Race and Ethnicity on Russian Television: News Coverage of the Manezhnaia Riots*

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INTRODUCTION

On 6 December 2010, in Moscow, four Spartak football fans became involved in a late-night altercation with a group of men from the North Caucasus. According to media reports, one of the fans, Egor Sviridov, was killed. Six North Caucasian men were detained, of whom five were then released. Aslan Cherkesov, from Dagestan, was remanded and later charged with Sviridov's murder (though he claimed he acted in self-defence). The event sparked mass demonstrations by Russia's vocal fan community, culminating in a violent riot on Moscow's Manezhnaia Square on December 11 as fans gathered to protest at what many saw as the dual outrage of Sviridov's murder and the apparent incompetence (or even complicity) of the law enforcement agencies. The rioters targeted their anger both at the forces tasked with reestablishing order and at representatives of Moscow's North Caucasian and Central Asian populations or anybody of suitably swarthy appearance. Numerous shocking beatings took place; several people were reportedly killed. On December 15, further violence at a counter-demonstration reportedly planned by migrant communities was largely averted. It took the re-arrest of two of the original suspects, interventions by Dmitrii Medvedev

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and Vladimir Putin and the appearance of the latter at a Sviridov memorial meeting before calm was restored. With analogous protests occurring throughout the country, Russia, ravaged by forest fires earlier in the year, was now aflame with a conflagration altogether more alarming: that of ethnic conflict with overt racist undertones.

The Manezhnaia riots delivered a serious blow to the nation-building effort, which since the end of the last century had been launched by Russia's political elites to create a sense of common purpose under the auspices of a supposedly powerful state. One of the main drivers for this policy has been the perceived need to overcome inter-ethnic differences, separatist tendencies and racist tensions by unifying Russia's diverse population under the banner of an inclusive Russian citizenship. Above all, and notwithstanding a prior racial flare-up in the Karelian town of Kondopoga in 2006, the events of December 2010 underscored the challenge facing the nation-building machine, exposing with unprecedented clarity the extent of the everyday racist resentments in today's Russia. This article explores how national television, which has been allotted a leading role in promoting the government-sponsored nation-building project, dealt with the tasks of representing Russia as a national community, interpreting the state of its ethnic relations and addressing the issue of racism in its coverage of the Manezhnaia riots.

Here we adopt a broad definition of racism as a social system that reproduces ›ethnic‹ and ›racial‹ inequalities through practices and discourses. (Shnirelman 2005: 41-65) We link the contradictions in the narratives articulated by television and its (in)effectiveness in imparting the desired message to the conceptual apparatus that it appropriates. We demonstrate that the latter has been inherited from the Soviet period and is often traceable to the pre-revolutionary, imperial era, but has now been transformed by a post-Soviet discursive environment significantly different from its predecessor. This apparatus bears the influence of hermeneutic lenses, all with distinct historical genealogies operating at various levels of the public sphere and possessing a mythical resonance which accounts for their durability. In tracing the role of the hermeneutic devices in shaping television coverage of Russia's ethnic relations in light of the Manezhnaia disturbances, we consider factors in interaction with which they are transformed and reconfigured: (a) the collapse of a single ideological framework (Marxism/Leninism) resulting in an intensification of terminological laxity and a less certain relationship between state and broadcaster; (b) an increased media openness to infiltration by ideas and media formats formerly deemed ›alien‹; (c) new interpretations of the meaning of Russian nationhood within the context of the state-sponsored promotion of a civic Russian nation (»grazhdanskaia rossiiskaia natsi-

ia«); and (d) a greater need to respond to grassroots voices beyond the parameters of approved discourse.

For the purpose of analysis we single out the hour-long Sunday news bulletins of Russia's three most important state-backed television channels (Channel 1, Rossiia and NTV), each with its subtly different approaches and emphases, and REN-TV (the one remaining independent channel with national reach). This is partly for reasons of logistical convenience. It is also because one of the key functions of the weekly overviews is to indicate the ›settled‹ view adopted by each channel in relation to significant events to which they have been compelled to react more spontaneously during the preceding days. They thus furnish insights into issues of narrative coherence.

THE HERMENEUTIC LENSES

The four channels represented Russia's ethnic relations through a set of three hermeneutic lenses. These lenses, reflecting official propagandistic myths, (semi-)academic theories and popular interpretations of events, are the friendship of the peoples, ›ethnic criminality‹ and ›culture conflict‹. The last two are of particular interest to us because of their distinct racialising undertones. A racialising worldview, while avoiding the articulation of particularly crude biologically determined hierarchies of people, tends to essentialise ethnocultural differences between people and transpose onto culture some of the prejudices commonly associated with biologically defined race. Such a perception is typical of what scholars call ›new racism‹, which, in contrast to the ›old‹ biologically deterministic racism views ethnocultural, rather than more overtly biological distinctions as having major social significance. (Todorov 1993: 91-94, 145 and Fredrickson 2002: 151-70)

Coined by Stalin in 1935 and used continually until the late Soviet period, the ›friendship of the peoples‹ metaphor emphasized the importance of achieving Soviet unity and emphasized the central role of Russians in it. Yet, despite its certain Russo-centrism, Stalin's slogan did not presuppose the transformation of the Soviet Union into a Russified nation-state and stressed instead the multi-ethnicity and multi-culturalism of the community of peoples of the USSR. (Martin 2001: 432-61) In view of the original meaning of the formula, it seems to sit 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. It is indicative that it was only within the context of the racially-motivated riots in December 2010 that the ›friendship of the peoples‹

metaphor suddenly resurfaced in the coverage of the two main state-backed channels (Channel 1 and Rossiia) after having been long in abeyance.[1] Today, as in the Soviet period, this rhetorical device aimed at emphasizing the country's unique ability to embrace ethnocultural diversity appears to be unable to mask, let alone overcome societal ethnic and racial prejudices.

In turn, the genealogy of the ›ethnic criminality‹ concept connects it with racial theories of the late nineteenth century, particularly with the Italian scientist Cesare Lombroso's school of criminology which linked people of particular anthropological types to criminality. Lombroso's ideas had their own life in Russia, as in the late imperial period when a debate took place about whether Lombroso's findings could be applied to entire ethnic groups. (Mogilner 2008: 358-96) The hypothesis of late imperial Russian anthropologists that the social norm and the social deviance were determined by the ›indigenous people‹ (›korennoe naselenie‹) of a given territory whereas migrants (›prishloe naselenie‹), deprived of links with their native soil, more easily showed inclination towards criminality (see, for instance, Erikson 1906), has acquired wide circulation in today's Russia and, as we will see below, it shaped the television interpretations of the causes of the Manezhnaia riots to a significant extent. Today this racialising understanding of ethnic criminality coexists with another definition of the concept as the occasional stratification of criminal groups along ethnic lines. In TV broadcasts as in pronouncements of various state officials and in academic (legal) texts about the relationship between ethnicity and crime, the latter interpretation is not infrequently marred by racial undertones.[2]

While the Soviet regime refrained from using overt biological explanations of social problems, it strongly essentialised ethnic differences and fostered the belief in the rigidity of ethnic boundaries. Furthermore, the perception of a special link between a single indigenous group of people (›korennoe naselenie‹) and a particular territory constituted a guiding principle of Soviet nationalities poli-

1 According to our project data – all news reports relating to inter-ethnic cohesion issues broadcast on *Vesti* and *Vremia* from September to December 2010 – the formula had not once been used between the beginning of September and the second week of December 2010. The only acknowledgement of its existence came in a report by *Vesti* on 20 September 2010 to the effect that local authorities in Moscow proposed to name a new street »Alley of the Friendship of the Peoples« (http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=393883) (accessed, 20 September 2010).

2 For an example of the application of Erikson's and Lombroso's typologies in the analysis of the causes of the Manezhnaia disturbances, see an article by the legal specialist Iu. V. Golik (2010).

cies, fostering the notion that only one group could have a legitimate claim on a particular piece of land, as well as triggering discriminatory policies against minority groups lacking their own ethnic units within the Soviet state. (Tishkov 1997: 71-79) This Soviet position constitutes a link between the pre-revolutionary views about the problematic nature of ›prishloe naselenie‹ and today's perception, reflected in TV broadcasts, of migrants as ›uprooted‹ people who have become morally corrupt because they have lost connection to their native soil. This prejudicial attitude has indeed underpinned both anti-Semitic sentiments of the Soviet period (particularly as they were manifested during the notorious anti-Cosmopolitan campaign of the late Stalin period) and today's resentments against Caucasians, who in the last decade to a large extent replaced Jews in popular perceptions of Russia's internal ›others‹.

As with the ethnic criminality ›theory‹ the culture conflict interpretation originated in Western scholarship, specifically in North American sociology of the 1930s. Echoed later in Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* theory, the culture conflict approach suggests that in complex multi-cultural societies the rules followed by some groups (e.g., immigrants) could clash with the perceptions and practices of the dominant culture. Under such circumstances, behaviour which conforms to some subcultural standards may be viewed as offensive and even criminal by wider society. (Burlakov 2004) As it is being used in today's Russia, the culture conflict theory is based on a highly essentialising understanding of ethnicity and on the perception of ethnic boundaries as clearly definable and fixed. It often presupposes a hierarchical view of cultures, with the Russian culture and traditions being viewed as the norm to which minorities are expected to adapt. While this hierarchy of cultures was already implicit in Soviet policies since the Stalin period, it is even more apparent in the current nation-building project initiated during Putin's presidency. (Prina 2011)

CHANNEL 1 AND ROSSIIA

Channel 1 and Rossiia were hesitant in responding to the Sviridov affair as they attempted to closely follow the interpretations of representatives of law enforcement organs and political leaders. At the same time, owing to its more explicit remit, Rossiia's *Vesti nedeli* differed from Channel 1's *Vremia* in the complexity of the angles it adopted and in the wider range of voices heard. The first reports on Sunday editions of *Vremia* and *Vesti* on December 12 attempted to downplay the racist nature of violence. The reporting was dominated by comments by representatives of the Moscow police and the Minister of Interior who

used euphemisms such as ›non-football slogans‹ (›nefutbolnye lozungi‹) in describing the crowds' overtly racist chants and ›left-radical youth‹ and unspecified ›extremists‹ in reference to members of extreme Russian nationalist groups participating in the disturbances. Any possibility of racist views being shared by members of football clubs (i.e. members of ›our‹ ingroup) was categorically denied. It was only towards the end of the coverage on December 12 that after showing footage of crowds of people extending their arms in a Nazi salute reporters on both channels used the expression ›radical nationalist groups‹ and mentioned attacks on ›passers-by who did not look Slavic‹. To some extent, *Vesti* went beyond what *Vremia* acknowledged at that time. The former concluded its first Sunday report with an interview with a Rossiia journalist Nikolai Svanidze, who admitted that on Manezhnaia »Nazi slogans were everywhere«.

The most detailed coverage we find in the December 19 *Vremia* broadcast which followed Medvedev's and Putin's speeches, both of which suggested that what had happened in Moscow on December 11 should be treated with the outmost seriousness. A week after the riots it became difficult to deny the racist frenzy that had gripped the Manezhnaia crowds and the extent of violence directed against non-Russians. Even though the speeches of the country's two main leaders seemed to have indicated the emergence of a more ›settled‹ official narrative about events, the *Vremia* bulletin of December 19 continued to frame its coverage in a highly contradictory way. Its Sunday edition started with the insistence that »the catalyst for the mass outrage [...] was a story not about nationalism, but corruption«. And yet, following the coverage of Medvedev's speech of December 16 which ›balanced‹ the condemnation of racially-motivated violence with criticism of the behaviour of migrants, the bulletin suddenly began to offer a different interpretation of the Manezhnaia riots. It showed YouTube clips featuring youths with shaved heads who attacked people with darker skin without any visible provocation; *Vremia* referred to the attackers as fascists or skinheads. It then ›balanced‹ the demonstration of such footage with an equal number of clips depicting young Caucasians behaving aggressively and in a highly asocial manner on Moscow streets. The programme concluded that »the number of crimes caused by extreme nationalism (›prestupleniia na nationalnoi pochve‹) was growing and growing«. In contradiction to its opening statement, halfway through the *Vremia* report ethnic relations in Russia became the context within which the Manezhnaia riots began to be interpreted.

Within this contradictory framework, *Vremia* criticized manifestations of racially motivated violence and attempted to explain its origins. Yet, these attempts demonstrate how pervasive the power of a racialising worldview has become in Russia. Certain words and concepts which in their original meaning had

nothing to do with ethnicity and race are now ethnicised and racialised. At the beginning of the December 19 bulletin, in the initial context of representing Manezhnaia as people's spontaneous response to the incident of corruption of law enforcement organs, the moderator claimed that it was quite common for frustrated youths to start directing their anger at ›strangers‹ (›chuzhie‹). According to the *Vremia* reporter »it is easy to provoke hatred of strangers« and so in Moscow »visitors (›priezzhie‹) were beaten up«. The original meaning of the words ›chuzhie‹ and ›priezzhie‹ have nothing to do with ethnicity or race as they refer to those who are not family members or friends and to those who have recently moved to a particular area. *Vremia* unreflectively adopted the current popular trend of using these words to label non-Slavs, particularly people from the Caucasus and Central Asia, without giving any consideration to the appropriateness of applying words with a strong power of distancing and othering fellow citizens of the Russian Federation.

After eventually acknowledging that the Manezhnaia riots manifested some problems with ethnic relations, the programme felt compelled to give a positive example of Russia's traditional ›friendship of the peoples‹ in a story about an Armenian boy Gagik who, when being set upon by adult males during the riots, was defended by two Russians, Lyosha and Sasha. In a performative evocation of the ›friendship of the peoples‹ myth, the reporter commented that Lyosha and Sasha did not care »what physical appearance their friend has«. In its original meaning the Soviet myth was supposed to mark the happy coexistence of different ethno-cultural traditions; in the *Vremia* coverage, however, what the myth was supposed to celebrate was reduced to a mere reference to racial distinctions.

Finally, the December 19 coverage contained an interview with the Orthodox Patriarch Kirill who shifted the blame even further than Medvedev's ›balance‹ approach onto the very victim of the riots, namely the Caucasians. Kirill evoked the controversial ›ethnic criminality‹ concept as the main cause of the riots, implying that the behaviour of the crowds on Manezhnaia was an understandable, even if extreme reaction to what for the Patriarch was a clear link between certain ethnic groups and crime further exacerbated by the corruption of law enforcement organs. In the context of *Vesti*'s more dialogical approach to reporting, a reference to the North Caucasians' albeit partial responsibility for the Manezhnaia disturbances appeared earlier than on *Vremia*, having been alluded to already in the December 12 broadcast. Evoking the ›conflict of cultures‹ theory, Svanidze spoke about »the people of alien religion and alien culture« who needed to be »taught the local norms of behaviour« if the exacerbation of ethnic tensions was to be avoided.

Both channels included the Manezhnaia riots in their surveys of the main events of the year on December 26. In these final annual broadcasts, both channels in different ways returned to their original tactic of downplaying the overall significance of the events and of their implications for the state of ethnic relations in the country. *Vremia* distilled its Manezhnaia narrative down to the simple story of an ›everyday street fight‹, purging it from any references to racial unrest. *Vesti* in turn claimed that the riots notwithstanding the ›friendship of the peoples‹ was still flourishing in Russia, whose citizens were proud of their legacy of fighting against fascism.

Overall, the two main government-backed channels failed to articulate an ›authoritative discourse‹ about the Manezhnaia riots as the coverage was unable to resolve the contradictions between the representation of Russia as a place where historically rooted, unique ›friendship of the peoples‹ was still flourishing and the narratives of ›ethnic criminality‹ and ›conflict of cultures‹, which reflected popular prejudices, so clearly shared by the reporters and the interviewed representatives of Russia's elites.

NTV

Of all the four channels, NTV most consistently reproduced ethnic and racial prejudices as it relentlessly stereotyped minority communities according to the ›ethnic criminality‹ lens. In NTV's coverage of Manezhnaia ›ethnic criminality‹ emerged as the main cause of the disturbances in particular, and ethnic tensions in Russia in general; the coherence of the channel's narrative was bolstered by selective quoting of authoritative figures and biased visual representational techniques. NTV's preferred ›investigative‹ mode (a legacy of its earlier enthrallment with Western news formats) accorded its reporters the leeway to exceed the bounds of the approved sources to which Channel 1 and Rossiia were tied and to indulge in free-ranging populist interpretations.

The first Sunday broadcast of NTV on December 12 unashamedly adopted a viewpoint close to that of the Spartak crowds, righteously incensed by the release of Sviridov's assailants whose North Caucasian origin was stressed by the report. Similarly to the first reports on Channel 1 and *Rossiia*, the only mention of racist slogans by NTV was as an ›unfair accusation‹ from unknown sources; overall the violence in the centre of Moscow was attributed to unspecified ›left radical and nationalist organisations‹, i.e., marginal actors on the fringes of the dominant ingroup. This downplaying and externalization of racially motivated

violence continued in subsequent weeks with the programme of December 26 describing the behaviour of Manezhnaia rioters as a mere ›emotional outburst‹.

The reports of December 19 and 26 were unambiguously framed by the narrative about ›problems with unintegrated diaspora communities‹ whose deviant behaviour and criminal actions, rooted in the specificity of their cultures, were presented as the main cause of social tensions across Russia. In the course of these reports the question of ›who is guilty‹ of initiating the riots was raised on several occasions, with the answer always starting with a discussion on ›migrants‹ (›priezzhie‹), ›including those from the Caucasus‹, who tended ›to behave outrageously and criminally‹ (›naglo i kriminalno‹) (December 19). Moreover, the North Caucasian republics of Russia, from where these ›guests‹ came to Moscow, were depicted as areas where ›criminal gangs have merged with law enforcement organs‹ and where even members of the political elites behaved so offensively that neighbouring Russian regions had to set up special police units to deal with North Caucasian political leaders when they came for visits. Aiming at bolstering the credibility of its coverage, NTV interviewed members of the law enforcement organs in Moscow so that they could provide statistical ›evidence‹ of ›ethnic criminality‹. The coverage furthermore suggested that the criminality of ethnic minorities was largely responsible for the incidents of corruption in local administrations and law enforcement organs across Russia. As the December 19 programme put it: »National diasporas in large cities have become criminalized; they are in cahoots with local authorities, the police…«

A selection of quotes from Medvedev and Putin's speeches was also tendentious as the biggest gloss was given to their remarks about problems with unintegrated migrants. The coverage of instances of ethnic tensions involving Russians and North Caucasians – other than Manezhnaia – always adopted the viewpoint of the Russian majority as confirmed in the use of the parenthetic phrase, »As the local people say…« On rare occasions when members of minorities were given a voice, they were quoted as reaffirming the majority viewpoint arguing that their fellow North Caucasians »bring shame on the country in which we live« (December 19).

Visual techniques further reinforced the representation of North Caucasians as the guilty party. Thus, the December 19 report on the aftermath of Manezhnaia opened with images of people in Moscow being checked for the possession of weapons. The hitherto unspecified voiceover was accompanied by footage depicting young Caucasians denying that they held 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):

»And yet they [weapons] do exist. These knives, hatchets, pistols – this entire arsenal – have been confiscated from Russian citizens marching towards each other on Moscow streets.«

The reporter's initial, even-handed phrasing of a ›general‹ problem was undermined by visual examples weighted against Caucasians. Similarly in the coverage of Putin's meeting with football fans on December 26 at which the Prime Minister gave his warning that ›inter-ethnic strife‹ posed a real threat to Russia, the camera dwelt on the darker-skinned participants as if hinting that Putin's admonitions were directed largely toward them. This was certainly the reporter's own view as he concluded that despite Russia's history of peaceful coexistence of different nationalities, in the North Caucasus as well as in the capital, a new generation has grown up who apparently needs to be taught anew what Russia is and what norms of behaviour its people have. In a further indication that this ›new generation‹ consisted of people from the Caucasus and of migrants from elsewhere, the programme ended by criticizing the St. Petersburg educational authorities for producing a Russian language textbook for children of minorities based on folk stories from the Caucasus. The reporter suggested that instead it would have been better to teach them, as everyone else, Pushkin's fairytales.

NTV's position at the boundaries of approved discourse renders the interpretative substratum from which state media outlets constructed their narrative particularly susceptible to re-inflection by the populist voices that cannot be ignored post-1991. Its former status as repository of ›progressive‹ infotainment-style television formats only aids that cause (›commercialism‹ and ›liberal democracy‹ are no longer synonymous in Russia). NTV's threshold position also allowed it to articulate a discourse with a much greater coherence than Channel I and Rossiia were able to do. The former merged to a potentially devastating effect the narrative about ›ethnic criminality‹ with criticism of the corruption of Russia's law-enforcement organs, which are themselves also, as it was implied, a victim of such criminality.

REN TV

REN TV made the clearest attempt to interpret the riots as part of a broader inter-ethnic problem, and it was most explicit in its criticism of extreme Russian nationalism and manifestations of racism. Its interpretative prisms were the opposite of those utilised by Channel 1 and Rossiia. It projected the view that ›friendship of the peoples‹ was dead in Russia, as the country was gripped by an

intense ›conflict of cultures‹. In contrast to the government-backed channels' interpretation of the riots as a one-off event, which the authorities quickly managed to put under control, REN TV spoke about »the epidemics of inter-ethnic conflicts« afflicting Russia for which multiple failures of the government and law-enforcement organs were responsible. Using Western-style semi-documentary and ›investigative‹ modes of reporting, the channel's attempt to offer an open discussion of the causes and consequences of the riots paradoxically seems to exacerbate its reliance on concepts and theories replete with ethno-racial prejudices.

The first broadcast of REN TV's Saturday weekly news programme, *Nedelia*, on December 11 made no attempt to conceal the racist nature of the riots, treating them as a major challenge to the Kremlin. In this report, *Nedelia* seemingly endeavoured to avoid concessions to the right, curtailing references to the possibility that the behaviour of the so-called diaspora communities could also be regarded as problematic. The issue of uncontrolled ›migration from the periphery to large cities‹ was briefly noted as causing tension, but was accompanied by a reporter's observation that »Visitors (›priezzhie‹) acquire weapons in order to defend themselves from aggressive aboriginals (›aborigeny‹)«. The clearly tongue-in-cheek use of the word ›aboriginals‹ in relation to permanent residents of cities in European Russia at this stage seemed to indicate the channel's understanding of the problematic nature of the term ›priezzhie‹.

In the subsequent broadcast of December 18, however, the *Nedelia* coverage began to reflect a shared perception of the responsibility of Caucasians for social tensions in Russia's big cities. Dwelling on the causes of the riots, *Nedelia* attributed a dominant explanatory power to the ›conflict of cultures‹ lens. Within this context, *Nedelia* suddenly began to ›balance‹ its opposition to ethnic Russian nationalism with a concern about the asocial behaviour of North Caucasians.

The over-reliance on the ›conflict of cultures‹ lens lacking a firm ideological mooring produced further contradictions in REN TV's coverage. While strongly condemning the racist tone of the demonstrations, the programme itself promoted a racialising worldview. In the *Nedelia* broadcasts Slavs and Caucasians were depicted as two neatly demarcated groups with immutable behavioural norms. Like Channel 1 and Rossiia, REN TV suddenly began to racialise the words ›priezzhie‹ and ›gosti‹ (visitor and guest), using them as a collective definition of anyone non-Slavic, irrespective of their citizenship or length of residence in Moscow. Likewise, the expression ›korennoi moskvich‹ (indigenous Moscovite) was applied by REN TV journalists solely to ethnic Russians/Slavs, even though

the word ›korennoi‹ (indigenous) strictly speaking merely pertains to a long-term resident of a particular location (Barkhudarov et al. 1958: 133).[3]

Contrary to the Kremlin-sponsored discourse of a pan-Russian civic nation whose multi-ethnic population is bound together by common efforts to build a strong state, 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 country as a whole. It seems to be the Soviet-era conflation of ethnicity and nationality and the linking of ethnically-defined nationality to discrete territorial space the post-Soviet discourses of Russian nationhood have failed to overcome, which caused REN TV's reporters to implicitly place Dagestanis, Chechens and Ingush permanently residing in Moscow under the umbrella term of ›priezzhie‹. (Tolz 2014, forthcoming) North Caucasians invited to speak on the programme seemed to have internalised their own othering. This was reflected in the arguments of a Chechen student activist living in Moscow. Despite the fact that he had moved to the Russian capital as a child, the student accepted the external definition of himself as an outsider whose personal behaviour was responsible for shaping a collective image of his nation (Chechnya) in the eyes of the host (ethnic Russian) society: »Those who take out knives put their nation into shame ... In other cities ... we should demonstrate [the best sides] of our culture, of our nation.« (December 25)

REN TV attempted to be more inclusive than the state-backed channels in the range of actors to whom it gave a voice. And so it ›balanced‹ statements by representatives of extreme Russian nationalist groups and nationalist opposition in the Duma, who in a lengthy interview spoke with the President of Ingushetia about ›ethnic criminality‹ as the main source of social tensions. He boldly criticized the Russian media for its selective reporting of the ethnicity of criminals and Russian politicians for expressing ethno-nationalist biases. And yet, similar to the situation with Channel 1 and Rossiia, REN TV's hybrid of sources and ideas failed to gel, while its condemnation of racism was undermined by the reporters' own interpretation of ethnicity and nationality through a racialising lens.

3 However, 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, which was rejected in the Soviet period, that seems to be influencing today's utilization of the word ›korennoi‹.

CONCLUSION

Using the coverage of the Manezhnaia disturbances as a case study, this article considered the discursive constructions of ethnic relations and Russian nationhood in the country's ›mediasphere‹. Structured as a spectrum running from centre (Channel 1) through Rossiia, this mediasphere leavens its official line with a strictly managed pluralism to a periphery serving as a two-way filter to extra-official realms: popular-nationalist (NTV) and liberal-progressive (REN-TV). Our findings suggest that in their often unreflective reproduction of ethnoracial stereotypes, Russian media practices are not dissimilar to what can be observed in Western media. Russian TV's tendency to emphasize negative characteristics of the ethnic ›outgroup‹ and downplay or deny those of the dominant ›ingroup‹ in the reporting on migrants and ethnic minorities, its biased application of ethnic labels in reporting crime and the coverage of ethnic conflict from the perspective of the Slavic majority all find parallels in Western media reporting. (van Dijk 1991) And yet, as the analysed material suggests, Russian media discourses seem to be marked by a particularly striking laxity with respect to terminology and conceptual apparatus when dealing with the issues of nationalism, ethnicity and race. Overall not surprisingly, this laxity seems to be particularly manifested in the peripheries of the ›mediasphere‹; yet at a first glance it seems somewhat paradoxical that these peripheries are not only nationalist (NTV), but also ›liberal‹ (REN-TV). It is the reasons behind this and the results of this extremity in the adoption of racialising terms and viewpoints across all channels that this article aimed to account for.

On the one hand, we have argued that potentially inflammatory narratives, which the TV channels articulated about the Manezhnaia riots, reflect the legacy of Soviet nationalities policies incapable of creating a unified state constructed on a pseudo-civic basis. Yet they maintain the dominance of its most powerful contingent (the ›russkie‹), whilst often unwittingly fostering separate identities of national minorities of vastly differing statuses. The current narratives about Russia as a national community in which the terms ethnicity and nationality continue to co-exist in an incoherent amalgam of mutually exchangeable terms reflect the division of Soviet and then Russian federal space into multiple territories inhabited by ›titular nationalities‹. The fact that the one territory which remains without a titular nationality is Russia (›Rossiia‹) has historically engendered major contradictions in the Soviet and post-Soviet approaches to the nationalities question. It has also exacerbated inter-ethnic tensions, whose resolution has not been brought any closer by vigorous nation-building efforts of the Russian government during the last decade. On the other hand, the Russian media currently op-

erate in an environment shaped by the lack of a single ideological framework and in which dialogical polemics with society and oppositional forces are playing a much greater role than in the past. This inevitably makes the media open to infiltration by ideas and modes of reporting, previously viewed as alien, while making it much more difficult for even the state-backed media to articulate a coherent discourse with the authoritative power, than it was the case in the Soviet times of ideological control and a clearer relationship between the political authorities and broadcaster.

The peculiarity of the current usage of words like ›visitors‹ and ›guests‹, replete with prejudicial assumptions, in describing people who are bona fide citizens of the Russian (Rossiiskaiia) Federation and of the inappropriately ethnicised references to Moscow's ›indigenous population‹ has its origins in this specific political and media environment. The apparent absence of ›race‹ within the amalgam belies its overarching influence on the deployment of the terms and concepts by which it is constituted. The continuing unwillingness to acknowledge the truth about racism in Russia accounts for both its persistent substitution with euphemisms such as ›xenophobia‹ or ›extremism‹, as well as the adoption of the latently racist formulation ›person of non-Slavic appearance‹.

Furthermore, a profound uncertainty about how nation, ethnicity and race should be conceived in general and in particular in the context of Russia as well as the perceived need to respond to popular fears and prejudices, account for often unreflective and at times potentially inflammatory use of different political persuasions of theories with racialising undertones by broadcasters such as ›ethnic criminality‹ and ›culture conflict‹. As recent research into the origins of ethnic conflict has shown, narratives about ›ethnic criminality‹ have a particularly powerful potential to act as a catalyst for violence against ethnic other. These narratives project onto »the future victims of violence the very impulses entertained by those who will victimize them« as they tend to attribute responsibility for violence to the victim. (Horowitz 2001: 77) We have encountered precisely this projection in the TV coverage of Manezhnaia. The ›culture conflict‹ argument with its tendency to dehumanize ethnic other has its own conflict-generating power, even if in a less strongly pronounced form. (Osipov 2010) In other words, ›banal‹ or latent racism in the television coverage of Manezhnaia has the power to unwittingly fuel the very sentiments which national broadcasters aimed to criticize or silence.

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