

Russkii Obraz and the politics of “managed nationalism”

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This article examines the rise of *Russkii Obraz*, a Russian ultranationalist organization whose leaders cultivated a neo-fascist ideology and collaborated with skinhead gangs. Despite its extremism, *Russkii Obraz* played an important role in the Kremlin’s “managed nationalism,” a set of measures to manipulate the nationalist sector of the political arena. During 2008–2009, *Russkii Obraz* collaborated closely with pro-Kremlin youth organizations and enjoyed privileged access to Russia’s tightly controlled public sphere. This article argues that the key to *Russkii Obraz*’s brief ascendancy was its duality, its capacity to project moderation in public and extremism in private. For several years, this duality enabled *Russkii Obraz* to participate in public life while building a support base in the skinhead subculture. But the two projects collided when the security organs exposed *Russkii Obraz*’s links to an ultranationalist death-squad. Nevertheless, official indulgence of *Russkii Obraz* cannot be attributed merely to ignorance of its violent potential. This indulgence also reflected the fact that it was precisely those at the neo-fascist limits of the political spectrum who were most willing to collaborate in the regime’s efforts to suppress demands for democratization.

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Few issues in contemporary Russian politics are as problematic as the relationship between the Putin regime and the burgeoning ultranationalist movement. Since 2004, the Kremlin repeatedly wielded anti-fascism as a political weapon. At home, state functionaries and pro-regime youth organizations vilified the liberal opposition as fascist sympathizers. On the international stage, Russian diplomats raised the banner of anti-fascism in a series of clashes with ex-Soviet states over the legacy of the Second World War. This posturing was accompanied by sporadic repression of domestic ultranationalists. Scores were prosecuted for extremism and acts of racially motivated violence. At the same time, some ultranationalists demonstrated their rejection of the Putin regime by waging a terrorist campaign against state institutions and functionaries (Kozhevnikova 2009).

This simmering conflict coincided with the Kremlin’s promotion of “managed nationalism,” a project that sought both to tame and to harness extremist and xenophobic forces. During Putin’s first term, the Kremlin co-opted prominent representatives of the nationalist elite in order to manipulate the electoral process. The most successful manifestation of this policy was *Rodina*, which was created to draw votes from the communists in the 2003 State Duma elections. This approach was expanded during Putin’s “preventive counter-revolution,” a set of mobilizational and repressive measures designed to guard

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the election cycle of 2007–2008 against a “colour revolution.” To ensure control of the streets in a crisis, the authorities sponsored the creation of a plethora of patriotic youth organizations. The most conspicuous was *Nashi* (“Ours”), which staged mass rallies against Western “colonizers” and enlisted football gang members in a campaign of violence against left-wing youth (Horvath 2013, 99–118). But it was reinforced by a cluster of rival organizations, such as *Rossiia Molodaya* (“Young Russia”), *Mestnye* (“Locals”) and *Evraziiskii Soyuz Molodezhi* (“Eurasian Union of Youth”) that were more explicit in their xenophobia and their appeal to ultranationalist elements.

This article examines the rise and fall of *Russkii Obraz* (“Russian Form/Image”), a formation that represented one of the most extreme manifestations of “managed nationalism.” Launched in 2003 as a journal of patriotic opinion, *Russkii Obraz* metamorphosed into a highly successful network-based organization. Under the direction of a team of creative young intellectuals, it employed sophisticated marketing and public relations techniques to spread its influence amongst neo-nazi skinheads, football gangs, the ultranationalist rock subculture, and the nationalist political field. During 2008–2009, *Russkii Obraz* moved to the forefront of nationalist politics and appeared to establish a special relationship with the authorities. It collaborated closely with several Kremlin-backed youth organizations. *Russkii Obraz*’s leaders appeared alongside high-ranking state officials in public forums. At a time when pro-democracy protests were routinely dispersed with demonstrative brutality, *Russkii Obraz* was able to stage a series of provocative actions in the public arena.

What derailed this collaboration was the exposure of *Russkii Obraz*’s links to an underground terrorist group. On 3 November 2009, Nikita Tikhonov, a founder of *Russkii Obraz*, was arrested and charged with the double murder, in broad daylight in central Moscow, of Stanislav Markelov, a renowned human rights lawyer, and Anna Baburova, a young journalist from *Novaya Gazeta*. The ensuing investigation exposed connections between Tikhonov’s death squad, the public leaders of *Russkii Obraz*, and the apparatus of the Kremlin’s “preventive counter-revolution.” The revelations destroyed the relations between *Russkii Obraz* and the Kremlin, and split the organization into two warring factions. Within two years of Tikhonov’s conviction, *Russkii Obraz* was defunct.

Despite its central role in “managed nationalism,” *Russkii Obraz* has attracted surprisingly little academic attention. In 2009, SOVA’s major handbook on Russian ultranationalist organizations referred to it only in the entry on another organization (Shekhovtsov and Kozhevnikova 2009). Nor was *Russkii Obraz* mentioned in Marlène Laruelle’s study of contemporary Russian nationalism (Laruelle 2009). This lack of coverage reflects the difficulty of tracking an organization that was secretive, ideologically contradictory, and constantly evolving. Little is known about *Russkii Obraz*’s internal functioning, and its public statements were marked by misdirection and disinformation.

This article seeks to explain how *Russkii Obraz* grew from a tiny groupuscule of young intellectuals into a major force in nationalist politics. It argues that the key to *Russkii Obraz*’s ascendancy and to its downfall was its duality. Experts at manipulative public relations, its leaders were engaged simultaneously in two divergent projects addressed to different audiences. In their appearances in the mainstream media, they struck a pose as sophisticated, media-savvy young professionals, well-dressed spokesmen for a new kind of pragmatic, “European-style” nationalism. In their dealings with the subterranean world of the ultranationalist subculture, football thugs and skinhead gangs, they promoted virulent racism, a nazi cult, and a neo-fascist ideology. Not only did they encourage the “partisan” underground of paramilitary neo-nazi groups, but they were in close contact with a death squad responsible for a series of murders. As long as these killers eluded

the security organs, *Russkii Obraz*'s divergent projects were complementary. Its public respectability created opportunities to defend the interests of its violent, semi-criminal base. At the same time, its capacity to influence ultranationalist militants gave it clout in its dealings with the state. But Tikhonov's arrest and the ensuing investigation turned *Russkii Obraz* into a liability for the Kremlin. It also destroyed the movement's reputation in the ultranationalist milieu, as leading members collaborated with the security organs.

Genesis

Russkii Obraz was a creature of the internet age. Its leadership group had coalesced on the military history website *vojniki.borda.ru* and two other virtual discussion forums in early 2002 (Goryachev 2008). The participants included two history students, Il'ya Goryachev (b.1982) and Nikita Tikhonov (b.1980), who met in person that summer at Moscow's Historical Library (*Novaya Gazeta*, January 20, 2010). Both were conducting ideologically charged research under the guidance of politically engaged academics. Their improbable friendship was to shape the history of *Russkii Obraz*. For a ringleader of ultranationalist militants, Goryachev struck many observers as incongruously diminutive and effete. Known by the innocuous nickname of "Student," he has been likened to a Komsomol functionary (Yudina 2013). He became the movement's mastermind, conceiving its projects, crafting its propaganda, and enticing talented nationalists into its inner circle (Mikhailov 2011). Tikhonov, the son of a senior intelligence officer, was made of a different mettle. According to the ultranationalist ideologue, Aleksandr Sevast'yanov, Tikhonov was "a born leader ... a man of a different nature, a different stamp, amongst a sick, degenerating tribe" (Sevast'yanov 2011). These qualities were forged in the skinhead gang, *Ob"edinennye brigady-88* ("United Brigades-88", *OB-88*), which was notorious for its brutal attacks on non-Slavic immigrants during the late 1990s (Erzunov 2011). *OB-88* vanished from public view in 2002, but its veterans were to play an important role in the history of *Russkii Obraz*.

Perhaps the most important Russian precursor of *Russkii Obraz* was the *Natsional-Bolshevistskaya Partiya* (National-Bolshevik Party, *NBP*), which was established by Eduard Limonov and Aleksandr Dugin in 1993. During its early years, the *NBP* shocked liberal opinion-makers with its revolutionary hyperbole, its Nazi and Stalinist regalia, and its deliberately grotesque slogans ("Stalin, Beria, Gulag!"). But the *NBP* was less a disciplined movement than a conglomerate of very different subcultures. For many radical youth, it was both a gateway into ultranationalist politics and a springboard to far-flung ideological destinations. Readers of the party newspaper *Limonka* included several future leaders of *Russkii Obraz*. During their student days, Nikita Tikhonov and Sergei Erzunov discussed the political actions described in its pages "and in general shared [the *NBP*'s] views" (Erzunov 2011). Dmitrii Taratorin, who became *Russkii Obraz*'s principal ideologist, moved in *NBP* circles during the 1990s and was close to both Limonov and Dugin (Taratorin 2006). Like the *NBP*, *Russkii Obraz* would blend fascist symbolism and the left-wing rhetoric of the anti-globalization movement. Both organizations were youth movements that revolved around a segment of the rock music subculture. Both aspired to play a role in public affairs while nurturing an interest in terrorist violence.

A more controversial influence on *Russkii Obraz* was the Irish republican movement. After Tikhonov's arrest, it was repeatedly claimed that *Russkii Obraz* had been conceived as a two track project, with a political "Sinn Fein" wing and a paramilitary "IRA" wing.¹ Certainly the Irish experience loomed large in the imaginations of some *Russkii Obraz* activists. Il'ya Goryachev's blog was named after James Connolly, an Irish insurgent executed

for his role in the Easter uprising.² It was a bizarre choice for a Russian ultranationalist. One bemused critic suggested that Goryachev should march under the flag of Ulster at a nationalist demonstration. "I am not under the flag of Ulster," retorted Goryachev. "I am under the flag of the IRA."³ His sarcasm contained an element of truth. Drummers dressed in IRA uniforms headed *Russkii Obraz's* columns at the Russian March in 2008 and at its May Day parade in 2009.⁴ This may have been empty posturing, but the Irish experience also informed Tikhonov's commitment to armed struggle.⁵

The name of *Russkii Obraz* and its symbol (the Constantine Cross) came from Serbia, a nation that became a focal point of Russian nationalist agitation during NATO's bombing campaign in 1999. Three years later, Goryachev and Tikhonov made a pilgrimage to Belgrade, where they established contact with activists of *Otačastveni pokret Obraz* ("Patriotic Movement Honor"), an ultranationalist group founded by the sociologist Nebojša Krstić. The Serbian *Obraz* had evolved from a journal of nationalist opinion into a political movement. Despite Krstić's death in 2001, his followers established a reputation as a militant force in far-right politics by a combination of skillful public relations, street violence and celebration of war criminals (Wiesinger 2008). This example impressed Goryachev, who sensed the superior potential of the Serbian "brand" and its broader format over his original plan for a niche journal.⁶

Like its Serbian namesake, *Russkii Obraz* began as an editorial collective. In February 2003, Goryachev and Tikhonov unveiled the first issue of the journal *Russkii Obraz*, which appeared in a small print-run of 500 copies. For an ultranationalist publication, it was marked by unusually high production standards. Under interrogation in 2009, Goryachev explained that "Nikita Tikhonov and I always maintained that a rightist nationalist publication must meet the criteria of the normal mass media, that is, it must look like a normal glossy magazine."⁷ In many ways, *Russkii Obraz* projected an image of intelligent, pragmatic patriotism. Editorials condemned terrorism and advocated self-organization, self-limitation and national solidarity as remedies for the ills of Russian society.⁸ Its content was often erudite and sophisticated. "In order to understand articles in *RO*," boasted an editorial, "it is essential to have a knowledge of world history, to have a grasp of sociology, economics and related fields."⁹ Reviewing its fifth issue, the newspaper *Zavtra* praised the editors for "forming a new style (and image!) of the Russian nationalist, responding to the demands of the times, but not renouncing higher ideals."¹⁰

Those higher ideals included a set of fixations that hinted at *Russkii Obraz's* role as the crucible of a neo-fascist movement. The first was national degeneration, which Roger Griffin has identified as a central component of the mobilizing myths of fascist movements (Griffin 1991, 201–204). In the pages of *Russkii Obraz*, degeneration took the form of a moral malaise, as society disintegrated into atomized individuals, hedonistic and egotistic, lacking convictions and historical memory. The principal task of Russian nationalists, affirmed Tikhonov in a response to a reader, was "the struggle against the *obydlivanie* of the Russian people." Literally, "*obydlivanie*" means "transformation into farm animals." In colloquial usage, it connotes a loss of will and a state of abject dependence. "We want to change the political stereotypes of the Russian person," continued Tikhonov, "so that he doesn't excrete in apartment staircases, so that he stops imitating criminals, so that he can and wants to assert his rights" (Tikhonov 2004). In pursuit of this project, *Russkii Obraz* spared neither the downtrodden nor the privileged. It derided the fashion sense and moral vacuity of the "*patsany*," the illiterate hoodlums who flourished in the criminal underworld (Orekhov 2003). But it was no less scathing about "yuppies," whom it denigrated as dehumanized and denationalized automatons.¹¹ Special opprobrium was reserved for selfish, consumerist young people who had renounced child-bearing for

the sake of “the satisfaction of their transitory desires.” Only “an authentic cultural counter-revolution,” with aggressive propaganda to discredit the egocentrism of this generation, could save Russia from demographic collapse and foreign occupation (Tikhonov, 2005, p. 12; *Russkii Obraz*, No. 5, p. 1).

The second hallmark of *Russkii Obraz*'s extremism was its racism. Its second issue featured a long interview with Aleksandr Sevast'yanov, Russia's most eminent exponent of biological racism. In the interview, Sevast'yanov proclaimed that “our task” was biological: the “further strengthening of the homogeneity of the Russian people, the increase of its ethno-genetic core.” No hint of dissent came from the interviewer when Sevast'yanov added that “from generation to generation, the percentage of non-Russian blood must diminish in our people” (Sevast'yanov 2003). Two issues later, Tikhonov promised that the journal would raise “the racial theme” because it was “an important component of national identity.” Race defined Tikhonov's perceptions of both friends and foes. The notion that Russia had a Eurasian destiny was nothing less than “race treason, an insult to the memory of our forefathers” (Tikhonov 2004). Racism became the cornerstone of *Russkii Obraz*'s vision of Russian statehood, which revolved around the idea of an apartheid-style regime (Goryachev 2004).

The third danger sign in the pages of *Russkii Obraz* was its valorization of the perpetrators of racist violence. A major article titled “Hero of the Asphalt” was devoted to the exploits of Željko (Arkan) Ražnatović, the Serbian gangster and paramilitary leader, who became one of the most notorious perpetrators of ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia (Popov 2003). A glowing review was devoted to the Russian translation of *The Turner Diaries*, a crudely racist fictional narrative by the US neo-nazi activist William Pierce about a “White Revolution” that culminated in a genocide of non-Aryan peoples. Without a hint of disapproval, the reviewer noted that the book had inspired Timothy McVeigh to bomb the federal building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people (Lyubimova 2004).

Political apprenticeship

The origins of *Russkii Obraz*'s transformation into a political force can be traced to the autumn of 2003, when Goryachev and Tikhonov worked for Boris Fedorov, a former finance minister and one of the first liberals to embrace xenophobia as a political weapon. In his bid to win the seat of Moscow's Lyublino district in the December 2003 poll, Fedorov enlisted a cohort of young ultranationalists who crafted a campaign that vilified immigrants in luridly racist terms as a threat to the lives and livelihood of Muscovites. Fedorov's advertising carried hysterical warnings that Caucasian criminals were preparing to seize power in the city (SOVA 2003a). Subway train carriages were plastered with stickers bearing Fedorov's photograph and the racially charged promise that “We will impose order on the ‘black’ markets of Moscow!” (SOVA 2003b). Although Fedorov lost the election, the campaign was a formative moment for the *Russkii Obraz* team. In an editorial, they boasted that “we now have EXPERIENCE,” practical habits of propaganda, organization, and interacting with crowds.¹²

Another mentor was Nikolai Kur'yanovich, the deputy from Irkutsk for Zhirinovskii's Liberal'no-Demokraticeskaya Partiya Rossii (LDPR). The Duma's most fervent exponent of racist nationalism, Kur'yanovich won notoriety in June 2005, when he proposed legislation to protect the national gene pool by revoking the citizenship of women who married foreigners.¹³ Until his expulsion from the LDPR in October 2006, he cultivated the party's ties to an array of ultranationalist formations, including *Russkii Obraz*. During 2006–2007,

Il'ya Goryachev served as an aide to Kur'yanovich.¹⁴ The formal collaboration between Kur'yanovich and *Russkii Obraz* was launched at a joint protest in March 2006 against the arrest of General Ratko Mladić, the Bosnian Serb general indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) for his role in the Srebrenica massacre. Kur'yanovich signed an appeal to the Serbian people drafted by *Russkii Obraz*, which celebrated Mladić as a “hero of the Serb land.”¹⁵ Several months later, Kur'yanovich accompanied a *Russkii Obraz* delegation on a trip to Serbia and Republika Srpska, where they met ultranationalist politicians and paramilitary leaders.¹⁶

Russkii Obraz also worked closely with the elder statesman of nationalist politics, Sergei Baburin, whose *Narodnyi Soyuz* (Popular Union, *NS*) was the major nationalist faction in the Duma after the destruction of the *Rodina* party. During 2006–2007, Goryachev served on *NS*'s Political Council.¹⁷ A host of *Russkii Obraz* members, including Dmitrii Taratorin and Mikhail Valyaev, were nominated on *NS*'s regional lists for the 2007 Duma elections.¹⁸ Five weeks before the poll, their candidacies were disqualified on a technicality (*Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, November 2, 2007). But cooperation between the two organizations continued in 2008, when they held a joint rally to mark that year's “Russian March.” For *Russkii Obraz*, this alliance was an opportunity to gain entrée into an influential segment of the nationalist elite and to promote the organization's brand. By association with an established party, led by veteran politicians, the young leaders of *Russkii Obraz* moved to the forefront of nationalist politics and showed that they were treated seriously by people who mattered.

The struggle against orangism

When it was formally launched as a public organization in 2007, *Russkii Obraz* was little more than a private club of ultranationalist intellectuals. During the ensuing two years, it became a major force in nationalist politics, staging mass rallies in central Moscow, participating in televised debates, spawning a plethora of subsidiary projects, and drawing many regional activists into its network. This transformation was facilitated by the Kremlin's “preventive counter-revolution,” a set of measures designed to pacify the public sphere during the election cycle of 2007–2008. Supervised by Vladislav Surkov, the deputy head of the presidential administration, the “preventive counter-revolution” offered real opportunities for ultranationalists to move from the margins into the mainstream of public life. The ideological gulf that separated them from the regime narrowed, as a host of pro-Kremlin commentators began to churn out xenophobic propaganda about a Western-instigated “orange revolution” and extolled Russia's special path as a “sovereign democracy.” At the same time, the proliferation of pro-Kremlin counter-revolutionary structures – youth organizations, websites and media outlets – offered ultranationalists opportunities not only for gainful employment but also for building public profiles and forging links with state functionaries.

The rise of *Russkii Obraz* is inextricably bound up with the extension of the “preventive counter-revolution” to the nationalist sector of Russian politics during 2007–2009. For the Kremlin, the major irritant was the *Dvizhenie protiv nelegal'noi immigratsii* (Movement against Illegal Immigration, *DPNI*). Under the leadership of Aleksandr Belov (Potkin), the *DPNI* became an increasingly rebellious force. Not only had it become the voice of anti-immigrant rioters in Kondopoga, but it had repeatedly aligned itself with proponents of an “orangist” revolutionary strategy. For Belov, the point of no return came in the summer of 2008, when he attempted to transform the *DPNI* into a conventional political party. On 8 June, he signed a pact with Aleksei Navalnyi's *Narod* movement on a joint

struggle for free elections.¹⁹ One month later, Belov presided over the *DPNI*'s first formal congress, at which he committed himself to "nationalism in velvet gloves," a nationalism "not with a beard and enormous boots, but in a suit and tie" (*Kommersant*, July 14, 2007).

This attempt to crawl out of the underground benefitted *Russkii Obraz* in two ways. First, a large segment of the *DPNI*'s support base, skinheads and football hooligans alienated by Belov's quest for respectability, gravitated toward *Russkii Obraz*. This mass defection was led by prominent *DPNI* activists like Aleksei Mikhailov and the Valyaev brothers, who belonged to the inner circle of *Russkii Obraz*. Second, the authorities drove nationalist crowds into the hands of *Russkii Obraz* by giving it preferential treatment. In October 2008, the Moscow mayor's office banned the *DPNI*'s "Russian march," but approved a joint application from *NS* and *Russkii Obraz*.²⁰ The gesture was reciprocated by Dmitrii Taratorin, who in the name of *Russkii Obraz* hailed the impending march as "an extended hand of friendship from nationalists to the authorities."²¹ This amicability provoked an acrimonious debate in the nationalist blogosphere. For the first time, *Russkii Obraz* was forced to defend itself against accusations of being a pawn of the regime.²²

During this period, *Russkii Obraz* appears to have established lines of communication with the Kremlin. According to Goryachev's testimony at his interrogation in April 2009, he worked closely with Leonid Simunin, who formally headed the Lyuberetskii branch of *Mestnye* ("Locals"), the loyalist youth organization backed by the administration of Moscow region.²³ Goryachev claimed that Simunin, whom he met in 2007, "handles the youth movement *Mestnye* for the presidential administration of Russia, and combines this with the unofficial handling of the *Russkii Obraz* movement."²⁴ Simunin's ability to supervise both movements may have been helped by their ideological convergence. Conceived as a club of "political ecologists", *Mestnye* had been reoriented to deal with the threat posed by the *DPNI*. During 2006–2007, it mimicked *DPNI* propaganda in luridly racist campaigns against illegal immigrants working in local markets and as taxi drivers (*Moskovskii komsomolets*, November 29, 2006; *Kommersant*, June 21, 2007).

Simunin's supervision was clandestine, but *Russkii Obraz* forged a very public alliance with *Rossiya Molodaya* ("Young Russia," *RuMol*), one of the most militant pro-Kremlin youth organizations. Under the leadership of Maksim Mishchenko, *RuMol* had waged a relentless campaign of harassment against the extra-systemic opposition. But *RuMol*'s support base was unreliable. Students bussed in to boost the numbers at its demonstrations often exhibited an embarrassing ignorance of why they were present (see, for instance, *Gazeta*, December 4, 2008). *Russkii Obraz*, with its networks extending into football gangs, the ultranationalist music scene, and the skinhead underground, was able to summon crowds of militant, ideologically committed protesters. In return, *RuMol* offered its services as a kind of public interlocutor with state institutions, particularly after Mishchenko was elected to the State Duma in December 2007.

The collaboration between *Russkii Obraz* and *RuMol* was inaugurated by a demonstration in support of an indicted war criminal. On 10 August 2008, under the slogan "Radovan, we are with you!," some 300 ultranationalist youths assembled in Moscow's Novopushkinskaya Square. They were protesting against the arrest of Radovan Karadžić, whom Serbian police had transferred to the custody of the ICTY on 30 July. Like Mladić, Karadžić was an iconic figure for *Russkii Obraz*, which had celebrated a host of Serbian war crimes suspects as patriotic heroes. But the convergence of *Russkii Obraz*'s skinheads and *RuMol*'s loyalist youths was undoubtedly facilitated by the outbreak of war with Georgia on 7–8 August. Both groups were united by the chant, "Tanks to Tbilisi!," and by the perception that the events in the Balkans and the Caucasus were part of a concerted Western onslaught against the Slavic world.²⁵

The cooperation between *Russkii Obraz* and *RuMol* gained momentum during a joint campaign against *gastarbaitery* (immigrant workers). On 10 December 2008, *Russkii Obraz* hosted a round-table on the need to tighten controls over immigrants as the economy reeled from the impact of the global financial crisis. Dmitrii Taratorin, *Russkii Obraz*'s principal ideologue, used the occasion to insinuate that criminality was innate in Chechen and Central Asian culture. Mishchenko supplemented this inflammatory diatribe with a critique of the neo-liberal policies that encouraged the importation of laborers from Central Asia.²⁶ The following day, *Russkii Obraz* activists rallied for tougher migration legislation in Teatral'naya Square. Mishchenko came out to receive their petition, posed for photographs with Taratorin, and promised to take their proposals back to the Duma.²⁷ Goryachev extolled the event as "a direct continuation of our constructive dialogue with the regime."²⁸ That dialog reached a new level on 24 December, when Mishchenko, Goryachev and Mikhailov appealed to the Moscow authorities to ban non-Slavic immigrants from the New Year's concert in Red Square (Goryachev, Mikhailov, and Mishchenko 2008). The following day, Mishchenko accompanied a *Russkii Obraz* delegation to a cordial meeting with Mikhail Solomentsev, the chairman of the city government's committee for interregional links and nationality policies.²⁹

Russkii Obraz's integration into managed nationalism was consecrated by *SPAS*, a cable television station dedicated to the promotion of "Russian Orthodox" values. Founded by Ivan Demidov, *SPAS* provided a platform for pro-Kremlin ideologues like Nataliya Narochnitskaya and Aleksandr Dugin (*Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, July 27, 2005). But *SPAS* also offered employment to two leaders of *Russkii Obraz*: Taratorin, who was appointed head of political programming; and Goryachev, who served as head of public relations and hosted his own program, "Network Wars."³⁰ The institutional prestige of *SPAS* enabled them to engage in televised discussion with high-ranking state functionaries like Sergei Popov, an influential Duma deputy, and Major-General Leonid Vedenov, the head of the Interior Ministry's firearm licensing service.³¹

Official recognition enabled *Russkii Obraz* to become a palpable presence in Russia's circumscribed public sphere. On May Day 2009, it held its first major demonstration as a political organization. Under the slogan "Total mobilisation against communism and capitalism," several hundred activists marched from the VDNKh exhibition complex to Ostanokino television station. Unlike at the heavily policed "Russian March," the authorities took no measures to search participants. In turn, the organizers created an innocent, carnival-esque atmosphere and avoided the displays of aggression that struck fear into bystanders at many ultranationalist marches. Alongside the usual white-yellow-black nationalist flags and *Russkii Obraz* banners fluttered the flags of Transdnier, Wales, Texas and the US Confederacy. To the accompaniment of drummers dressed in IRA uniforms, the marchers chanted a medley of uplifting and comical slogans: "Youth! Rus! Revolution! Sport! Health! Nationalism! Chuck Norris! Freedom to Texas!" The message, according to Goryachev, was that *Russkii Obraz* supported the struggles of fraternal peoples "against world imperialism, against the yoke of NATO and globalisation" (Yaroshevskii 2009).

If this surreal pageant was an attempt to encroach upon the traditions of the left, *Russkii Obraz* also staged actions that expressed the prejudices of the nationalist right. In collaboration with *Ob'edinnennaya pravoslavnaya molodezh'* ("United Orthodox Youth"), *Russkii Obraz* spearheaded protests against a "Gay Parade," which had been proposed to coincide with Russia's hosting of the Eurovision Song Contest.³² Rank-and-file activists of *Natsional'nyi Stroi* ("National Formation"), a subsidiary organization of *Russkii Obraz*, took their prejudices to the streets with a sticker campaign ("Homosexuality = disease. Don't permit

its spread!”³³ One tribute to *Russkii Obraz*’s efforts came from the newspaper *Komsomol’skaya Pravda*, which anointed Goryachev the “coordinator of the opponents of the gay parade”.³⁴ In fact, the Eurovision “gay parade” was chimerical. The only people who paraded on the streets of Moscow that day were OMON troops and “anti-Sodomite” zealots (*Novaya Gazeta*, May 18, 2009). But *Russkii Obraz* had reason to celebrate its skill in capturing publicity by latching onto a prominent media story.

During the spring of 2009, *Russkii Obraz* staked out its own territory in the human rights field with the establishment of *Russkii Verdikt*, a “rights-defense centre” dedicated to the protection of “rightist” prisoners.³⁵ In a travesty of rights-defense rhetoric, it designated skinhead gang leaders, perpetrators of racially motivated murder, and neo-nazis convicted under the anti-extremism law as “prisoners of conscience.” The new initiative was launched in a blaze of publicity around a new “Day of Solidarity with Right Political Prisoners,” which consisted of fundraising events around the country.³⁶ One measure of the resonance of this campaign was the outbreak of a riot at a football match, when police intervened against a group of fans who had raised a banner emblazoned with the slogan, “Prisoners of conscience, you are not forgotten” (*Vechernyaya Moskva*, July 27, 2009).

Russkii Obraz’s incursion into the human rights field did not signal any amelioration of its racism. In October 2009, it promulgated a “political program” based on Dmitrii Taratorin’s fantasy of a racial dictatorship.³⁷ The founding premise of this manifesto was that “people are not equal, people are qualitatively different, and therefore they cannot have equal rights.” To institutionalize this inequality, it proposed a kind of apartheid. Non-Slavic indigenous populations would be granted autonomy in areas of dense settlement, but outside these territories they were to be second class citizens. Racial hierarchy was to be reinforced by a caste system that elevated warriors over civilians. Mixed-race marriages were to be outlawed as “a manifestation of a contemptuous attitude towards the fact of one’s race.”³⁸

Russkii Obraz publicly disavowed any sympathy for the Third Reich, but it courted neo-nazi youth by the incorporation of nazi regalia in its branding.³⁹ In 2009, its clothing label *Ratibor* produced black t-shirts that became a kind of uniform for the movement’s activists at public and private events. They featured a death’s head skull above the slogan, “*Moya chest’ zovetsya Vernost’*” (“My honor is named Loyalty”). For the uninitiated observer, the phrase was a platitude, but insiders would recognize the motto of the SS.⁴⁰ The fact that an organization called “Russian Image” embraced such un-Russian symbolism elicited some scorn on the internet.⁴¹ But *Russkii Obraz* activists who participated in a visit to Serbia also proudly reported an occasion when foreign rightists were unperturbed by their SS regalia.⁴²

The principal platform for *Russkii Obraz*’s interaction with ultranationalist youth was the rock band, *Khuk Sprava* (“Hook from the Right”), which labeled itself “the official voice of *Russkii Obraz*.” Launched at a concert in July 2006, *Khuk Sprava* was both a social space and a propaganda organ.⁴³ One sign of its importance was a dispute over the band’s lyrics between Goryachev and Sergei Golubev, leader of the neo-nazi gang “Blood and Honour. Combat 18.”⁴⁴ It is easy to see how Golubev’s qualms were alleviated. *Khuk Sprava*’s songs carried an unmistakable racist message. The refrain of “I Call!” made racism and intolerance a sign of personal independence: “I call a faggot a faggot!/I call a nigger a nigger!/They haven’t yet brainwashed me!/To be tolerant is the choice of a loser!”⁴⁵ Certainly there was no hint of tolerance in “Russian Beauty,” which vilified migrants from the Caucasus as sexual predators who threaten “a dark-blond maiden” and the survival of the white race: “I will not let a black southerner abuse you for his

pleasure/ ... If we stand up for Russian pride ... the dark-blonde maiden will become a mother/there will be numberless white children!"⁴⁶ The same anxieties about rapacious outsiders pervade the song "Indifference," which castigates bystanders who lack the will to fight when confronted by the spectacle of "a drunk 'visitor' grabbing someone's daughter."⁴⁷ The lyrics of "Black-White Regime" appear to argue for moral clarity, but the racial message is transparent: "The black, the evil is passing through your brain ... Defend yourself with a solid wall, blood brother! ... Let us swear to serve the White!"⁴⁸

Russkii Obraz's crowning achievement was a concert in Moscow's Bolotnaya Square on 4 November 2009. Unlike the "Russian march" that day in Lyublino, this gathering of 3000 skinheads and nationalist youth was officially authorized. It became a sensation because the concert featured not only *Khuk Sprava*, but also *Kolovrat*, a neo-nazi band notorious for its inflammatory, white supremacist lyrics. Introducing the concert, Aleksei Vasil'ev of *Russkii Verdikt* declared that "until the last moment, I didn't believe that here today, at a cannon-shot's distance from the Kremlin, several thousand rightist young people would gather to hear genuine rightist music" (*The New Times*, November 9, 2009). No less astounded was Dmitrii Bobrov, a skinhead leader recently released from prison. The concert, declared Bobrov, was "unprecedented in the modern political history of Russia" and evidence that "even in the depths of the regime, an awareness of the necessity of reform in a national spirit was taking shape."⁴⁹

The "partisans"

The Bolotnaya Square concert was a reminder of *Russkii Obraz's* duality. Even as it occupied a prestigious niche in the edifice of "managed nationalism," it was deeply implicated in a murky underworld of skinhead gangs and neo-nazi networks. When they were ensnared in a criminal investigation, some of movement's luminaries attempted to disavow the killers in their midst. They claimed that *Russkii Obraz*, the public organization launched in 2007, had parted ways with the advocates of violence who had contributed to the original journal. But *Russkii Obraz's* propaganda projects, its ideological statements, and the records of its internet community reveal an almost symbiotic relationship between its political leaders and the paramilitaries.

Russkii Obraz's most important statement of support for the paramilitary underground was the documentary film *Russkoe soprotivlenie* ("Russian Resistance"), which was released onto the internet in August 2009. A joint production between *Russkii Obraz*, its subsidiary *Russkii Verdikt* and *Belaya Pamyat'*, this sophisticated propaganda exercise was lauded by some nationalist commentators for its contribution to the movement's self-awareness (Kholmogorova 2009). Despite a denial in the opening credits, it was both a celebration and a vindication of political violence. It was punctuated by biographical sketches of "Russian partisans," whose murderous campaigns against immigrant "occupiers" were recounted to the accompaniment of uplifting, martial music. Its underlying message was that their struggle had to become more purposeful. A series of commentators contended that random killings of immigrants were ineffective and too costly to the movement. The implication was that the insurgents should redirect their aggression toward the "system" that imported immigrants. The film provided a long quotation from the first declaration of *Boevaya Organizatsiya Russkikh Natsionalistov* ("Fighting Organization of Russian Nationalists," *BORN*), which warned that "if [state] functionaries continue to populate Russia with foreigners, then we will have to begin exterminating functionaries."⁵⁰

Russkii Obraz's main intermediary with the "partisan" underworld was Nikita Tikhonov. In late 2006, he had gone into hiding after a warrant was issued for his arrest in connection

with the murder of Aleksandr Ryukhin, a young *Antifa* (anti-fascist) activist stabbed by a gang of ultranationalists (*Sovershenno sekretno*, May 24, 2011). But Tikhonov remained in contact with Il'ya Goryachev, Dmitrii Steshin and other *Russkii Obraz* activists. He also contributed to the organization's internal discussions. According to the skinhead leader Sergei Golubev, Tikhonov was the author of the "Ethical Codex of Russian Nationalists," which was signed by *Russkii Obraz* and two skinhead gangs, "Blood and Honour. Combat 18" and the supposedly defunct *OB-88* (*Sovershenno sekretno*, May 24, 2011).

A group of paramilitary fighters around Tikhonov was implicated in a succession of high-profile murders. This carnage began with attacks on migrant workers in late 2008, but achieved public resonance with the murder of Markelov and Baburova on 19 January 2009. After a lull, it was resumed on September 3 with the murder of Rasul Khalilov, a defendant in the trial of the "Black Hawks," a gang of non-Slavic youths who had made a video of their racist attack on two Russian youths in the metro.⁵¹ It intensified after Tikhonov's arrest with the murders of Ivan Khutorskoi, a prominent *Antifa* leader (16 November), and Muslim Abdullaev, a Dagestani kickboxing champion (24 December 2009).⁵² The group's final victim was Eduard Chuvashov, a judge of the Moscow city court, who had imposed harsh sentences on neo-nazi gang members for racially motivated murders in a two recent trials. Chuvashov was shot dead in the entrance to his apartment building on 12 April 2010. Although Tikhonov was already in custody, photographs and the address of the judge were found in his apartment (*Kommersant*, December 14, 2012).

Tikhonov provided an ideological justification for this killing spree in a manifesto titled "Strategy 2020." Although he insisted at his trial that he had merely downloaded this document, which the FSB had discovered on his computer in draft form, there was considerable evidence of his authorship. During his second interrogation, Goryachev spoke in detail about Tikhonov's labors on "Strategy 2020", which they had discussed on Skype.⁵³ One month after Tikhonov's arrest, the document appeared on the website of the skinhead gang "Blood and Honour. Combat 18."⁵⁴

"Strategy 2020" identified the Putin regime as the principal enemy of Russian nationalists. It contended that the regime's patriotic rhetoric was nothing more than a façade that concealed the machinations of two anti-national clans. First, there was the "Jewish oligarchical power," financial conglomerates like Mikhail Fridman's Alpha Group, which used their hirelings in the media to promote cosmopolitan values. Second, there were the *siloviki*, functionaries of the security apparatus who were infected by a "Soviet patriotism" that blinded them to the racial threat posed by non-European immigration.⁵⁵ By its stranglehold over the political system, the regime had prevented nationalists from taking a peaceful, parliamentary road to power.⁵⁶ At the same time, it was seeking to crush the nationalist revival by sponsoring "pseudo-nationalist projects" and by a crackdown on neo-nazi youth.⁵⁷ For Russian nationalists, violent resistance was the only option.

The central contention of "Strategy 2020" was that "direct action" – arson, killings, and acts of terrorism – was both the essence of the nationalist movement and a road to power. The paramilitary fighters of the neo-nazi underground, "those of us who are engaged in the physical extermination of occupiers and traitors," were the prime movers of the struggle.⁵⁸ For these fighters to become a revolutionary force, "every adult national-socialist" would have to master the use of firearms and every member of the "newly created military terrorist organizations" would have to learn not only how to make bombs, "but also to understand in cold blood: where and how best to apply them." This professionalization was a response to the reality that "the time of pogroms is long past, it is now a time of precision strikes against important targets."⁵⁹

In a sign of its author's media expertise, "Strategy 2020" contained an elaborate discussion of the need to wage an "information war" to demoralize the enemy and capture the imaginations of sympathizers. In this theater of conflict, truth mattered less than appearances. An unpublicized strike against the movement's enemies was a wasted effort. But once something became a media sensation, "then it is already unimportant whether it really happened or not." To magnify the resonance of their real and imaginary exploits, the paramilitaries needed to be reinforced by "their own special information resources, which publicize our actions."⁶⁰ As Goryachev explained to his interrogator, this aspect of "Strategy 2020" was realized by *BORN*.

The crackdown

As *Russkii Obraz* prepared for its crowning triumph, the concert on Bolotnaya Square on 4 November 2009, the FSB was closing in on Tikhonov. For several weeks, it had bugged his apartment. In an attempt to elicit an incriminating admission, Mikhail Markelov, the brother of the murdered lawyer, announced to the media that he knew the names of the killers (*Novye Izvestiya*, October 28, 2009). Disturbed by the news, Tikhonov and his girlfriend, Evgeniya Khasis, had a tense discussion about whether he might be a suspect (*Novaya Gazeta*, April 1, 2011). Their fears were confirmed on the night of 3 November, when police stormed the apartment and arrested the pair. The investigators found a small arsenal, including hand grenades, explosives, and automatic weapons. They also found numerous accessories of a clandestine life: fake passports, wigs, and glue for a fake mustache and beard.⁶¹ No less incriminating were the contents of Khasis's handbag: a memory stick containing images of a beheaded Tajik immigrant and an array of *BORN* declarations (*Novaya Gazeta*, April 1, 2011). Under interrogation, Tikhonov confessed that he had killed Markelov "out of personal enmity" (*Novaya Gazeta*, April 22, 2011). It was a plausible motive. Markelov was loathed by ultranationalists both for his pursuit of Russian officers guilty of abuses in Chechnya and for his support for the *Antifa* movement.⁶² When Tikhonov was brought to the scene of Markelov and Baburova's murder, he calmly recounted how he had committed it. Particularly incriminating was the admission that he had used an antique Browning pistol, a fact which was yet to be established by ballistics testing (*Novaya Gazeta*, April 22, 2011).

The coincidence of the *Kolovrat* concert and the arrest of Tikhonov and Khasis provided the liberal press with an opportunity to investigate official patronage of ultranationalists. Evgenii Levkovich, a *New Times* journalist, quoted the admission of a Kremlin source that "the holding of a meeting in Bolotnaya Square was conceived in the president's administration" and that the intention was "to draw part of the nationalists away from the Russian March in Lyublino". But no one had realized the virulence of *Kolovrat's* neo-Nazi racism, "and now there is a kind of embarrassment about what happened" (*The New Times*, November 9, 2009). A week later, *New Times* shed new light on the regime's reasoning. Citing a Kremlin source, it claimed that Surkov had decided to back *Russkii Obraz* as a force that might exert control over ultranationalist youth. According to this source, Surkov had been impressed by the erudite and witty articles in the movement's journal (*New Times*, November 16, 2009).

One of the first victims of the scandal was Maksim Mishchenko, the leader of *RuMol*, who had been named by *New Times* as the official who "supervised" *Russkii Obraz* (*The New Times*, November 9, 2009). At first, Mishchenko seemed to encourage this impression. Four days after Tikhonov's arrest, he publicly boasted that "I get along well with *Russkii Obraz*."⁶³ He soon had reason to regret his candor. On the evening of 16

November, *Antifa* militants raided the offices of *RuMol*, pelting it with rocks and bottles. They were exacting revenge for the murder, one day earlier, of their comrade Ivan Khutorskoi. Caught in the media spotlight, Mishchenko was forced to disown his allies. In an attempt to distract the media from his involvement in *Russkii Obraz*'s racially charged campaign against immigration, he conceded that he had engaged in "tactical cooperation" on the Serbian question.⁶⁴ But Mishchenko's promising career had suffered a serious blow. Unlike the ex-*Nashi* activist Robert Shlegel', Mishchenko was not nominated for re-election on the lists of *Edinaya Rossiya* in the 2011 poll.⁶⁵

The arrest of Tikhonov and Khasis caused disarray in the ranks of *Russkii Obraz*. The lives of its inner circle were disrupted by intrusive searches and aggressive interrogations. One faction hurried to dissociate itself from the detainees. Evgenii Valyaev, the movement's press spokesperson, issued a statement that "neither Khasis nor Tikhonov are or were members of the *Russkii Obraz* public movement" (Valyaev 2009). Another faction rallied in defense of the two prisoners. Aleksei Baranovskii's blog ("soberminded") hailed Tikhonov as a paragon of heroism, a warrior who "felt personal responsibility for the Russian movement and the fate of our Nation" and who "did what had to be done, what he considered right."⁶⁶ This panegyric was quickly deleted, and Baranovskii's allies denied that he was "soberminded" (Vasiliev 2011). When Tikhonov retracted his confession, Baranovskii threw all the resources of *Russkii Verdikt* into a prolonged campaign that portrayed the "journalist" Tikhonov and the "rights-defender" Khasis as innocent victims of an appalling injustice.

This crusade was undermined by the readiness of a group of Tikhonov's former comrades to cooperate with the investigation. The most incriminating testimony was provided by Il'ya Goryachev on 9 November 2009 after his resistance was evidently broken by the presentation of "all kinds of personal information" that had been discovered on his laptop (*The New Times*, March 21, 2011). That night Goryachev testified that both Tikhonov and Khasis had separately boasted to him about their role in Markelov's murder. Although he tried to portray them as critics of his own moderation, he also revealed the ambivalence of his own stance. During 2009, while Goryachev was hobnobbing with state officials and participating in the public forums of managed nationalism, he was in contact with the outlaw Tikhonov.⁶⁷

The pressure on *Russkii Obraz* intensified after the murder of judge Chuvashov on 12 April 2010. Eight days later, Goryachev was re-arrested in a Moscow café (Tor 2010). Under interrogation, he provided new details about the relationship between *Russkii Obraz* and the paramilitary underground. He recounted how he had arranged for Tikhonov to take knife-fighting lessons from the head of *Russkii Obraz*'s security team in the summer of 2009.⁶⁸ Goryachev also spoke about Sergei Nikulkin ("Sergei Sergeevich"), one of Tikhonov's old comrades from *OB-88*, who provided financial support to the fugitive. But in a kind of a warning, he added a handwritten postscript to the interrogation transcript, in which he not only named Leonid Simunin as *Russkii Obraz*'s Kremlin supervisor but claimed that Simunin had contacted him about obtaining a weapon from Tikhonov (Tumanov and Shmaraeva 2011). The message was clear: Goryachev had the ability to cause embarrassment in high places.

As the pressure mounted, *Russkii Obraz*'s activity dwindled. The scale of the crackdown disrupted both its financial affairs and its activist networks. Amongst those detained in a roundup of ultranationalists were not only rank-and-file militants but also private sector benefactors of the movement (Kozhevnikova 2010). In an attempt to deter the investigators, Goryachev and his lieutenants tried to reposition themselves as allies of the regime. In a long interview with *Novaya Gazeta*, he defined the organization's goal as "a struggle for

power not with the Kremlin but with ideological opponents at our level, the left-liberals.”⁶⁹ This reorientation was ratified by *Russkii Obraz*'s first formal congress, which was attended by 60 delegates from 10 regions on 11–12 September 2010. In his speech, Goryachev announced that the movement would emulate European nationalist parties that had won seats in national parliaments. But no sooner had he conjured up this tempting prospect than he announced his resignation (Valyaev 2010). Later that month, *Russkii Obraz* reached a kind of accord with the remnants of *DPNI*. They issued a declaration calling for “the integration of nationalists into the political system” as an antidote to the “partisan” insurgency.⁷⁰

The reasons for Goryachev's abrupt departure became clearer in early 2011, when transcripts of his interrogations appeared on the internet. It was widely suspected that they had been leaked by Tikhonov's defense team (Valyaev 2011). What is certain is that *Russkii Obraz*'s reputation in the nationalist milieu was tarnished by the exposure of Goryachev's cooperation with the security organs and his detailed descriptions of leading personalities in the neo-nazi underworld. Moderates cut their ties with a movement whose violence threatened to undermine their own quest for respectability.⁷¹ For Goryachev, ostracism was compounded by threats that emanated from the neo-nazi underworld.⁷² In early 2011, he left Russia for exile in Serbia.

No previous prosecution of Russian nationalists provoked the public controversy that raged around the Tikhonov-Khasis trial. For liberals and nationalists, the case became a cause célèbre. Sergei Sokolov, the deputy editor of *Novaya Gazeta*, took a personal interest in the case and repeatedly castigated Tikhonov's defenders as apologists for neo-nazism (*Novaya Gazeta*, January 18, 2010; Sokolov, 2011). With no less certitude, nationalist bloggers portrayed the defendants as victims of a conspiracy to destroy the nationalist movement. Their position was aided by numerous procedural irregularities. Judge Aleksandr Zamashnyuk made no pretense of even-handedness, and defense lawyers repeatedly called for his removal from the case (*Novye Izvestiya*, March 16, 2011). There were also well-founded concerns about the integrity of the jury. One of its members resigned, complaining that two of her colleagues, ex-security agents, were waging “propaganda work” for a guilty verdict (Levkovich 2011).

Despite its flaws, the trial left little doubt that Tikhonov and Khasis were involved in a neo-nazi paramilitary group. Their domestic chatter, recorded on eavesdropping devices planted by the FSB and replayed to the jury, included gossip about skinhead leaders and macabre banter about killing (*Moskovskii Komsomolets*, May 12, 2011). Video footage of the couple's domestic life included Tikhonov rearranging his armory and Khasis taking a pistol out of her handbag (*Novaya Gazeta*, April 22, 2011). These recordings were substantiated by Tikhonov's former collaborator, Sergei “Oper” Golubev, leader of the neo-nazi gang, *Blood and Honour. Combat 18*. Contradicting Tikhonov's denial of involvement in the skinhead underground, Golubev confirmed that Tikhonov belonged to *OB-88*. “Tikhonov thought that terror offered a chance for success,” he recounted, “for the coming to power of Russian nationalists” (*Novye Izvestiya*, April 19, 2011).

To the disappointment of some liberals, the proceedings offered few insights into the internal mechanisms of “managed nationalism.” Despite their relevance to the case, none of the intermediaries between the Kremlin and the ultranationalist milieu appeared in court. After the verdict was handed down, lawyers for the victims' families called for an investigation of the role of these murky figures (*Moskovskii Komsomolets*, May 12, 2011). This appeal fell on deaf ears. A year later, Aleksandr Cherkasov of the Memorial Society lamented that Russia had missed “a chance to recognize that under the cover of legal, ‘moderate’ nationalist groups there exists and operates a terrorist, nazi underground,

which is strangely but in an indisputable way linked to the regime and the *siloviki*" (Cherkasov 2012).

If the carefully managed trial left "managed nationalism" relatively unscathed, it caused irreparable damage to *Russkii Obraz*'s reputation. For many nationalists, the sentences handed down by the court – life imprisonment for Tikhonov and 20 years for Khasis – were a glaring injustice that had been made possible by Goryachev's perfidy. Despite the demonization of Goryachev, key figures in *Russkii Obraz* remained loyal to him and critical of Tikhonov.⁷³ Their intransigence only added fuel to the denunciation campaign. One critic tarred the group with the label *suchii obraz* ("bitch's image"), which quickly proliferated across the nationalist blogosphere.⁷⁴ Deserted by its regional branches, *Russkii Obraz* ceased to function as a political organization. Its website was not renewed in late 2012 and became inaccessible in April 2013.

But *Russkii Obraz* survived as a community of activists, who returned to the public arena in the guise of the discussion club and internet portal, *Modus Agendi*. In the aftermath of mass protests against fraud in the December 2011 Duma elections, *Modus Agendi* became a platform for a new anti-revolutionary initiative, the "Right-Conservative Alliance" (*Pravo-Konservativnyi Al'yans, PKA*). Launched at a conference at the Metropol' Hotel on 20 February 2012, *PKA* purported to advance a broader agenda than its predecessor (Valyaev 2012). But it showed few signs of becoming a political agent in its own right. Instead, its most prominent figures dispersed in a variety of movements and media structures. The exception was Goryachev, whose fate mirrored the fortunes of the mastermind of "managed nationalism." As long as Surkov remained in power, Goryachev flourished in his Balkan exile. But his impunity ended after Surkov's dismissal as vice-premier on 8 May 2013. One day later, Serbian police detained Goryachev on an international arrest warrant on charges of organizing an extremist group, banditism, complicity in ideologically motivated murders, and arms dealing (*Novaya Gazeta*, May 15, 2013).

Conclusion

Tikhonov's neo-nazi insurgency may have been nipped in the bud, but *Russkii Obraz* cannot be dismissed as a complete failure. It was a crucible that formed a network of young ultranationalist intellectuals who became shrewd political operators, adept creators of "political projects," and experts at manipulative propaganda. This groupuscule was able to make an impression on public life and to exert an influence out of all proportion to its numerical strength. It helped to make fashionable a cause that was once the refuge of the marginal and the unsuccessful. In its journal and its internet portal, it lent style, sophistication and intellectual depth to the ultranationalist project. In its use of branding, media campaigns, and public "happenings," it developed and extended the repertoire of ultranationalist activism.

Russkii Obraz also left its mark on the violent "partisan" underground. Its band *Khuk Sprava* was not merely a platform for revolutionary nationalism; it was also an arena for crowds of violent young men to fraternize and form new networks. In its subsidiary projects like *Russkii Verdikt* and the film *Russkoe Soprotivlenie*, *Russkii Obraz* glorified racist killers as partisans and prisoners of conscience, mythic figures in a pantheon of heroic warriors. It was no coincidence that two members of its own community, Tikhonov and Khasis, came to occupy a central niche in that pantheon. "It turned out," declared their hagiographer, Aleksandr Sevast'yanov, "that the *FSB* gave the Russian resistance icons" (Sevast'yanov 2012).

The history of *Russkii Obraz* also contains important lessons about the nature of the Putin regime and the dynamics of managed nationalism. For all of their anti-fascist posturing, the architects of Putin's "preventive counter-revolution" were not adversaries but manipulators of Russian fascism, which they employed as a tool for the subjugation of the nationalist sector of the political arena. In the process, they contributed to the radicalization of Russian nationalism. It was precisely at the moment that the *DPNI* threatened to compete for power as a conventional political party that the regime began to favor *Russkii Obraz*, an organization that represented a far more virulent form of extremism. While Belov talked about nationalism "with a suit and tie," *Russkii Obraz* was cultivating a neo-fascist ideology, courting the skinhead milieu, celebrating racist murderers, and maintaining links with Tikhonov's death squad.

What remains unclear is how much the movement's Kremlin handlers knew about the virulence of *Russkii Obraz*'s ideas and the extent of its ties to the "partisan" underground. It is likely that to some degree, the manipulators were also victims of manipulation. *Russkii Obraz* was playing a double game. Behind a smokescreen of "constructive dialogue," it exploited official indulgence to engage in a struggle against the state. Even as it was granted privileged access to the public sphere, its propaganda was inciting skinheads to redirect their aggression from immigrants to state institutions and functionaries. But there was an underlying logic to the regime's courtship of this subversive force. Neo-fascists were natural adversaries of those nationalists who embraced democratic principles. They were also adversaries of a state that rarely matched its patriotic rhetoric with deeds. This circumstance lies at the core of the unmanageability of "managed nationalism."

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Notes

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8. *Russkii Obraz*, No. 3, p. 1; No. 2, p. 1.
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10. "Shagi," *Zavtra*, 22 April 2005, p. 8.
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12. *Russkii Obraz*, No. 3, p. 1.

13. "LDPR predlagaet lishat' grazhdanstva RF za brak s inostrantsami," *Novye Izvestiya*, 6 June 2005, p. 2.
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25. "Svobodu Karadzichu! Tanki na Tbilisi!" available online at <http://shustikov.livejournal.com/471847.html> (accessed August 18, 2008); See particularly Goryachev's speech, "Miting 'Radovan, my s toboi!'," <http://web.archive.org/web/20111125232159/http://rus-obraz.net/activity/23>.
26. "Stenogramma kruglogo stola "Trudovaya migratsiya v usloviyakh krizisa: ugrozy i vyzovy", 17 December 2008, available online at <http://web.archive.org/web/20100612111642/http://rus-obraz.net/activity/36> (accessed June 4, 2013).
27. For photographs of Mishchenko and Taratorin, see Mishchenko's blog, 12 December 2012, <http://tagan.livejournal.com/2008/12/12/> (accessed July 8, 2013); on the demonstration see, "Piket za uzhestochenie zakonodatel'stva v otnoshenii trudovykh migrantov," 12 December 2008, available online at: <http://web.archive.org/web/20100612111611/http://rus-obraz.net/activity/35>.
28. "Molodezhnye lidery trebuyut uzhestochit' migratsionnyu politiku," 16 December 2008, <http://rus-obraz.livejournal.com/8229.html> (accessed December 16, 2012).
29. "Za Beluyu vlast' v Belokamennom gorode," 26 December 2008, <http://rus-obraz.livejournal.com/11598.html> (accessed November 29, 2012).
30. "Il'ya Goryachev," <http://www.right-world.net/persons/ilya-goryachev> (accessed March 15, 2013).
31. "Stenogramma kruglogo stola "Trudovaya migratsiya v usloviyakh krizisa: ugrozy i vyzovy", 17 December 2008, available online at <http://web.archive.org/web/20100612111642/http://rus-obraz.net/activity/36>; "Kruglyi stol "Legalizatsiya korotkostvol'nogo oruzhiya i izmenenie zakonodatel'stva o samooborone," 10 February 2009, available online at <http://rus-obraz.livejournal.com/20295.html> (accessed December 28, 2012).
32. "Oni ne proidut," <http://web.archive.org/web/20100612123251/http://rus-obraz.net/activity/58>.
33. "Ubi pедера..." <http://rus-obraz.livejournal.com/55322.html> (accessed March 16, 2013).
34. "Nuzho li provodit' gei-parad v Moskve?" *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, 15 may 2009, p. 3.
35. On *Russkii Obraz's* role in creating *Russkii Verdikt*, see the interview with Aleksei Mikhailov, "Esli proyavleniya natsionalizma budut podavlyat'sya, politicheskii terror obyazatel'no poyavitsya," *Novaya Gazeta*, 22 June 2011, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/society/47635.html> (accessed March 2, 2013).
36. "Den' Solidarnosti s pravymi politzaklyuchennymi: itogi," <http://web.archive.org/web/20111128111822/http://www.rus-obraz.net/activity/77>.
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41. See the exchanges on *Russkii Obraz's* community site, 20 September 2009, <http://rus-obraz.livejournal.com/95638.html> (accessed March 20, 2013).
42. "Obraz! Serbiya! Kosovo! Metokhiya!" <http://web.archive.org/web/20090804051134/http://www.rus-obraz.net/activity/68>.
43. On the first concert, <http://wrath14.livejournal.com/5167.html> (accessed July 29, 2007).
44. "Delo Tikhonova-Khasis: Protokol dopolnitel'nogo doprosa II'i Goryacheva," 20 April 2010, available online at <http://news.nswap.info/?p=54007&page=3> (accessed April 15, 2013).
45. "Ya nazyvayu" <http://hooksprava.org/lirika/ia-nazyvaiu> (accessed March 5, 2013). This analysis of *Khuk Sprava's* songs is indebted to research assistance by Grigorii Durnovo.
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47. "Ravnodushie," <http://hooksprava.org/lirika/ravnodushie> (accessed March 5, 2013).
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49. "Dmitrii Bobrov (Shul'ts): "Nichto ne daetsya bez bor'by," 17 November 2009, <http://rus-obraz.livejournal.com/124267.html> (accessed December 17, 2012).
50. "Russkoe soprotivlenie," available online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PetQ0-i1-0o> (accessed July 12, 2013).
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52. On Abdullaev, "Champion mira i Evropy po taikommu boks uubit na severe Moskvyy," *Vechnyaya Moskva*, 25 December 2009.
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56. *Ibid.*, <http://news.nswap.info/?p=26265>.
57. *Ibid.*, <http://news.nswap.info/?p=26265&page=2>.
58. *Ibid.*
59. *Ibid.*, <http://news.nswap.info/?p=26265&page=3>.
60. "Strategiya 2020," <http://news.nswap.info/?p=26265&page=6> (accessed February 5, 2013).
61. "Nikita Tikhonov i Evgeniya Khasis. 28 i 25 let... Ikh sudyat prisyazhnye. Mesto deistviya – Mosgorsud," *Novaya Gazeta*, 22 February 2011, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/society/7042.html> (accessed April 16, 2013).
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63. "Maksim Mishchenko: Diaspory parazitiruyut na organizme gosudarstva i natsii," 13 November 2009, available online at <http://rusk.ru/newsdata.php?idar=731959> (accessed February 15, 2013).
64. Andrei Kozenko, "'Rossiyu moloduyu' udarili po 'Russkomu obrazu,'" *Kommersant*, 19 November 2009, p. 6.
65. Mishchenko resigned his seat to join the Public Chamber, see his blog, 28 September 2011, <http://tagan.livejournal.com/545214.html> (accessed February 20, 2013).
66. originally <http://soberminded.livejournal.com/545668.html>; a copy is available at <http://forum.dpni.org/archive/index.php/t-22561.html?s=e4a05db810ec8bcd2aea4b3974e33571> (accessed April 23, 2013).
67. <http://news.nswap.info/?p=54000&page=3> (accessed December 14, 2012).
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73. See Valyaev's comments at <http://sver.livejournal.com/137503.html?thread=1528351> (accessed May 30, 2013) and Mikhailov's statement, "Delo T-Kh i Il'ya Goryachev," 24 June 2011, <http://rob-fergusson.livejournal.com/27406.html> (accessed April 15, 2013).
74. See "Suchii Obraz," 11 February 2011, <http://pn14.info/?p=55864> (accessed May 29, 2013); on the proliferation of the term, see Leont'ev (2011) and Yudina (2013).

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