862>; Pavel Pchelkin, “Podozrevaemyi v rezonansnom ubiistve v Biriulevo zaderzhan v Kolomne,” “*Vremia*,” October 15, 2013, <http://www.itv.ru/news/crime/243976>; and “Smolenskaia ploshchad schitaet zaiavleniia Biulbiul-ogly nadumannymi,” *Vesti.ru*, October 17, 2013, <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=1143088>.

clearer set of consensual values that both elites and society at large could share, while at the same time “win the trust” of the majority of the people. Prominent television personalities such as Kiselev and Mamontov played a leading role in constructing a new narrative about Russia’s defense of traditional values, inevitably allowing their own perceptions and prejudices to influence the nature of this narrative and the selection of certain groups to be targeted as “enemies” from whom these values had to be defended. Thus, in this period, the overall role of federal broadcasters in the construction of official discourse, paradoxically, increased.

Rather than returning to old Soviet models, after the 2012 elections state-aligned television reporting continued to be shaped by post-Soviet broadcasters’ requirements and social forces. Above all, these include taking into account viewers’ expectations concerning the choice of issues to be covered, maintaining at least some semblance of pluralism of opinion, and providing entertaining programming. These requirements inevitably strengthen the agency of journalists when compared to the Soviet period.

Leading television personalities, particularly at Rossiia, are overtly sympathetic to some of the positions of Russian ethnonationalists, particularly on the issues of migration and Islam, as are many ordinary Russians. It is noteworthy that, according to a public-opinion survey conducted in June 2013 by the Russian polling agency ROMIR, only a small minority of respondents (16.6 percent) believed that the coverage of Channel 1 and Rossiia exaggerated problems caused by migration; 35.8 percent thought that the channels offered coverage which well reflected reality on the ground; and 35.7 percent that the broadcasters downplayed the scale of the problems.⁹⁰

Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that, at the time of its initial construction, the new officially endorsed narrative about Russia as Europe’s last bastion of traditional values incorporated, with the help of media personalities, the main postulate of Russian ethnonationalists about the Muslim migrant as a major threat to Russian culture, security, and identity. Paradoxically, yet inevitably, this new narrative has challenged Putin’s election campaign positions claiming that multiethnicity is one of Russia’s strengths, and that Russia’s rule over the North Caucasus and its close relationship with the Central Asian states are essential components of the country’s great-power status.

Commenting on this paradoxical situation, one of the liberally inclined television reporters whom our team interviewed argued that the Kremlin had, in promoting certain official “celebrity” journalists, created “puppets” that it no longer knew how to control.⁹¹ Yet this explanation does not take into account the fact that figures such as Kiselev and Mamontov are unquestionably loyal to the regime and, therefore, even though some of their programs and reports explicitly criticize government policies, their activities cannot be read as attempts to question the regime’s legitimacy. Their anti-immigration campaign was a direct byproduct of attempts to offer news coverage which would promote the Kremlin-sponsored strategy of controlling society through polarization by identifying “enemies” represented as Russia’s absolute other. By articulating ideas which directly address real and perceived public concerns, broadcasters likewise reinforced the Kremlin’s governing

⁹⁰This opinion poll was conducted within the framework of the NEORUSS project.

⁹¹Interview with a Channel 1 journalist, March 26, 2013.

strategy, helping to foster the impression that national leaders are attentive to the concerns of the country's majority, without them having to make pronouncements which other citizens and residence might find offensive.

Yet the reporting tactics which some media personalities use are fraught with danger. Mamontov's approach, for instance, might encourage unwelcome questioning of the credibility of some of the top leaders' own pronouncements. Mamontov's programs treat performative utterances in Kremlin-sponsored discourse, such as claims that Russia is strong because of its "unity in diversity," as constative utterances subject to true/false assessments. Numerous pieces of "evidence" are then cited in order to expose these utterances as empirically false. In Kremlin-sponsored discourse, pronouncements of unity in diversity are intended as performative rebuttals of actions which foster disunity, but in the talk shows, the "truthfulness" of these pronouncements is, instead, tested against examples of street conflict and violence.

Furthermore, the anti-migration campaign also revealed that the narrative about Russia as a bastion of traditional values harbors a strong destabilizing potential. The narratives of Russian nationhood articulated during Putin's earlier presidencies were deliberately ambiguous, allowing them to accommodate a variety of positions and so diversify their appeal. Given that the traditional-values narrative tends, as we have seen, to prioritize those aspects which are explicitly associated with Europe and Christianity, its othering potential could easily trigger ethnic tensions. The new virulence with which demands to expel "the ethnic Other" were expressed throughout Russia in the summer and the fall of 2013, a virulence which forced the federal broadcasters to stop the anti-immigration campaign, bear testament to the danger.