

CULTURAL NATIONALISM IS BEYOND MY KEN

Pavel Bardin



PAVEL BARDIN is a TV journalist and is famous for directing the pseudo-documentary, *Russia 88* (2009), a film that deals with the issues of the Nazi skinhead sub-culture

RJ You mentioned that the Soviet state had monopolised the right for nationalism. Do you think the current developments are an attempt of rehabilitating it?

In my opinion it is a matter of control rather than rehabilitation. However, control requires the adaptation of certain attributes and ideological elements. The powers that be would obviously like to monopolize everything. Hence the flowers on the grave of Yegor Sviridov when visited by the Prime Minister and the absence of flowers on the graves of those who died at the hands of right-wing extremists. Had there been any sort of balance, one might have been able to suggest that the elite wasn't trying to toy with the ideology in question. For the time being, everything that happens in this respect strikes one as sheer electoral media-mongering. What we have is an elite that would like to control the nationalists on the one hand, but is not really tolerant of nationalism on

the other, since none of the slogan-spewing street nationalists make it to either the parliament or the mainstream media, and, obviously, a certain deal of effort has gone into keeping them out.

RJ Street nationalists being those who turned up at Manezhnaya Square on December 11th – the type of people that your film is about?

Quite so. I am convinced that they could produce a couple of public leaders. But the elite is controlling this process deliberately. They tolerate Zhirinovsky's brand of authorised nationalism while being critical of all other kinds.

RJ Are there any grounds for the emergence of a right-wing party with a partially nationalistic agenda?

There are always grounds, but the process is being quelled. Existing parties have many members that sympathise with the nationalists – the LDPR, Yedinaya Rossiya, the Communists, et al. A real nationalist party would be a salubrious development – in such a case, other parties would have to abandon their nationalist rhetoric. But it appears that the elite aren't ready to open the parliament to parties they won't be able to control, parties that could easily appeal to the masses and become a presence that one would

culture and ethics, not genetics. But this kind of nationalism at the moment remains beyond my ken. Russian culture needs to be nurtured and preserved, and this is the nationalistic agenda that one might subscribe to. Yet all I see around me is ethno-nationalism, which I find quite useless.

Ethno-nationalists are usually ignorant of most aspects of their own culture and mutilate their own language as they speak. No amount of patriotic blockbusters you release onto the screen will change the situation in any way.

RJ Nationalism is often identified as Nazism – how much truth is in such an identification?

The line is a very fine one indeed, and it is most often crossed by the extreme right. I find nothing wrong with nationalism as an idea, but once it involves violence, it's Nazism. Nationalism often uses ethnic slurs and hate rhetoric, and all the slogans that nationalists have are negative, they are always against something. 'Russia for the Russians' is urging you to hate the immigrants and so on, and violence is really just around the corner. The most horrible thing about Nazism wasn't the number of death squads, but rather the silent or vocal approval by the majority of the nation, which didn't

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prove unable to ignore or manipulate.

RJ Do you believe nationalism could be beneficial to the emergence of a civic culture and a civic society?

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necessarily take any direct part in acts of violence. And so the line isn't only very fine, but also quite blurred.

Pavel Bardin was speaking with Kseniya Kolkunova