

CHAPTER 7

Patriots on Air

Reflections on Patriotism in the Minds of TV Journalists

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Abstract

This chapter analyses patriotic discourses of Russian television journalists. The starting point is that there is a certain pressure to be patriotic imposed upon journalists who work for mainstream television. Three discourses on patriotism have been identified through thematic interviews: a personal, intimate patriotism; a militaristic one; and a patriotism that draws from the narratives of ongoing information war. Russian journalists use all three discourses when they explain their attitude towards patriotism. While journalists express criticism towards militaristic undertones of official discourse, the most prominent figures in television accept and repeat it in their work.

Keywords: journalism, infowar, patriotism, militarism, intimate patriotism

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Introduction

In his book *Pis'ma o russkom patriotizme* (*Letters about Russian Patriotism*), writer Mihail Berg (2010) opens the phenomenon of Russian patriotism in a sharp and ironic way. According to Berg, patriotism requires constant formation of external threat in order to justify itself. When there is a threat, patriotism is needed and it hides under its 'fatty layer' any discontent or social inequality. Berg also underlines that Russian patriotism is geographic:

The main thing that warms our souls is latitude, indivisibility, and the more we have, the better. That is why there is no apology to former Soviet republics that went away and gave a hoot to everything good done to them, making the Motherland smaller and taking away parts of the formerly native lands. (ibid., p. 13)

Patriotism witnessed by Berg is simple to the point of banality, leaning on dichotomies. He explains it, among other, by the fact that the Soviet system from the very beginning gave the power to the least educated. To Berg, the constant chain of humiliation that has always gone from those ruling to those being ruled leads to the need to humiliate. Berg's book consists of his own observations, but his outlook in historical moments and practices demonstrates well that patriotism and patriotic education are nothing new in Russia (ibid.). Despite the fact that patriotic education and state-led patriotism are sometimes seen and understood as a Putin-era phenomenon, these programmes have their roots much deeper than this in Russia and elsewhere in the world.

In this chapter I shall take a look at how Russian journalists working for mainstream television understand and re-produce with the ideas of patriotism, imposed upon them from above. I chose television as a medium, since despite the changes in viewership – the younger generations in particular seem to be abandoning linear television – it remains the most popular source of news in Russia. In addition to this, during Putin's years in power, TV has increasingly become a tool for promoting Russia's foreign policy (Zakem et al., 2017, p. 1). One turning point was the 2011–2012

protests and another the beginning of the war in Ukraine. Joshua Yaffa calls the moment that fighting broke in Donbass one where 'the Russian media adopted a hysterical and bellicose tone' (Yaffa, 2019, p. 59). Yaffa explains this change as:

The need for enemies became obvious: to rally the patriotic masses for the struggles that lay ahead. (ibid.)

My assumption was, thus, that there is at least an expectation from above for journalists working for mainstream television that is largely controlled by the state to be patriots, or at least to share patriotic sentiments. Another relevant issue is the question of self-censorship. Previous research (Schimpfoss and Yablokov, 2018; Yaffa, 2020) has shown that there is no self-censorship per se but journalists have created their own sophisticated methods of manoeuvring with the needs of the Kremlin that is more down to the personalities of journalists. This came up in my interviews, too. Nobody admitted having faced coercion of any kind, but many admitted that there is an expectation to do the work in a certain way, and those that disagree will go and work elsewhere.

The research is based on eight thematic interviews with Russian journalists either currently working or having worked with mainstream Russian television channels, conducted between May and September 2018. I asked the journalists about their understanding of the concept of patriotism in general, their personal attitude towards it and the way they see it reflected in their work, if at all. I wanted to find out how the journalists interpret patriotism and how they re-produce it in their work.

During the interviews I asked about the careers of journalists; about their understandings of the meaning of patriotism and patriotic education; about whether Russia is conducting ongoing information warfare; about freedom of speech in Russia and related issues. My main interest lay in patriotism, but I gave journalists room to talk freely about the things the concept brought to their mind. During my analysis I looked for broad thematic patterns that were used by journalists in their interpretations of the theme. As a result, I found three discursive frameworks that

best depict the way journalists understand patriotism. I call them 'intimate patriotism', 'military patriotism' and 'infowar patriotism'.

The first two discourses are clearly a reminiscence of Soviet-era patriotism that underlined the duty of the citizen, on the one hand, and the need to protect the interests of the homeland, on the other (Nikonova, 2010; see also Lassila, Chapter 5, this volume). In a quite similar way as in the Soviet Union, a true patriot is understood as one who cares about the homeland and one's community but is also ready to defend the home country by military means. At the same time, patriotism includes a personal component. As found by Goode (2016) in his focus group interviews about patriotism, the categories of practice elaborated by his interviewees were 'loving', 'activating', 'performing', 'comparing', 'living', 'improving' and 'choosing' (*ibid.*, pp. 430–443). Looking at patriotism this way, it turns into a practice that journalists exercise in their everyday life.

This came up in my data: 'intimate patriotism' was something that the journalists felt was important for them personally. The journalists interviewed wanted to underline that they indeed were Russian patriots – but not necessarily in a way the state would impel them to be. Journalists saw it as the duty of journalists to help society and the community as large. This reflects the Soviet understanding of patriotism as an expectation of universally good behaviour and citizenship. At the same time, official patriotism was reflected in the programmes of patriotic education, where the media is mentioned as one of the important components of patriotic education. The question of how one promotes 'good behaviour' and military patriotism at the same time remains in the education of future journalists (Makarova, 2010, p. 889).

Military patriotism has its roots in the First World War, when Russia declared, following the approach of the French government, a 'sacred union'. According to Stockdale (2016, p. 15), this included three central patriotic components: the traditional union between tsar and people, the patriotism of all Russian people regardless of belief or ethnicity, and the willingness of all Russians to serve and sacrifice. The latter was best manifested by the massive

mobilization and unexpected rash of volunteering that followed. The approach to patriotism by the Soviet Union owes a lot to this.

And, in quite a similar way as in the Soviet Union, in today's Russia, patriotism is an official part of state ideology. According to Nikonova (2010, p. 354), the popularity of the topic has been associated with the intensified search for a national idea since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The post-Yeltsin political leadership needed to develop a long-term strategy to find a universally valid symbolic framework for citizens. The programmes of patriotic education were being born. The first five-year programme was introduced in 2001 by the then prime minister Mihail Kasânov, and the current programme (2016–2020) is the fourth one (International Crisis Group, 2018; Pravitel'stvo Rossijskoj Federacii, 2015).

The military-patriotic discourse owes a great deal to this official patriotic discourse – which again has its roots in Soviet-era patriotism. The theme of patriotism has 'run like a thread' throughout Soviet history and patriotism was promoted as public consciousness, as something that would increase the feeling of belonging to the state and as an ideology that would contribute to people's willingness to defend the state (Sanina, 2017, pp. 33–34).

Interestingly, however, as written by Jussi Lassila in Chapter 5 of this volume, the understanding of patriotism offered by the state is not taken at face value. The citizens prefer their own definition of patriotism. Opinion polls show that, despite Russians agreeing that the state needs patriots and Russia is surrounded by external threats, people reject the state-imposed patriotism (see Mitikka and Zavadskaya, Chapter 6, this volume). Here we come to what I call intimate patriotism: patriotism as a personal attachment.

The third discourse, the one I call infowar patriotism, can be traced to the contemporary political realities of Russia, where the foreign policy principles lean on the idea of competition between countries and constant external threats (Pynnöniemi, 2018). One way to counter these threats is non-military means and hybrid war, which is well described in the so-called 'Gerasimov doctrine', named after general Valery Gerasimov, who elaborated this

'doctrine' in his speech to the Russian military academy after his appointment in January 2013 (Felgenhauer, 2019). Information warfare is seen as both part of the geopolitical struggle between great powers (Pynnöniemi, 2016, p. 41) and as a component of all warfare (Mölder and Sazonov, 2018, p. 309). Soft power instruments are used to promote and protect national interests and measures often referred to as tools of information warfare are used in this. The aspiration to manipulate the public perception of reality is even indicated at the level of strategic documents; however, as rightfully noted by Pynnöniemi and Ràzc (2016), it is not at all clear how this aspiration is being implemented in practice.

The concept of information war is not new in Russia. V.I. Lenin listed the methods of political struggle in his 1906 essay 'On Guerilla Warfare', where the 'simulation of mass consciousness' was mentioned as a method. In Soviet times, the media was first and foremost a tool for ideological education and public opinion formation, thus the weapon for information war was at all times in the hands of the state (Hopkins, 1970). In today's Russia, information war is understood not just as a strategic confrontation between two or more states but also as a tool to destabilize society and state and as a coercive tool that helps force the target country to make decisions that favour the attacking party (Derbin, 2017, quoted by Pynnöniemi, 2019, p. 216). It is also important to note that in the Russian context the 'information war' is all-encompassing – this is distinct from the Western definition of the phenomenon as something that is only used in limited situations. What is different to the Cold War-era Soviet propaganda is that present-day Russia tries not to sell itself as an idea or model for others to emulate. The aim is to undermine the notion of objective truth and reporting (Giles, 2016, p. 6).

In the discourse that I have separated from my data, information war means the 'strategic confrontation' between Russia and the West. In my conversation with the journalists it appears, first and foremost, as a battle between Russian and Western journalism. As demonstrated in the interview with Andrey Medvedev of Rossiâ 1 / VGTRK -channel:

It's just that the American, British, Swedish journalism ... the one (journalism) that once spoke about Vietnam War honestly, the one that spoke about Iraq war ... well, if not dishonestly but at least the political emphasis was understandable – but the picture was complete ... today there is no complete picture. Today there are no references to sources, today there is no way to know where they took it all. Today BBC can ... the tragedy with the Boeing. Horrible tragedy, hundreds of people died. Literally in 2–3 hours, the bodies have not been taken away, and BBC says that this was done by pro-Russian militias.

These frameworks are also present in what Serguei Oushakine (2009) means by the 'patriotism of despair'. According to Oushakine, since the Soviet system lacked a developed network of civic institution or political responsibility, the collective practices of grief and discourses of bereavement gradually occupied a leading position in a kind of civic life. The patriotism of despair can also be rooted in the old idea of Russia as a reactive rather than active nation, as victim and a saviour (more about this in Kati Parppe, Chapter 2, this volume).

Media and Patriotic Education

Despite the importance of patriotism for the Kremlin and the patriotic education that remains embedded in the school system owing to a lack of other tangible models for civic education (see Lassila, Chapter 5, this volume), there is no clear approach to the concept in journalism. Even the term itself remains somewhat ambiguous and lacks precise academic definitions, unlike its sister term nationalism, which has inspired a lot of academic discussion. Some authors – like Berg (2010) above – see patriotism somewhat similarly to how Benedict Anderson (2006) saw nationalism in his classic work *Imagined Communities*: as a glue that keeps nations together.

The most common definition of the term revolves around the concept of 'love to the Motherland' or 'positive nationalism'. Sanina (2017, p. 22) writes that patriotism is a philosophical concept that

‘reflects emotions of love for a particular place, i.e. a region or a country, and a readiness to support the community of people associated with that place’. Marlene Laruelle maintains (2009, p. 172) that contemporary Russia uses nationalism as a central element in the construction of social consensus. To her, patriotism as a self-evident topic in this exercise is there to ‘attenuate political divisions, to negate potential social conflicts and to efface the multiplicity of cultural references by recentring discourse on the idea that nation is in danger and must be defended’ (ibid., p. 155).

The state programmes of patriotic education communicate this need for consensus in many ways. The ongoing 2016–2020 programme, for instance, underlines the ‘priority of societal interests above individuals and self-sacrifice’. It puts emphasis on citizens’ accountability for the fate of the country and also calls for strengthening citizens’ sense of participation in the great history and culture of Russia (Goode, 2016, p. 320; International Crisis Group, 2018; Pravitel’s tvo Rossijskoj Federacii, 2015). Currently the programmes include three components: military, spiritual and civic, meaning, respectively: teaching historic battles and promoting readiness to defend the homeland; imbuing pupils with moral uprightness, desire for healthy lifestyles and respect for the environment; and respecting state and legal systems as well as history and cultures.

Work with the mass media is one of the five main concrete directions of the programmes. In the ongoing programme for 2016–2020, ‘securing the informational dimension of the patriotic education of citizens’ is defined as an exercise that takes place at the federal, regional and municipal levels and is aimed at creating circumstances for covering patriotic events and phenomena. This includes creating databases; analysing web sites and blogs; using new technologies to cover patriotic education in a modern way; promoting the development of patriotic TV programmes, print media and literature; and creating conditions for the people to get to know the work of journalists, writers, scientists and others who have worked in the field of patriotic education. The programme also requires the creation of media products that specialize in patriotic themes. The work plan of the programme includes several concrete

steps including radio programmes about military-patriotic themes and films about the history and traditions of Russian army and the history of the Great Patriotic War. The work done with the media is clearly aimed at young people: the plans are made in cooperation with the Center of Patriotic Education for Children and Youth. The emphasis of the media production is on military patriotism and in the heroes of Russian history; this emphasis runs all through the patriotic education programme for 2016–2020 (Pravitel'stvo Rossijskoj Federacii, 2015).

Reflections of patriotism on journalism and/or television have, however, not been researched widely. There is a general understanding among the public that the media plays a role in promoting patriotic education (Goode, 2016; see also Lassila, Chapter 5, this volume) and the programmes emphasize the role of journalism; however, as is the case with the patriotic education programmes in general, there is little information on their actual impact on media and/or citizens. Some scholars, such as L.S. Makarova (2010, pp. 889–892), think that patriotism should be promoted in journalistic education as something that promotes tolerance. Makarova bases her observations on a questionnaire conducted among journalism students in the University of Nizhegorod. The respondents all felt that it is the duty of a journalist to defend the national interests of Russia.¹ The idea of journalists playing a role in promoting patriotism is thus nothing new. In the 1930s elements were already being used in Soviet radio, even in children's programmes (Somov and Somova, 2016).

The Role of Television in Russia

Any government, even personalist autocracies, need the support of the people as the ultimate source of legitimacy. In the case of Russia, Soviet-era concepts of patriotism, nationalism and internationalism remain actively used and meaningful (Goode, 2016, p. 420). And the way to gain access to people is television. Peter Rollberg (2018, p. 247) calls Russian television the 'key element for maintaining political stability and social functionality'. He quotes Daniil Dondurej (2011), the editor-in-chief of Cinema

Art, as saying that television is an 'institution for unifying into one entity the people inhabiting a common territory. ... [Television networks] are invisible secret services for the management of the country, the economy, human capital, and for guaranteeing national security' (Dondurej, 2011).

My assumption in this text follows Dondurej in that I see the ideas by the state necessarily being circulated in the thinking of journalists themselves. It is not just the institution but also the views of the individual journalists that set the tone for official patriotism. Institutions and powerful individuals not only exercise control over their members but also influence, shape and determine their 'attitudes, beliefs and very wants' (Barkho, 2011, p. 31; Lukes, 2005, p. 27). Subsequently, the power that is held by journalists in powerful journalistic institutions such as Russian mainstream news channels is exercised not only by the fact that the television is well resourced and promoted by the state but also by the individual position(s) of the journalists working for them.

In the case of Russian television, another useful point of view has to do with neo-authoritarian regimes that need a state-controlled media sphere to maintain domestic legitimacy. Putin needs his television to control the setting of public agenda and the articulation of official discourse, even though a limited amount of freedom is permitted in the ownership structures of the media (Meng and Rantanen, 2015; Tolz and Teper, 2018, p. 213). If patriotism is an official part of state policy, then is it not the duty of journalists working for state-owned and controlled television stations to promote it?

Despite the profound changes undergone in Russian television, it needs to be noted that it still has its roots in Soviet TV, a propaganda weapon for the state. The first real TV reportage was aired from Red Square in May 1956 and concentrated on the May festivities. From the very start of its existence, Soviet TV was part of the state machinery and subject to hard censorship. It was only the times of glasnost and perestroika that brought TV journalists the long-sought freedom. Perestroika, initiated by Mihail Gorbačev and continued officially up until the coup of August 1991, meant a change in Soviet policy that aimed at

bringing the Soviet economics, politics, ideologies and culture into harmony with basic human ideals and values. This meant a new press law, abandonment of censorship, political changes and liberating TV programmes. The dry, official news programme *Vremya* was complemented by new kinds of TV news broadcasts by talented young people. Direct uncensored translations became more widespread (Ûrovskij, 2002).

However, these changes led for their part to the gradual fall of the Soviet system. The freedom spread very quickly. Glasnost, introduced first as a policy from above, became a policy from below that demanded freedom not as an instrument of government policy but in its Enlightenment connotation of the spirit of critical inquiry (Skillen, 2017, p. 152). The last desperate try of Gorbachev to control the situation was sacking the head of Gosteleradio in late 1990 and replacing him with a more loyal person. It was, however, too late, and glasnost and perestroika gave room to nationalist movements and an urge for self-determination. This, combined with a major economic crisis caused by multiple factors from the inefficiency of state companies to environmental concerns about a number of industries and nuclear power stations, eventually led to the end of the Soviet Union (Beissinger, 2002, p. 385; De La Pedraja, 2019, p. 40; Marples, 2004, p. 97; Skillen, 2017).

How does Russian television look like today? To get there one has to look at the 1990s, an era that Daphne Skillen (2017, p. 56) depicts by quoting Vysotsky's lyrics: 'Yesterday they gave me freedom, what am I to do with it?' According to Skillen (ibid.), the media never becoming a real 'fourth estate' was largely caused by the media professionals themselves. The media, especially television, did not position itself as a true servant of the public. The years of the 1990s gave room to the rise of the oligarch television, meaning that people like Boris Berezovzkij and Vladimir Gusinskij acquired major ownership in the media. After this time, no significant TV channel in Russia has been owned by anyone who would not hold close ties to the Kremlin. Today some 90% of the Russian mass media is owned and controlled by the state. One can say that the television is a mix of two models: state-controlled and commercial. The latter provides entertainment content only.

The ownership structure via loyal oligarchs has made it possible for the government to control the media through just three media holdings (Smirnov, 2014, pp 93–136; Tolz and Teper, 2018, p. 214).

Television remains the most watched mass media, despite the growing popularity of the internet and social media platforms. According to the annual report on television, over 90% of Russians watch TV at least once a week; 70% do it every day. According to the rating agency Mediascope/TNS, in 2016, TV reached its peak of popularity ever over the years the ratings have been conducted (Federal'noe agenstvo po pečati i massovym kommuinikaciâm, 2017, p. 28). This was explained largely by the growth in the time spent watching TV. Interestingly enough, the years 2014, 2015 and 2016 witnessed a growth in the hours spent in front of the TV. This was mostly thanks to the oldest segments of population, those traditionally very loyal to television. Mediascope/TNS reports state that in 2016 Russian viewers over 55 years would spend 6 hours and 17 minutes watching television² (ibid, p. 29). When it comes to the popularity of the TV channels, the most watched channels are Channel 1 and Russia 1/VGTRK, or 'second channel'. Their viewership is around 37% each (Zakem et al., 20186).

How does television react to patriotism?

In a lengthy television debate on the eve of Victory Day 2018 on the public broadcaster OTR,³ two Russian writers, Vladimir Eremenko and Ůri Polâkov, were debating patriotism. The programme was headlined as discussing 'quasi- and real patriotism' (OTR, 2018). The journalist leading the broadcast, Olga Arslanova, started by stating:

What we have for sure seen during the last years – it is an outburst of patriotism. And we are here to find out what we mean by it.

The programme started with an opinion poll stating that 78% of Russians consider themselves patriots. The fact that those 17% of Russians who do not consider themselves patriots have

lower levels of education and are worse off materially was underlined. The same poll also asked about the ways patriotism should be expressed. For Russians, serving in the army was an important expression of patriotism, and so was non-willingness to leave Russia. Other definitions supported by people were 'support of the leadership of the country', 'active citizenship', 'charity and mutual help', 'participation in elections and meetings', 'support of domestic producers', 'participation in memory meetings', even 'support of Russian sportsmen'. The discussants of this programme seemed really worried about the 42% of Russians who were not able to express what patriotism meant for them. The contents of the programme demonstrated clearly one tendency in official Russian patriotism that comes frequently up in opinion polls as well (Levada-Center, 2019). The word appears often in the media and people are expected to think about it; however, the content of the term, let alone its practical reflections in everyday life, seems unclear.

The Research Data

The journalists interviewed for this chapter worked for, had worked for, or had an ongoing professional relationship with the mainstream television stations.⁴ Four of them worked for Rossiâ 1/ VGTRK (*Vserossijskaâ gosudarstvennaâ televizionnaâ i radiovešatel'naâ kompaniâ*), which is the second largest television channel in Russia. In fact, the viewership of the channel has on some occasions exceeded the viewership of the First Channel (Trunina, 2017). Rossiâ 1 / VGTRK is fully state-owned but it also airs commercials, demonstrating the particularity of the Russian system where the main TV networks are state-owned but the state could not maintain its position without private revenues (Meng and Rantanen, 2015, pp. 10–11; Tolz and Teper, 2018, p. 214).

Rossiâ 1 / VGTRK was established in 1990 as RTR, the channel that served only Russia in the Soviet Union. Today Rossiya 1 / VGTRK is a massive round-the-clock TV holding that has four

channels and a separate digital channel package. Famous journalists running talk shows at VGTRK include Sergei Brilev and Dimitri Kiselev. Two of the Rossiya 1 / VGTRK journalists, including Sergei Brilev, gave their consent to use their names and two remained anonymous. I have coded the anonymous interviewees using code M for male and F for female. F1 and M1 work for Rossiya 1 / VGTRK.

One interviewee (M2) had recently worked for the best-known Russian TV channel, First Channel (Pervyj kanal). Pervyj kanal is the successor of Soviet era 'Ostankino', which was first renamed in 1995 as ORT ('Obščestvennoe Rossijskoe Televidenie') and in 2002, when Boris Berezovskij lost control of the channel, as 'First Channel' (Medvedskaâ, 2017, p. 51).

The channel remains to this day the most watched in Russia, and it has been able to remain so despite the overall changes in the media consumption, and the numerous forecasts that have predicted a decline of television as a medium that brings the whole nation together (Gabowitsch, 2012, p. 214; Vartanova, 2012, p. 43).

Out of the eight interviewees, six were still actively working in television; two (M3 and F2) were older and currently working part time, mostly as journalism teachers or for print media, but they too had an insider's view of Russian television. M4 had a job at one of the big newspapers but was a frequent visitor of television talk shows especially on First Channel.

All the journalists I interviewed had clear, outspoken opinions about patriotism. There are no officially established connections between patriotic education programmes and journalists, but in practice some journalists exercise it. For instance, a retired TV journalist who ran a TV academy for schoolchildren told me how she took part in the Immortal Regiment in May 2018 by putting the pictures of her relatives, veterans of war, on the table of the room:

I said that this is my grandfather and my uncle, we should say big thank you to them. I put the pictures by the remote control. ... Why did I do this? I don't know. It flew onto me from above. An American would not do this. They would think I am crazy. We are different, for real we are different. We ... sometimes I am even

mad at us, Americans put their flag up, why don't us ... but we are differently built. Patriotism is deep in us, it appears when needed. (Interview with F2, Moscow, May 2018).

In Table 5 below, I separate the three discursive frameworks of patriotism I analysed as persistent patterns within the interview data. The table below highlights the three discourses I separated from my interviews: intimate patriotism, military patriotism and infowar patriotism. The latter two are intertwined and carry similarities; however, journalists supporting military patriotism do not necessarily find infowar patriotism useful, whereas intimate patriotism can carry elements of military patriotism. This means, for instance, the case of a journalist who is active in investigating the Second World War, including cooperating in groups that look for the remains of soldiers lost at war active in covering the events of Second World War, but at the same time is critical of the 'propagandistic patriotism' in media.

Each of the discursive frameworks was expressed in multiple ways during the conversations. Intimate patriotism discourse came up via journalists explaining their loyalty to the country, to people, to the environment and to other things related closely to people's everyday lives. Military patriotism drew from the official patriotic discourse as well as the state-level security concerns in its expressions, analogies used and definitions of problems. Infowar patriotism was clearest when talking to the two Rossiya 1 / VGTRK journalists who gave their consent to express their names. Andrej Medvedev of Rossiya 1 / VGTRK, for instance, was very critical about the shooting of the Malaysian plane and the Salisbury poisonings. Another journalist, interviewed anonymously, however, said that his patriotism means that he searches for truth, and the official narratives were even unpleasant to him:

For many people I am not a patriot but almost a traitor. For me to be a patriot is to speak the truth. I think not speaking out the truth causes problems to ourselves. The clearest example is the fact that our authorities up to this day do not admit that our military is present in South-Western Ukraine. It is ridiculous to deny it. (Interview, M4, Moscow, May 2018).

Table 5: Discourses on patriotism by TV journalists in Moscow.

	Intimate patriotism	Military patriotism	‘Infowar’ patriotism
Origins of the discourse	Soviet concepts of patriotism	State definitions of patriotism	Kremlin ⁵
Expressions	Taking care of the environment; respect for the heroes of war in concrete actions	External threat; heroic past, Second World War	Problems of the West: Skripal case; Malaysian plane; sanctions
Dichotomy patriots/liberals	Unnecessary and artificial	‘You cannot be liberal in such a huge country’	‘We do not have patriotic liberals in this country’
Analogies	Soviet times; Russian mentality	History of Russia showing the way	Counterweight to the degeneration of the West
Definitions of problems	Passivity of the people, need to ‘do something for your country’	External threat towards Russia	America and other countries trying to disturb Russia and strip it off its power
Understanding of freedom of speech	Situation is bad but TV does what people want it to do; self-censorship prevails	There is no free media anywhere; self-censorship prevails	There is no free media in the West

Table by the author.

I also analysed the dichotomy between patriots and liberals⁶ by asking the journalists whether such a dichotomy exists. In some interviews the dichotomy was seen as unnecessary, even detrimental; however, all the journalists did find this dichotomy something that exists in political discourse.

The single thing every discourse and interview had in common was the pessimistic understanding of freedom of speech. It was seen either as something that exists nowhere, or something that is now in decline in Russia, because people do not want the truth. And Western journalism is in decay as well.

Discourses on Patriotism

Intimate patriotism

All three patriotic discourses have their roots in the Soviet concepts of patriotism. The Soviet system implicitly involved patriotic orientation, as demonstrated as early as 1925 by the first People's Commissar of Education, Anatolij Lunačarskij, who wrote about the necessity of encouraging the citizens' 'revolutionary patriotism' and their pride in the Fatherland (Sanina, 2017, p. 34). During and after the Second World War the all-prevailing patriotic discourse was a necessary component to unifying the nation for the needed sacrifice, and this was complemented by an intensive exercise of building enemy images (ibid., pp. 69–70). This approach to patriotism remained relatively unchanged until the collapse of the Soviet Union.

As the first programmes of patriotic education were introduced in Russia in 2001, the government emphasized the need to form 'socially significant values' such as the 'readiness to carry out civic duty and constitutional obligations to protect the interests of the homeland'. This did not make everyone happy. The Soviet bureaucratic approach was disliked by many, and some were disturbed by the attempt to 'governmentalize an intimate feeling' (Nikonova, 2010, pp. 354–355).

This interpretation of 'intimacy' in patriotism can be found in all my interviewees. How it was expressed varied. The clearest examples of it came during my first interview with M3 a long-term journalist, and who is to this day working at a newspaper but had a long career in media, including television, before. In the interview, he referred to the Soviet theory of the press as 'collective propagator, agitator and organizer'. According to him, the

task of ‘organizator’ was appreciated and taken seriously at the time – he remembered the times he worked as the editor-in-chief of a youth paper.

We had a very positive attitude towards this. When I was the editor of a youth paper we organized many acts that were good and interesting and we aim at this now as well. (Interview, M3, Moscow, May 2018).

Beside his journalistic duties, M3 is involved in the searches for the bodies of those lost during the war. In addition to this, he participates in delivering medals to veterans who did not get them during wartime.

This is not komsomol construction building a BAM ... but writing notes [in Russian: *zametki*, a genre in Russian journalism] takes 10 to 15% of my time and the rest I spend on these things. Not everyone can afford this kind of work, first one must make a career. For me it is possible not to show up at the newsroom for three days, if I am not on duty. (Interview, *ibid*).

Intimate patriotism also meant underlining the special nature and character of Russians and Russianness, at the same time sometimes pointing at representatives of other countries⁷ as being less generous. Interviewees gave examples of situations in which a Russian is helpful and unegoistic to others:

I think we are disliked [by other countries] because we have this attitude towards money ... God gave it, good took it. It's not that we are careless, but we have somewhat different values. (Interview, F2, Moscow, May 2018).

A female interviewee, an employee of Rossiya 1/ VGTRK, expressed her love for the Motherland via her criticism of it:

I am very, very worried about the destiny of my homeland. I am a Russian person, I have a very sensitive attitude to Russian language, to the context. It all really hurts me, especially for the people. I don't want to cooperate with them ... all this big amount

of people supporting the authorities, they want to argue. I don't want to argue or reassure anybody about anything. We are grown ups. ... What I can do is to show my own child that there is more to the world than this television and this big country of ours. (Interview, F1, Moscow, May 2018).

I interviewed two visible journalists, both from Rossiya 1/VGTRK.⁸ Andrej Medvedev, a journalist from Rossiya 1/VGTRK, put it this way:

I think that patriotism – it is concrete things. Love to the Motherland – it is not empty conversation, it is very ... you can touch it with your bare hands. If you don't spit on the streets – you are a patriot. You do spit: you are disgusting, a fascist and an occupant. Unfortunately ... in Russia civil society is very young and underdeveloped, we are not used to demanding something from the civil servants. And civil servants are not used to being accountable to citizens, they are not seen as hired managers like in Europe. So I think patriotism, including the one that journalist has, consists of trying to reassure people that this is how it works. This is the way it works everywhere in the world: the responsibility of the civil servant starts at the point where he is under control. (Interview, Moscow, June 2018).

Intimate patriotic discourse goes very close to what patriotism was seen as in the Soviet Union: as loyalty and love to much-suffered fatherland, and as a sense of belonging that is framed by trauma and suffering (Oushakine, 2009, p. 5). It is the duty of a citizen to be a patriot for the simple reason that the Motherland, surrounded by external enemies, needs nurture and care.

Military patriotism

Militaristic discourse is the most obvious of the discourses I separated in my materials. The origins of Soviet patriotism are militaristic by character. Stalin articulated in the early 1930s that the defence of the Fatherland is necessary to protect socialism (Sanina, 2017, p. 34). In today's patriotic discourses, victory in the Second World War remains a key element.

In addition to Second World War, this narrative appreciates Russia's historical struggles spanning from the tsarist, Soviet and post-Soviet eras, especially from the viewpoint of appreciating empire as a national achievement and underlining the comparisons between the present and imperial past (Nikonova, 2010, p. 353). Also, the patriotic education programmes, as depicted above, concentrate on the military aspects of patriotism. Their original aim was to raise the profile of the Russian army. The army has indeed gained popularity after its all-time low in the 1990s, but this could also be due to the reforms within the system (De La Pedraja, 2019).

During the last three years there is also a clear tendency that some young men even leave their studies and want to go to army. Not because they have problems at the university. They come from good families. The reason is that they want to defend their close ones, their homeland. This is very good ... I hear this from their mothers, they can be doing really well at the University but still want to go to the army! This is patriotism. (Interview, F2, Moscow, May 2018).

These things did come up with the interviews, especially with the two older – retired but still working – journalists. Both of them expressed military patriotism as something personally important, as from an intimate viewpoint: defending homeland is a duty and has many ramifications, and is a natural human feeling. What is noteworthy about the discourse is that it makes no claims about Russian journalism but concentrates on showing that there is no honest journalism in the West either: the days of 'good journalism' are over.

This thematic framework arose clearly from each of the interviews. I asked all the journalists whether they thought that 'Russia is at information war'. I gave all the interviewees a lot of room to define the terms and concepts; despite this freedom, the journalists would come up with either narratives that followed the Russian metanarratives or an apologetic explanation of why this works the way it does. By metanarrative I mean, following Gill (2011, p. 3), a 'body of discourse that serves as a vehicle of

communication between the regime and those living under it. The aim of a metanarrative is to simplify the prevailing ideology and serve as a tool for symbolic construction of the society, normalizing and stabilizing some concepts and excluding others.'

Military patriotism also strongly carries the narrative of the Second World War – a narrative generally very important for and in Russia today. The war is also used in order to explain many things, not least the shortcomings in today's world:

I guess not everything is as great as everywhere in Europe ... but kids, you did not have the kind of a war as we had. The war destroyed the Soviet Union totally. Out of 27 million [deceased] 18 were peaceful civilians. Nine million – war losses, and everything else – civilians. Soviet children – children – were taken to concentration camps. ... By year 1945 the country was destroyed from Western border to Volga, nothing was left whole, nothing. How can you guys in the West, say, that our life is not as good as yours? What do you mean by that? You don't have our experience. We sent Gagarin to space in 1961, 16 years after the most horrible war. (Interview with Andrej Medvedev of Rossiya 1/VGTRK, June 2018).

Sergej Brilev, the best-known of my interviewees, used the 'military' description of patriotism. He did not find the term very easily describable, and thought that one expression of it is waving the flag (the interview was made during the Football World Championship in Moscow):

SB: There's a military-political aspect of it and in that sense Russia, because of its long security-related history makes you look at things maybe slightly differently ... in comparison with small countries. Because essentially, if you look at the attitudes of the population towards certain things, it's quite similar to have – or used to have – in America, Britain, France and China. Essentially, essentially the same logic. People question things more and more but you know. And there's this notion that is very important to me, about patriotism contributing to the well-being of the country. I find it essential, but also being a realist and knowing this country I can tell you that

there are quite a lot of people in this country, maybe even majority, to whom well-being is secondary. People in this country are ready to sacrifice and to suffer for the sake of an important aim. In between brackets this is very important to something that people in the West fail to comprehend, why the anti-Russian sanctions are going nowhere. People are not impressed. In fact they are impressed but the reaction is ... totally different to what the decision-makers in Washington and Brussels expected.

SN: And you think this is something that ... this could be called patriotism?

SB: Mmmm ... you may call it patriotism. This is how this country's mentality has worked since at least 1237, when the country was invaded by the Mongol Tatars. So it's been eight centuries. (Interview, Moscow, June 2018).

Both Brilev and Medvedev of Rossiya 1/VGTRK were worried of the fact that young people did not know the history the way they 'should'.

What preoccupies me in fact is that what I see is the youth – I am already, I am 45 years old so I am starting to say things about the youth – the youth knows history not as it should and sometimes there are funny paradoxes when patriotism is being promoted and people do wave flags but they don't really talk to the youth and they don't understand the basic history lessons. (Interview with Sergej Brilev, Moscow, June 2018).

Military patriotism, of all the discourses, has most obvious roots in the state-led patriotism exercises. The basic assumptions are that Russia is surrounded by external enemies and it is the duty of citizens to know the bloody history of Russia and to be prepared for the worst, the way it always has been for the country.

Infowar patriotism

As described earlier in this chapter, Russian definitions of information war led to a Russian security strategy where non-military

measures are combined with military ones in order to neutralize a potential threat to the national interests (Pynnöniemi, 2016, p. 221). The measures vary from situation to situation, but one tactic used is using certain pre-prepared narratives that are spread in the media.

For instance, the European Union External Action Service-backed EU vs Disinfo has separated several clear narratives used by Russian mainstream media to undermine the 'West' in particular (EU vs Disinfo, 2019). The narrative, where the West is 'decaying', is not a new one but has been prevalent for centuries. Often the strategy is not to spread lies but repackage information selectively in order to produce not false but heavily slanted news (Lupion, 2018, pp. 352–353). Familiar narratives used to undermine the 'West' have been the erosion of moral values, the deliberate destruction of history, and constant strikes, protests, terrorism and the problematic influx of refugees and migrants (EU vs Disinfo, 2019; Mölder and Sazonov, 2018, p. 322).

Parts of these narratives were easily recognized in my interviews. Some of them came in a milder form. Sergej Brilev of Rossiya 1/VGTRK, for instance, reminded that Russia is still a liberal democracy, although it started building democracy later than Europe:

[This country] is less a liberal democracy compared to Western Europe, but still so much more a democracy compared to any country that lies to its South or to its East. It's a democracy. Essentially it's a democracy. People vote. People choose. This country has achieved something for the last twenty-five years that took Europe 300 years to achieve. In comparison with the West – yes, I would like to see this and this and this. In Russian reality, you have to be patient sometimes. It will change. (Interview, *ibid*, June 2018).

Brilev also mentioned the relatively late decriminalization of homosexuality in the West. Later on, when I asked concrete questions about information warfare, he mentioned that infowar has been going on for a long time – basically deriving from anti-communist propaganda spread in the West during the Cold War, up until the war in Georgia. Brilev felt that there have been

misunderstandings: that not all the bad things said were there on purpose; he also felt that somehow the spread of useless stereotypes has been let out of hands.

Certain things belong quite automatically to the category of 'information warfare'. For instance, the issue of economic sanctions against Russia is officially stated and interpreted as being a good thing for Russia. Some interviewees completely agreed with this, such as the female interviewee no longer full time on TV:

These sanctions that are now put upon as in big quantities ... they are in the end a plus. We were forced to actively develop industrial sector ... we don't like to be maddened. This time it was done fundamentally. So people, even those that used to be indifferent ... it is not a coincidence that this year so many people came to the immortal regiment. (Interview, F2, Moscow, May 2018).

My only interviewee from the First Channel was clearly within the machinery of information warfare – but he did not feel like it. He had been covering US presidential elections. To him, sympathetic coverage of Trump was natural, because he felt somewhat that the (Russian) state sympathized with Trump.

Interviewee: There was no official setting, but I somehow felt in the situation that our state is sympathetic to Trump.

SN: Yes?

I: Yes, because Hillary is associated with war – war in Afghanistan and in Iraq. Consequently, Hillary is associated with the oil click, that exchanges oil to blood, blood to oil and so on.

SN: And you think, that you felt that somehow you know how to cover, in order to ...?

I: There was no official setting, but there was a game of sorts. And Trump is totally unpredictable, totally different to the rest of the Washington establishment. So it was fun, my attitude to work was that it was not work but some kind of a game. If one takes it all seriously, one can lose one's mind. (Interview, M2, Moscow, June 2018).

This conversation was interesting, since the journalist saw and analysed the Russian-indulged narratives around US elections as a 'game' of sorts. He did not feel like being under pressure, or part of some kind of a major information machine; he rather felt that he took his work lightly and played a game. Later it was established that the attack against Hillary Clinton was well-planned and followed a consistent narrative (see e.g. Helmus et al., 2018; Snyder, 2018, pp. 231–279).

Only one of my interviewees was clearly and outspokenly critical of the practices of infowar. He asked to remain anonymous when criticizing the Russian media. He felt that there was no balanced journalism in Russia.

As a rule here, if the journalist criticizes Putin, he will in all support Ukraine and in all the ways he will condemn the Russian – Donetsk side. If the person thinks he is patriot or Russia, he will blame Kyiv about all the sins. ... He will be sure that Malaysian plane was shot by a Ukrainian provocation and so and so forth. ... Remarkable part of journalists went to propaganda. I know very few media outlets and not many concrete journalists that remain worth the term 'journalists'. ... The only very mild comfort – maybe a comfort – is that the standards have changed, the Western journalism has gone down as well. (Interview, M4, Moscow, May 2018).

This discourse was commonplace; it came up in four of my eight interviews.

I don't think there is freedom of speech or objective journalism anywhere. Do you think Yle is free? BBC? The same talking heads. Yle programs are the most boring I have heard. Journalist cannot be free as long as he gets money. He will always be in charge for that who gives the cash. The only way to be 'independent' would be to make the money some other way. (Interview, M1, Rossiya 1/VGTRK, Moscow, September 2018).

The journalist underlined the impossibility of nonpartisan journalism.

Sometimes my friends blame me for serving the state interests in my work at a state-owned TV. That feels odd. We all serve some interests. (Interview, *ibid*).

Journalists were also eager to explain the problems in Russian journalism by the passivity of Russian people and the fact that nobody really wants democracy or freedom of speech:

We live like on a volcano. And despite that, the nostalgia to Soviet Union is very strong ... Old films are being shown. They calm people down, calm because people want to go back, to return to the past simply because they don't want to take responsibility of their own lives. ... People don't want any liberal democracy, they don't want it. Absolutely, they flee to all four directions. Most difficult part is the fight with the mentality. It's like in a film by Tarkovski: when a person sits in a dirty puddle and another comes and says 'come on, get up, get out of there.' And the other person replies: 'But this is where I live!' (Interview, F1, Rossiya 1/VGTRK, May 2018).

Conclusions

Serguei Alex Oushakine (2009) wrote in his thought-provoking book about patriotism of despair: 'The patriotism of despair, as I call it, emerged as an emotionally charged set of symbolic practices called upon to mediate relations among individuals, nation and state and thus to provide communities of loss with socially meaningful subject positions.' In other words, the discourse of war, of extreme loss and trauma combined with a story of heroic victory, is a crucial component of Russian patriotism up to this day and this is evident also when talking to journalists about their understandings of patriotism. The journalists feel that the much-suffered Motherland deserves a good treatment, and it is a duty of a citizen to do things for Russia. This is, however, not the full story; journalists give different meanings and interpretations to the concept.

Russian patriotism is a state ideology, and the state-centred military patriotism does have its ramifications in the minds and

activities of Russian TV journalists. Again, however, the official discourse is not accepted without criticism. Some journalists interviewed even found it awkward. Journalists also admit that the quality of mainstream Russian television journalism has gone down, although they underlined that this is the case everywhere.

Information security is high on the state agenda, listed among the cornerstones of preserving national security and thus in defending national interests (Kari, 2016, pp. 71–72). It is unlikely that the tendency to control television and to impose state-led patriotism upon TV journalists will cease anytime soon, despite the apparent inefficiency of patriotic education programmes and other top-down initiatives. The official narrative, where Russia is seen as a threatened superpower and where certain discourses are being constantly repeated to reinforce this system, is accepted and used, especially by prominent figures on television. Narratives about historical injustices do appear regularly and the official way of celebrating war is most often taken at face value.

Using patriotism as a means of (government) legitimization is not without risks. As argued by Goode (2016, p. 421), since patriotism includes both Soviet-era associations and contemporary ideals, it gives its users an opportunity to interpret and reinterpret it in many ways. According to Goode, the concept remains somewhat autonomous of regime and may as well be used to criticize or support the Kremlin (*ibid.*). Whether citizens' everyday understanding matches official doctrine really is a survival question for the regime. This was also seen in my materials: despite the clear separate discourses on patriotism that included elements of the doctrine, the journalists had their own ways of making sense of the concept.

Notes

¹ This questionnaire was done relatively recently, some two years after the war in South Ossetia and the Munich security conference, so it is likely that the attitudes of young people have been affected by these developments.

² The statistics do not mention the very widespread practice in Russia of having the television open in the room all the time. It is quite

unlikely that people actually sit watching the television for over six hours a day.

- ³ 'Obščestvennoe televidenie Rossii' ('OTR') is a public service broadcaster that started in 2013 after an initiative of President Medvedev. For details, see e.g. https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Общественное_телевидение_России
- ⁴ It needs to be noted that it was not easy to find interviewees since, officially, the journalists at VGTRK had no permission to talk to outsiders. Thus, turning to official structures such as the management of the channels was not helpful in finding interviewees.
- ⁵ The Kremlin runs a system of weekly editorial meetings for the editors-in-chief of all main outlets, where they are given the topics and angles (Kizirov, 2017).
- ⁶ This dichotomy comes often up, for instance, when speaking of 'Western liberalism' and patriotism and 'traditional values' as its counterweight. I was interested in the way journalists understood this dichotomy. More about this, see Il'ina, Chepkina and Kablukov (2017, p. 77).
- ⁷ In this work I am not elaborating on the situations when my own nationality came up; however, it did and many times my interviewees underlined the special relationship between Russia and Finland. It even made me wonder whether my nationality had some effect on the course of the interviews.
- ⁸ Out of the eight interviews, only three hoped to remain completely anonymous, two of them working for VGTRK and one for First Channel. Andrei Medvedev's interview was given to me via an official request sent to the VGTRK leadership.

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