

Russia: Patriotism as a diagnosis

Sunday 17 February 2019, by [MARKELOV Stanislav](#) (Date first published: 19 January 2009).

Ten years ago, Russian activist lawyer Stanislav Markelov was shot dead in central Moscow. We republish the last article he wrote before his death.

January 2019 marks the tenth anniversary of the murder of Stanislav Markelov and activist journalist Anastasia Baburova. On 19 January 2009, as Markelov and Baburova walked through central Moscow, they were gunned down by Nikita Tikhonov, a Russian neo-Nazi.

This tragic murder sent shocks through human rights, media and activist communities in Russia, and later exposed the neo-Nazi terror cell run by Tikhonov and several others. As was revealed at trial, the group's organiser Ilya Goryachev was using his connections to people inside Russia's Presidential Administration and law enforcement to lobby for a new umbrella party that would preside over Russia neo-Nazis and extreme nationalists. Alexander Litoy writes about this trial (and how he wound up on one of Goryachev's lists) in detail here.

Born in 1974, Markelov led an active life. He was involved in the Russian Social Democratic Party during the early 1990s, joined the Maximillian Voloshin brigade, a left-wing medics' group, during the events of October 1993 in Moscow, travelled to Ingushetia with Memorial as a human rights observer, and helped lead the radical left Russian Student Union in 1994-1995. In the late 1990s, he was involved in the Defenders of the Rainbow anarchist ecological movement, as well as writing extensively about the authoritarian surge in Belarus.

In the early 2000s, Markelov represented the interests of striking workers at a Vyborg paper mill, people illegally evicted from Moscow dormitories and activists from an independent railway union. In 2002, he defended the interests of Elza Kungayeva, who was murdered by corporal Yuri Budanov.

In 2006, Markelov founded and headed the Institute of the Rule of Law, where he focused on defending activists, journalists and others in high-profile legal proceedings, such as Anna Politkovskaya and Mikhail Beketov, who led the campaign for the defence of Khimki forest outside of Moscow.

Markelov's last article "Patriotism as diagnosis" remains, sadly, as relevant today as it was in 2008.

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This country has got hooked on patriotism like a drug. Any politician, before lying, will swear by his patriotism. Any toady, before wheedling money from the authorities, will boast of his love for the state. Any thief licking his lips at the sight of his stolen goods will describe how he loves his country and how much more he would steal for the sake of this love.

Today in Russia it is impossible to occupy a senior position unless, bowing and scraping, you declare your patriotism. It's impossible to become a politician (whether pro-government or pro-opposition) until you have licked the backside of the two-headed eagle and sworn your love to other imperial symbols.

Patriotism has become the state's criteria of eligibility towards its citizens. If you aren't a patriot, then you're a pariah and the state's repressive apparatus will soon do everything to choke the life out of you. Nowadays, people make nothing of it, but making your feelings public is thought of as bad taste, as is declaring your love for the whole country — almost like parading your underwear in the street, the traces of your last solitary passion still fresh. No-one gives it a second thought that, to all intents and purposes,

patriotism is foolish!

Personal emotions are fine as long as they remain private. If we love our country's native soil, our ancestors and our traditions that's admirable, but what kind of idiot would force people to flaunt their private emotions? Indeed, this love can only be sincere precisely insofar as it remains personal and doesn't lapse into the category of public-patriotic masturbation.

Imagine declaring love for one's parents as a national idea. People would take you for a complete idiot. Why should we see this attempt to thrust patriotism down our throats in any other way? There's no need to crawl into our minds to check how much we love our motherland. People can work out who and how they should love all by themselves.

On the contrary, public adoration is never sincere. Unctuous love towards household gods will soon arouse adverse feelings of revulsion and give birth to a generation who hate this love of the fatherland that's been rammed down their throats. Just the same as Soviet power gave birth to a hatred of everything Soviet, constantly stuffing us full of their cretinous slogans. But nowadays we are not even promised communism, we are simply told that we must blindly love the Motherland oblivious to everything else and then everything will be fine. Fine for the authorities, for the oligarchs and the mafias. Because

patriotism is cowardice!

Rather than establishing who lined their pockets during the poverty and lawlessness, who grabbed all public property in the mafia-style 1990s, who should answer for the privatisation of our future, for the overnight plunder of all the goods built up by the hellish labour of many generations, they propose instead that we should love the state unrequitedly. Civic patriotism is not love of one's Motherland, rather it is love of the state. It is advantageous for the ruling circles that we, mouths open wide in amazement and agog with joy, gaze upon our latest state flag, even if the Vlasov traitors fought against their own people or the Black Hundreds organised pogroms under it.

According to the patriots, we should express joy at the successes of the regime and lay down our future for the oligarchs or other fat cats munching on that which was stripped from us and our parents.

You call this love of the motherland? Any motherland would soon perish from such love, and the more we sink into the abyss of patriotism, the more inequality we see in our society, the more arrogant the power of the rich starts to look.

Everyday, the media rams it down our throats that we must become patriots

If you doesn't see this, you've consciously chosen to go blind. If you see this, but continues to shout about your patriotism, you're a coward sheltering under a cliché imposed by the state. Everyday, the media rams it down our throats that we must become patriots. Thus there's nothing left for the state to do but demand patriotism from us, otherwise we would insist that it account for all its actions. Because the people and the authorities were never together, the latter always grew fat through the

powerlessness and the poverty of the former. This is why today

patriotism is treachery!

The more we scream about patriotism and the great empire, the fewer friends our country will have. We even managed to quarrel with the last republic with whom we were on good terms, Belarus, due to the gas wars. Because the oligarchs couldn't care less about ideas, they have their profits and laugh about how they managed to dupe society, fobbing them off with the pill of patriotism.

Like utter fools, we're falling into the same trap that other countries have experienced for themselves. As soon as the Serbs stopped talking of Yugoslavia and raised the cry of a Great Serbia, everyone turned their backs on them. Even their constant ally Montenegro hastened to escape from the Serb nationalists. As soon as patriotism emerged in Russia, we began to disintegrate into a bunch of national enclaves and were then foolishly surprised as to why other nationalities respond in the same way, expelling Russians from where they were living.

Patriotism has released the demon of nationalism from captivity, continuously provoking new national conflicts. Russia only grows weaker from this, but its bourgeoisie rejoices as it lines its own pockets from wars and international conflicts.

Our country has always been multinational and now we are forced to scuttle into our national corners and hate our neighbours.

The greater the patriotism, the weaker the people.

There is no need to make a distinction between patriotism and nationalism. The imperial summons that sound from high tribunes soon turn into national pogroms on the streets, and when yesterday's atheist communists stand with candles on church porches it only leads to reactionary obscurantism and a return to medieval practices.

There is no reason to believe that this is simply the idiocy of the authorities. People, whose futures have been stolen from them, resent everyone else and are ready to spit out their rage at any moment. It is advantageous for the authorities that this hatred is directed against poor migrant workers and not the thieves' Mercedes stuffed with New Russians.

Our establishment are scared of seeing Mercedes on fire, because they travel in them themselves. It's easier for them to express their sorrow over the latest pogrom, at the same nudging the dissatisfied towards them.

They are timeservers, their task is to line their own pockets and not let go of their power.

They are happy to sacrifice people as though they were small change, feeding them a patriotic drug in exchange for their own wellbeing and safety. Nowadays for us

patriotism is death!

This is no exaggeration. In place of the achievements of our people, its best traditions and our real history we are forced to love the state. Even the state's historical idols are chosen to justify their irresponsibility and cruelty.

Alexander Nevsky, personally suppressing an anti-Tatar uprising, several times prostrating himself before the Golden Horde, burning the Russian cities of Peraslavl'-Zalessky and his own native Vladimir and buried outside of Vladimir Cathedral for his crimes, suddenly becomes one of the

country's most respected saints. Is this simply because he fought off a single armed assault on the River Neva which took place almost annually and was victorious in a single battle on Lake Ladoga, while the rest of the time he suppressed the uprisings of small nations while in league with the Crusaders?

Peter the First built a city on marshland on the bones of peasants, forcibly destroying all those Russian traditions and the old faith, which patriots today advocate so strongly.

Bloody Nicholas II, who began his tsardom with the monstrous stampede at Khodynka field, executed his loyal subjects on Bloody Sunday 1905, and was defeated in two wars leading the country to two revolutions.

They regale us with fine heroes, as if Russian history had no genuine fighters for truth and freedom.

Patriotism is a myth, a candy given to a people to console them

Patriotism is a myth, a candy given to a people to console them. Patriotic delirium can serve to change anything, history can be rewritten, reality embellished, one can call white black and black white. Only drug addicts don't live for long, and a society plagued by patriotic disorder is doomed to suffer terrifying withdrawal symptoms and extinction due to this patriotic frenzy.

There is only one item of national pride for the New Russians — their abnormal profits from raw materials remaining in the depths of the earth and the slave labour working in enterprises. This is the only national treasure of any significance.

All the rest that is fobbed off to the people is no more than pretty wrapping paper. Why should we swallow these empty patriotic sweets, while, at the same time, all the possessions of the country are siphoned off by a band of nouveau riches lining their pockets? Behind the attractive patriotic coating hides a fear to look truth in the face and demand that those who, since the period of liberal economic horrors of the 1990s, cast their people into a state of powerlessness and poverty should answer for their deeds. Because

patriotism is fear!

It is far easier to hide one's powerlessness jabbering noisily about your love for the Motherland than trying to fight to regain your own rights. To admit (even if only to yourself) that in the 1990s, instead of democracy, we were humiliated and robbed and today they (the power elite) are doing just the same and not even sharing the crumbs off their tables.

Patriotism is the guise of our powerlessness. It's the mask behind which we hide our own cowardice. Patriotism is useful for the powerful, it separates peoples as it fobs off each people in the form of reverence to one's own thieves and rulers. Patriotism forces people to think that they are better than everyone else and they don't even notice their own tattered backsides and the holes of their cleaned-out budgets. According to the patriots, we ought to be proud of a country which reduces its old people to a state of penury, wipes one's feet on those who lived by their own labour and leaves its youth without any future. We should be proud of a society inflexibly divided into a golden elite and all the rest who, like slaves, must provide for the prosperity of this elite.

The New Russians will guzzle our national wealth in Courchevel while it is proposed that we acclaim their power with patriotic cries of joy. In Russia power and society has always been two distinct and irreconcilable notions. Power has never been for the people — it has been either completely unacceptable or just about tolerable. With the aid of patriotism they are trying to force us to love not the Motherland, but the state. Yet they are eating away the Motherland in plush resorts and guzzling

it up in fashionable restaurants.

Many ask: why have the authorities started to persecute Russian nationalists? It's very simple:

patriotism is an illness!

Those who have seriously taken it into their heads to contract this disease have turned into out-and-out neo-nazis and pogromists. There's practically no difference between a patriot and a Nazi. The former simply deceives himself and others, and the latter attempts to bring these crazy ideas to life.

The state has no use for volunteers who attempt to implement in actual fact all this propagandistic nonsense they cram into our heads from their high podiums and the drain pipes of the news media. If you rush headlong in front of the state engine, you'll surely fall under its own wheels.

It was the Russian state itself that gave birth to the neo-nazis, trying to channel any social protest into its own course of national hatred or rather, more accurately, national butchery. When the nationalist thugs get out of control, they turn out to be of no use and even dangerous. Suddenly they might begin to talk about how they got real help, how they were provoked to direct action, and how they were kept as slavish puppies at the state's beck and call. Sidelined, the Nazis went wild and there was nothing left for the authorities to do than start hunting them down. An owner shoots his rabid dogs.

The nationalists bawl exactly the same slogans as the authorities do. However, due to their natural stupidity they really believe in them and attempt to bring them to life. Some pretend that they are sick with official patriotism for the sake of profit, greed and their careers. Others really catch this illness. It is a fatal illness: if nationalists don't finally lose their minds on their own, then the authorities will help them do so in the prisons. One can imagine how the oligarchs deride these flawed nationalists on their revelries, these very nationalists which they brought to life. After all

patriotism cannot be serious!

A patriotic mood can only become real when the country is exposed to an external occupation, but these days we celebrate the day of independence from ourselves.

No-one occupied us, in the 1990s it was our mafia and our oligarchs who grabbed power. Gangsters are completely indifferent what nationality they have- the most significant thing for them is their criminal businesses. They serenely divide the country out amongst themselves leaving us with patriotism as some kind of consolation prize.

The transnational companies are absolutely indifferent to people's nationalities, they carve up our country, once again flinging patriotism to us in the form of some consolatory bone. And for some reason we should be proud, rejoice that we are perfect patriots and worship the country where we've been made powerless and poor. To struggle with the oligarchs, nouveau riches and mafias scuttling to our national quarters is impossible. Those who are profiting from us are united and yet we are forced to grow estranged and fight with each other.

Patriotism revolves around conflict zones, international clashes and mutual hatred. As if it were fine to live in a society of refugees suffering from national hatred and humiliation. If so many people have to suffer from this phantom-like patriotism, then why is it necessary at all?

Why do countries, which are the most respected in the world such as the states of western Europe, avoid stirring amongst their citizens a sense of national exclusivity and force-fed patriotism? Why is America hated throughout the world? Maybe that there too each citizen is also constrained to be

given a shot of patriotism? Yet America in the guise of the world policeman and universal thief can allow itself to be insolent and patriotic. But why should we foster an idiotic patriotism in ourselves? In order to be the object of general hatred and ridicule?

Patriotism doesn't make sense!

If someone wishes to show his crazy love for something, let him shut himself up in the bathroom and demonstrate it. To publicly make love is exhibitionism, immoral and amoral. Public love for leaders, for the state is no less amoral.

The idea of a homeland is not defined by state boundaries, territories or even the settlement of one's blood relatives. It is a personal idea and one which you can't force on others. Personal things are not the object of parades and passionate declarations. It's like hanging up one's underwear as some kind of flag.

A person who really loves his homeland won't shout out about this in every street corner and swear by their patriotism. Moreover, he won't force others to do so or make of patriotism a state doctrine. If in the guise of a national idea, we are fobbed off with phony patriotism it means that this is useful for someone, someone who is trying to hide their profit — a profit, to put it mildly, not entirely honest or legal.

The only question is: are we ready to swallow this bait? Have our brains really gone soft from this patriotic gabble? Do we want to get fat on this national lie and gobble any shit so long as it is served up with a patriotic sauce? The choice is left: are you healthy or has the epidemic of patriotic insanity managed to eat into your minds so you no longer digest anything but the sickly ambrosial gushing from the television and the cries of thieves about how they love their homeland.

An honest man will never become a patriot because honesty is irreconcilable with public patriotism. A wise man will never become a patriot because to actually assimilate patriotic slogans is a task for idiots ready to deceive themselves.

Self-respecting people aren't taken in by patriotic deception. They have their own opinions and they don't need them to be substituted with intrusive propaganda.

The choice is yours!

Our special thanks to Giuliano Vivaldi, who translated and assisted with this publication. You can read Stanislav Markelov's biography in full, as well as other articles.

Read Victoria Lomasko's graphic reportage from the BORN trial and Vlad Tupikin on the importance of remembering Markelov and Baburova on 19 January in English, courtesy of The Russian Reader.

In 2010, openDemocracy translated several of Anastasia Baburova's LiveJournal entries. Find them here. In 2015, Dmitry Okrest interviewed Anastasia Baburova's parrents.

Stanislav Markelov

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