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Love for the Motherland (or Why Cheese is More Patriotic than Crimea)¹

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the Russian government has promoted patriotism as a means to unify society and secure the legitimacy of Putin's regime. This paper considers the effectiveness of this campaign by examining everyday understandings of patriotism among Russian citizens. Drawing on in-depth interviews and focus groups conducted in two regions in 2014-2015, patriotism is lived and experienced among ordinary Russians as a personal, normative, and apolitical ideal that diverges significantly from official patriotic narratives. At the same time, Russians are convinced that the majority of fellow citizens are patriotic in the ways envisioned by the government. As a result, the government's use of patriotism is more effective in raising barriers to collective action than cultivating legitimacy. At the same time, everyday forms of patriotism encourage citizens to sacrifice public choice and to tolerate authoritarian rule.

KEYWORDS: Russia, Patriotism, Authoritarianism, Legitimacy, State-Society Relations

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INTRODUCTION

On the Urals website znak.com, a surprising survey appeared in early August 2014: “what is more important to you, Crimea or cheese?” The survey was surprising in part because of the patriotic wave engulfing Russia, in which questioning the annexation of Crimea became subject to criminal penalty.² Yet even more surprising was that 67% chose cheese over Crimea (see **FIGURE 1**) at a time when the government and media loudly and insistently claimed that Western sanctions would have little impact on daily life.³ While it is tempting to view such a poll as provocation in pitting patriotic sentiment against dairy products, at a minimum it raises an intriguing question: what kind of patriotism is consistent with Russians claiming cheese is more important than Crimea?

The answer has potentially far reaching implications for understanding how authoritarianism ‘works’ in Russia and more generally among ordinary citizens in authoritarian states. Much of the comparative literature on the ‘new authoritarianism’ focuses on a mix of elite competition and cohesiveness, material or status incentives, and coercion to explain the trajectories of authoritarian rule. Focusing on elites makes sense in relation to the distribution of patronage, use of coercion, or the manipulation of formally democratic institutions.⁴ As

² Maria Makutina, “Srok vozvrata: Za prizyvny vernut’ Krym Ukraine s 9 maia budet lishit’sia svobody srokom do piati let,” *Gazeta RBK*, March 24, 2014,

<http://www.rbc.ru/newspaper/2014/03/24/56bf1e9f9a7947299f72d389>.

³ The poll was soon taken down from the site, by which time it reached nearly 15,000 responses.

⁴ Larry Diamond, “Thinking about Hybrid Regimes,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 21–35; Henry E. Hale, *Patronal Politics: Eurasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Jennifer Gandhi, *Political Institutions under Dictatorship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Stephen Levitsky and Lucan Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Beatriz Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Andreas Schedler, *The Politics of Uncertainty: Sustaining and Subverting Electoral Authoritarianism* (Oxford University Press, 2013); Milan W. Svoblik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

authoritarian regimes proved increasingly durable in the post-Cold War era, scholars began to turn to ideational sources of power (like nationalism) and legitimation to account for regime dynamics and endurance.⁵

Yet a crucial factor missing from such explanations is the people as the ultimate source of legitimacy. After all, even personalist autocracies make some claim to adhere to democratic practices and values for domestic consumption. In the post-Soviet sphere, Soviet-era tropes concerning patriotism, nationalism, and internationalism remain active and meaningful in public policy and electoral politics. With particular regard to Russia, Marlene Laruelle and others have written extensively on the convergence of regime, parties, and opposition on nationalist politics under the guise of patriotism.⁶ When nationalism becomes state policy, incumbents claim legitimacy by regulating the content, directionality, and participation of subordinates and opposition in nationalist politics.⁷ Indeed, a crucial means by which the Kremlin controls

⁵ For example: Steven R. Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, “Beyond Patronage: Violent Struggle, Ruling Party Cohesion, and Authoritarian Durability,” *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 4 (2012): 869–89, doi:10.1017/S1537592712002861; Calvert W. Jones, “Seeing Like an Autocrat: Liberal Social Engineering in an Illiberal State,” *Perspectives on Politics* 13, no. 1 (March 2015): 24–41, doi:10.1017/S1537592714003119.

⁶ Marlene Laruelle, *In the Name of the Nation: Nationalism and Politics in Contemporary Russia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Marlene Laruelle, ed., *Russian Nationalism and the National Reassertion of Russia*, Reprint edition (S.l.: Routledge, 2009); Nicu Popescu, “The Strange Alliance of Democrats and Nationalists,” *Journal of Democracy* 23 (2012): 46–54; Natal’ia Iudina, Vera Al’perovich, and Aleksandr Verkhovskii, “Mezhdu Manezhnoi i Bolotnoi: Ksenofobiia i radikal’nyi natsionalizm i protivodeistvie im v 2011 godu v Rossii [Between Manezh and Bolotnaya: Xenophobia, radical nationalism, and efforts to counteract them in 2011]” (SOVA Informatsionno-analiticheskii tsentr, February 24, 2012), <http://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/publications/2012/02/d23739/>; Pål Kolstø, “The Ethnification of Russian Nationalism,” in *The New Russian Nationalism: Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism 2000-2015*, ed. Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 18–45.

⁷ J. Paul Goode, “Nationalism in Quiet Times: Ideational Power and Post-Soviet Electoral Authoritarianism,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 59 (2012): 6–16.

ideational capital in today's Russia is by claiming state policy as patriotic while labeling opposition and extremists, alike, as nationalists.

However, invoking patriotism as a means of legitimation is not without risk. First, while the government seeks to define and regulate the ways that patriotism is articulated and practiced, the concept is encumbered with Soviet-era associations as well as contemporary ideals. In this sense, patriotism as a concept is somewhat autonomous of regime and may serve either purpose of supporting or criticizing the Kremlin. Second, patriotism potentially shifts the locus of legitimacy unavoidably to the people (or nation). As a result, the Kremlin seeks to fuse state legitimacy with regime legitimacy, collapsing the distinction between state and regime and threatening the people's sovereign choice by associating regime failure with state failure. The success of such a gambit presumably depends on whether popular appraisals of patriotism in citizens' daily lives matches official doctrine.

I argue that one can understand popular tolerance of authoritarian rule by examining the everyday meanings and behaviors that citizens associate with patriotism in today's Russia. In democracies, legitimation is oriented towards governing institutions rather than the specific inhabitants of a given office. Electoral legitimacy appears to work precisely because democratic institutions endure, in turn ensuring elites of the opportunity to continue competing for popular support. By contrast, legitimation in today's Russia is oriented specifically towards the preservation of Putin's regime. Yet one should not mistake mere regime survival with legitimacy. As Walker Connor notes, there are a variety of reasons that citizens may accept or tolerate illegitimate regimes, arising from fear, habit, apathy, political and cultural isolation, and disorganization.⁸ For the Kremlin's current brand of patriotism to be successful in securing regime legitimacy, one expects that citizens must embrace its statist vision of the nation while accepting the displacement of their political subjectivity.

⁸ Walker Connor, "Nationalism and Political Illegitimacy," in *Ethnonationalism in the Contemporary World: Walker Connor and the Study of Nationalism*, ed. Daniele Conversi (New York: Routledge, 2002), 38–41.

While it is commonly observed that the Russian public is politically apathetic, there is little understanding of how Russians are complicit in the cultivation of regime legitimacy.⁹ When examining closely the ways that ordinary Russians explain and illustrate their understandings of patriotism and what it means to be a patriot, one finds a curious mix of individualism and conformity that goes well beyond opaque public opinion polling. Most believe the government, media, and education system are effective in producing genuine patriotic sentiment, yet few believe patriotic duties as claimed by the state are ever fulfilled. At the same time that individuals suggest that they are outside of the influence of the state's patriotic propaganda, they are convinced that the vast majority of their fellow citizens are solidly patriotic. Having situated themselves as relatively isolated or marginalized in relation to fellow citizens, Russians instead embrace an individualist, localized, and apolitical patriotism that takes shape through daily practices related to loving the motherland, daily life, and sacrificing public choice.

METHODOLOGY

The observations in this paper are drawn from over 60 in-depth interviews and focus groups conducted in Tiumen' and Perm' in 2014-2015.¹⁰ The distribution of respondents by age group

⁹ On popular support for Putin's regime, see: Timothy J. Colton and Henry E. Hale, "The Putin Vote: Presidential Electorates in a Hybrid Regime," *Slavic Review* 68, no. 3 (2009): 473–503; Alexander Lukin, "Russia's New Authoritarianism and the Post-Soviet Political Ideal," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 25, no. 1 (2009): 66–92; Richard Rose, William Mishler, and Neil Munro, *Popular Support for an Undemocratic Regime: The Changing Views of Russians* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Timothy Frye et al., "Is Putin's Popularity Real?," PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo (Washington, D.C.: PONARS Eurasia, November 24, 2015), <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/putins-popularity-real>.

¹⁰ Funding for this research was provided by a Fulbright research grant. I am grateful to Ekaterina Semushkina (Tiumen') and Valeriia Umanets (Perm') for invaluable research assistance, and to Dr. Oleg V. Lysenko and his team at Perm State Pedagogical University for organizing and conducting the focus groups. All errors and omissions are my own responsibility.

and occupation and depicted in **TABLE 1**.¹¹ Selection of respondents for the initial round of interviews followed ‘snowball sampling’, making use of initial contacts to reach wider circles of respondents with varied political views and socio-economic backgrounds. After the first few interviews, however, respondents were less likely to be socially connected.

I was especially interested in the logics that Russian citizens use to account for patriotic practices—in other words, what citizens *do* with regime narratives and how they convert elements of regime narratives into meaningful aspects of daily life. This includes making room for off-script forms of patriotic practice that do not correspond to regime narratives but emerge from ordinary experiences.¹² Moreover, allowing respondents to elaborate the meanings and activities associated with their understanding of patriotism in their own words allows for coding these meanings and identifying areas of overlap that span social, economic, and political cleavages. Interviews lasted anywhere from 30 minutes to two hours. Respondents were asked some standard questions up front, but allowed to respond in their own words with follow up questions to clarify their answers. Though the order and format varied somewhat from person to person,

¹¹ The gender distribution of respondents was 64% male, 36% female.

¹² On this approach in the study of ethnicity and nationalism, see: Rogers Brubaker et al., *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvania Town* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Melissa L. Caldwell, “The Taste of Nationalism: Food Politics in Postsocialist Moscow,” *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 67, no. 3 (2002): 295–319, doi:10.1080/0014184022000031185; John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnicity, Inc.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Jon E. Fox, “Missing the Mark: Nationalist Politics and Student Apathy,” *East European Politics & Societies* 18, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 363–93, doi:10.1177/0888325404266940; Jon E. Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss, “Everyday Nationhood,” *Ethnicities* 8, no. 4 (2008): 536–63, doi:10.1177/1468796808088925; Catherine Palmer, “From Theory to Practice: Experiencing the Nation in Everyday Life,” *Journal of Material Culture* 3, no. 2 (1998): 175–99; Natalya Kosmarskaya and Igor Savin, “Everyday Nationalism in Russia in European Context: Moscow Residents’ perceptions of Ethnic Minority Migrants and Migration,” in *The New Russian Nationalism: Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism 2000-2015*, ed. Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 132–59.

the interviews touched on a series of common topics: what it means to be a patriot in Russia today; what duties are associated with being a patriot; what kinds of patriotic symbols are encountered in one's daily routines; and what it means to "love the motherland."

All interviews were conducted in Russian by myself with an assistant present, recorded on my phone using an external microphone with respondents' consent, and conducted in public locations (most often a coffee shop or park) unless the respondent requested an alternative locale. The interviews were transcribed for analysis using process coding¹³ in Nvivo to generate an initial list of patriotic practices. This list was then consolidated into related sets of 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' practices. In reality, of course, no social practice is purely 'top-down' or 'bottom-up', as regime narratives merge with popular culture and become appropriated in citizens' daily lives.¹⁴ Similarly, elites are unlikely to be 'above' or unaffected by nationalism or popular culture, though they may play significant roles in shaping their content.¹⁵ These meta-categories of 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' are inductively derived from respondents' own understandings of the directionality of patriotic practices. The most frequently referenced practices are listed in **TABLE 2**.

Some caveats are in order concerning the conditions and means by which these interviews were conducted. As I entered the field in July 2014, relations between the United States and Russia were at their lowest point since the Cold War. This was largely related to the conflict in eastern Ukraine, the various accusations concerning the downing of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17, and the imposition of Western economic sanctions against Russia. The range of conspiracy theories concerning American involvement and deception concerning Ukraine seemingly increased on a daily basis, with new versions of schemes and machinations floated by a variety of figures and sources in Russia's national and online media. This made for a unique time

¹³ Johnny Saldana, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (Los Angeles, Calif: Sage Publications Ltd, 2009), 77–81.

¹⁴ My thanks to Yitzhak Brudny for this point.

¹⁵ Joseph M. Whitmeyer, "Elites and Popular Nationalism," *British Journal of Sociology* 53, no. 3 (2002): 321–41, doi:10.1080/0007131022000000536.

to visit Russia, but also a very unfortunate time from the standpoint of access. It became almost immediately clear that elite interviews were not an option. Whereas during previous research trips respondents liked to joke about meeting with an American spy, this time it was a genuine suspicion perhaps helped by the fact that my Fulbright grant was paid by the State Department. The situation persisted through 2015. In a telling moment, a sociologist in Perm' resisted the offer to conduct my focus groups with a simple explanation: "we are at war, but we do not know where the front is."

An additional underlying challenge was the near-pervasive belief that there is no such thing as academic independence, and that any research project invariably serves the purposes of the sponsor. More than once, respondents pressed me to explain for whom (*eto zakazal*) and for what purpose I was conducting my research. This is a reflection of years of politicization of academia in Russia, bolstered by the media's frequent use of pseudo-experts who rehearse the official line. There was also some suspicion of foreign academics as 'agents of influence' (*agenty vlianiia*) working in tandem with the so-called 'fifth column' (*piataia kolonna*), fanned by Putin's own remarks on the occasion of Russia's annexation of Crimea:

Some Western politicians are already threatening us with not just sanctions but also the prospect of increasingly serious problems on the domestic front. I would like to know what it is they have in mind exactly: action by a fifth column, this disparate bunch of 'national traitors', or are they hoping to put us in a worsening social and economic situation so as to provoke public discontent?¹⁶

For most Russians, events in Ukraine occurred far away from daily life despite the media attention and politicization of events. However, my presence personified those events for some respondents with an immediacy that demanded a vocal or visible response. In short, there might be little in daily life in provincial Russia that would trigger an outwardly patriotic or nationalist response, but the appearance of an American researching Russian patriotism with State

¹⁶ Vladimir Putin, "Obrashchenie Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii [Address by the President of the Russian Federation]," *Prezident Rossii*, March 18, 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/20603>.

Department funding potentially served as that trigger. The only way to deal with such circumstances was simply to ensure transparency in dealing with respondents. In practice, it also meant limiting collaboration with local academics despite my institutional affiliations to contain potential unforeseen consequences for them.¹⁷

In addition to the interviews, I used a series of focus groups conducted by local moderators as a form of verification.¹⁸ By removing myself from interaction, the focus groups provided an opportunity to observe the ways that citizens in different occupational categories (pensioners, small- and medium-business, state employees, and students) discussed patriotism in social settings. The sessions were similarly transcribed and analyzed using the categories of practice derived from the interviews. In each focus group, participants were given a scenario in which they are asked to suggest items to include in a museum exhibition dedicated to “love for the motherland,” spanning different eras: late Soviet era (1970-80s), 1990s, and the present day. Throughout, moderators guided participants to think about items related to their daily lives and to explain their suggestions. The sessions thus provided a useful means of recording patriotic associations and representations as well as observing points of contention.

OFFICIAL PATRIOTIC NARRATIVES

The Kremlin’s patriotic narratives concentrate on appreciation for Russia’s enduring state history, spanning the Tsarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet eras. This stands in contrast to the experience of loss of state and empire that characterized the 1990s.¹⁹ From the start of the Putin era, it placed particular emphasis on patriotic education programs, memorials and public remembrances of the

¹⁷ For instance, one of my colleagues in Tiumen’ withdrew from a co-publication project, fearful of the career consequences of publishing in an American journal.

¹⁸ On combining interviews with focus groups in this fashion, see: J. Paul Goode and David R. Stroup, “Everyday Nationalism: Constructivism for the Masses,” *Social Science Quarterly* 96, no. 3 (2015): 14–15, doi:10.1111/ssqu.12188.

¹⁹ Serguei Alex Oushakine, *The Patriotism of Despair: Nation, War, and Loss in Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

Great Patriotic War and especially Victory Day.²⁰ This accompanied a significant resurgence of military and war themes in popular culture that presented a muscular and assertive semblance of national identity.²¹ Official narratives also restore appreciation for empire (Tsarist and Soviet) as national achievement, politicizing its representations in textbooks and histories to the extent that comparisons of the present with the imperial past are unavoidable.

A typical manifestation of this form of patriotism may be observed in regional ethnographic (*kraevedcheskii*) museums in Russia. For example, Tiumen's City Duma Museum featured an exhibit called "I was born in the Soviet Union" (*Ja rozhben v Sovetskoi soiuze*) in summer 2014.²² One half of the exhibit featured items associated with a life in a typical Soviet-era apartment, including furniture, toys, and tins of food. The other half of the exhibit featured items associated with life in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, but with virtually no reference to ideology. Rather, the exhibit offered paperweights, identity documents, pins, and other souvenirs as the furnishings of a typical career in the Party, which informational placards recounted the steps in a typical career path. Joining home life and Party life together in the center of the exhibit was a re-constructed school room, flanked by a pair of shelves with items representing unifying events: Yuri Gagarin's space flight and the Moscow Olympics in 1980. The significance of such an exhibit, of course, is its banality, or the conscious connecting of past and present through the notion of a normal life lived simultaneously by all Russians. Indeed, similar exhibits may be observed in *kraevedcheskii* museums throughout Russia.

²⁰ Valerie Sperling, "The Last Refuge of a Scoundrel: Patriotism, Militarism and the Russian National Idea," *Nations and Nationalism* 9, no. 2 (2003): 235–53, doi:10.1111/1469-8219.00084; Valerie Sperling, "Making the Public Patriotic: Militarism and Anti-Militarism in Russia," in *Russian Nationalism and the National Reassertion of Russia*, ed. Marlene Laruelle, Reprint edition (New York: Routledge, 2009), 218–71.

²¹ David Gillespie, "Defence of the Realm: The 'New' Russian Patriotism on Screen," *The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies*. *Pipss.org*, no. Issue 3 (October 1, 2005), <http://pipss.revues.org/369>; Stephen M. Norris, *Blockbuster History in the New Russia: Movies, Memory, and Patriotism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

²² Author's field observations, Tiumen', Russia, July 30, 2014.

Of course, official patriotic narratives also cultivate strategic silences and selective remembering about the failures of either imperial system.²³ In the opening ceremonies of the Sochi Olympics, for example, the elaborate re-enactment of Russian history portrayed the twentieth century in two parts: the mechanization of society, cast in red lights to represent early Soviet development, followed by a sparkling rush to modernity that connected the post-war Soviet Union with today's Russia. The two periods were divided by a moment of silence to mark the cataclysm of the Second World War. In this fashion, the survival of the Russian state and its achievements took the place of the nation, and nowhere did one observe any indication of the Soviet Union's collapse or the various malaises that brought it to self-destruction.

In a vivid instance of selective remembrance, Putin's speech to mark the annexation of Crimea addressed the historical injustice of Crimea's transfer to Ukraine by the Politburo in 1954:

This was the personal initiative of the Communist Party head Nikita Khrushchev. What stood behind this decision of his – a desire to win the support of the Ukrainian political establishment or to atone for the mass repressions of the 1930's in Ukraine – is for historians to figure out. What matters now is that this decision was made in clear violation of the constitutional norms that were in place even then. The decision was made behind the scenes. Naturally, in a totalitarian state nobody bothered to ask the citizens of Crimea and Sevastopol. They were faced with the fact. People, of course, wondered why all of a sudden Crimea became part of Ukraine. But on the whole – and we must state this clearly, we all know it – this decision was treated as a formality of sorts because the territory was transferred within the boundaries of a single state. Back

²³ Ruth Wodak and Rudolf de Cillia, "Commemorating the Past: The Discursive Construction of Official Narratives about the 'Rebirth of the Second Austrian Republic'," *Discourse & Communication* 1, no. 3 (August 1, 2007): 337–63, doi:10.1177/1750481307079206; James V. Wertsch, "Blank Spots in Collective Memory: A Case Study of Russia," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 617, no. 1 (2008): 58–71, doi:10.1177/0002716207312870.

then, it was impossible to imagine that Ukraine and Russia may split up and become two separate states. However, this has happened.²⁴

With this bit of revisionist history²⁵, Putin absolved the Soviet system of responsibility for Crimea's transfer to Ukraine by laying the blame squarely on Khrushchev, concluding that Ukraine's sovereignty (with the breakup of the USSR) is the greater historical injustice.

Regime narratives about contemporary politics tend to characterize 'non-systemic' political opposition as attempting to organize a Maidan (in reference to the mass protests in Ukraine) in Russia, or alternatively of simply being a vocal, aggrieved minority of malcontents. Hence, in relation to the non-systemic opposition and related organizations (like 'foreign agents' and the so-called 'fifth column'), being a patriot means supporting the government against those who (allegedly) seek to undermine or overthrow it. With regard to foreign policy, patriotism for many is linked to supporting the Kremlin (particularly Putin, Prime Minister Dmitrii Medvedev, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, and Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu) as a bulwark against Western influence and meddling, though it also involves constant comparisons with the Soviet era and (by contrast) the 1990s.²⁶

As a whole, the Kremlin's patriotic narratives may be seen as synthesizing the importance of service sacrifice for the state, particularly through military service and war; the unexceptional normality of the state and the current regime as inscribed in, and exemplifying, an unbroken arc of Russian statehood; the exceptionality of Russian culture and traditions, and the related importance of resisting alien (not exclusively foreign) influences to safeguard Russia's

²⁴ Putin, "Obrashchenie Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii [Address by the President of the Russian Federation]."

²⁵ For a reliable account, see: Mark Kramer, "Why Did Russia Give Away Crimea Sixty Years Ago?," CWIHP E-Dossier (Wilson Center, March 19, 2014), <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/why-did-russia-give-away-crimea-sixty-years-ago>.

²⁶ J. Paul Goode, "Everyday Patriotism and Putin's Foreign Policy," *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo*, July 12, 2016, <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/everyday-patriotism-and-putins-foreign-policy>.

present and future; and increasingly the substitutability of Russian (*Rossiiskii*) citizenship with Russian (*russkii*) ethnicity. The state's expectations for ordinary citizens in accordance with its patriotic narratives may be found in the State Program for Patriotic Education (SPPE), which began in 2001 and has been renewed every five years since. According to the draft 2016 program, patriotism is “the foundational orientation of citizens’ social behavior, expressing a higher purpose in life and individuals’ activities, showing duty and responsibility before society, forming an understanding of the priority of societal interests above individuals and self-sacrifice, [and] disregarding danger to one’s life and health in the defense of the Fatherland’s interests.”²⁷ The essential goals of the SPPE include “creating conditions for raising citizens’ accountability for the fate of the country, raising the level of societal consolidation for resolving tasks related to the provision of national security and stable development of the Russian Federation, strengthening citizens’ sense of participation (*soprichastnost’*) in the great history and culture of Russia, [and] educating citizens who love their motherland and family, possessing an active position in life.”²⁸

CITIZENS’ PATRIOTIC PRACTICES

Turning from official patriotic narratives to the accounts of ordinary Russians in interviews and focus groups, I focus here on some of the most commonly referenced categories of practice, spanning both top-down and bottom-up varieties: loving, activating, performing, comparing,

²⁷ Gosudarstvennaia programma “Patrioticheskoe vospitanie grazhdan Rossiiskoi Federatsii na 2016-2020 gody”. Proekt. [State program “patriotic education of citizens of the Russian Federation”. Draft.] (<http://gospatriotprogramma.ru/programma%202016-2020/proekt/proekt.php>, last accessed January 17, 2016).

²⁸ Postanovlenie Pravitel’sтва RF ot 30 dekabria 2015 g. N 1493 “O gosudarstvennoi programme “Patrioticheskoe vospitanie grazhdan Rossiiskoi Federatsii na 2016-2020 gody” [On the state program ‘Patriotic education of citizens of the Russian Federation, 2016-2020]” (http://gospatriotprogramma.ru/upload/gospatriot_2016_2020.pdf, last accessed August 8, 2016).

living, improving, and choosing.²⁹ These are not cumulative in any linear sense, and contradictory attitudes and orientations are quite common. The task in examining these practices is not so much to impose an artificial consistency, but to attempt to re-create the logics that respondents invoke (or evade) in reconciling various forms of patriotic practice in their daily lives. In the concluding section, I will consider their significance to the extent that they correspond to official patriotic narratives.

Loving: The Motherland ‘As Is’

When asked to define patriotism, virtually every respondent answered the same way: to love the motherland (*liubov’ k rodine*). This is largely consistent with survey responses (see **TABLE 3**), but also opaque in meaning. As one respondent put it, “you don’t even have to think about it before you say it.”³⁰ This almost mechanical answer conceals a range of unexamined orientations.

Respondents struggled when pressed to explain *how* one should love the motherland, or even to describe it. In most cases, respondents focused rather on the ‘little motherland’ (*malaia rodina*), or the town, neighborhood, or village of one’s birth or where one lives. However, they also related patriotism to a range of spatial and social concepts mentioned in combination with love for one’s city, compatriots, country, culture, government, history, region, and general surroundings.

Many respondents characterized patriotism as categorically positive and contrasted it with chauvinistic attitudes. Insofar as patriotism involves loving the motherland, its authenticity or sincerity is determined by way of emotional connection. Yet it is also established through acceptance—that is, loving the motherland ‘as is’, rather than in accordance with some sort of ideal:

Traditionally, patriotism is love for one’s fatherland (*svi*). If you ask, “why do you love your mama?” or “why do you love your daughter?” I cannot answer. I’ll say, “Because

²⁹ An exhaustive analysis of all practices would go beyond the confines of this article, such that the practices not addressed in this paper will be examined in separate works. Ethnicizing, in particular, requires substantial analysis in relation to the ways that Russians differentiate patriotism from nationalism.

³⁰ Respondent 112556, Tiumen’, August 12, 2014.

she is [my] mama,” or “because she is [my] daughter.” You ask me, “why do you love your motherland?” I’ll also say, because it is [my] motherland (Respondent 110231).³¹

In a large part, a patriot is a person who loves the motherland, regardless of what kind of motherland or anything that happened. ...It doesn’t matter what kind of leader we have today, or what kind of leader we’ll have tomorrow (Respondent 151501).³²

For the older generation the motherland, more than likely, is connected with the USSR. Right now a new understanding is spreading. Thus the motherland is the Russian Federation plus Crimea, plus something else, maybe some part of Ukraine... (Respondent 175248)³³

In this fashion, the imperative to love the motherland takes priority over judgments of regime and leadership. As the last comment illustrates, accepting the motherland ‘as is’ does not imply that it needs well-defined or stable borders. On the contrary, changes in state borders associated with the motherland are to be accepted (and loved) with equanimity, though expanding the motherland’s borders appears preferable over their contraction. This became particularly apparent when one of the focus groups was asked about aspects of patriotism they would like to see in Russia’s future:

Participant A: Expansion of territory, expansion of borders.

Question in the room: By what means?

Participant A: Like Crimea, returning [*obratno*].

Participant B: Alaska, for example.

Moderator: Are you serious, or is that a joke?

Participant B: Serious.

Participant C: They’ve been talking about it, about expanding our borders to Alaska.

Moderator: I missed something. I didn’t hear about it.

³¹ Author’s interview, Perm’, December 3, 2015.

³² Author’s interview, Tiumen’, August 10, 2014.

³³ Author’s interview, Tiumen’, August 13, 2014.

Participant C: in *Rossiiskaia Gazeta* there was an article about revising Alaska's borders.

Moderator: Alaska? Are you certain? Alaska is a state of the US. How can we change Alaska's borders? Or are we preparing for war over Alaska? (*laughter*)

Participant C: No, wait, I mixed something up...

This approach to loving the motherland 'as is' found reflection in other objects of love that are impervious to individual agency or choice, such as culture, history, or government. The absence of choice means that loving the motherland sometimes feels to citizens like a dysfunctional relationship. As one respondent put it, "that's what patriotism is: love for the motherland. Though it would be nice if it were mutual."³⁴

Activating: The Patriotism of Others

All respondents saw patriotism as activated 'from above', most often attributed to the government, the media, or education. Discussions of 'activated patriotism' featured a mixture of causal and normative associations. Most respondents believed government, media, and education were (or could be) effective in producing a uniformly patriotic view among Russians. For some, this was seen as natural and expected: the government or schools are supposed to produce patriots. For others, 'activated patriotism' was expected but unsuccessfully executed by the state owing to lack of funding, corruption, or incompetence. Still others complained about patriotism as artificially manipulating people:

I think the government's use of patriotism is positive. Again, this is because, I hope, that eventually through this patriotism society will come to love its place of residence – that is, not just self-sacrifice, but not littering on the street. Of course, I don't exclude that the government uses it for its own interests, but this is completely normal. (Respondent 173010)³⁵

³⁴ Author's interview, Perm', November 27, 2015.

³⁵ Author's interview, Tiumen', August 8, 2014.

[Love] should come from the individual. That is, if they tell you from above, “yes, we should love the motherland,” it’s not faithful. Cultivating love for the motherland should come through understanding of that motherland, study of the motherland...

(Respondent 122134)³⁶

I think it’s impossible to make someone feel love [for the motherland] if it doesn’t come from within. It’s strange, almost savage. On the whole, when people of my generation say that they are doing some kind of patriotic things, for them it is an opportunity to realize their value in the absence of loneliness. (Respondent 161822)³⁷

Some respondents were more specific in connecting government and media with the effective and instrumental manipulation of patriotic messages to deflect opinion about the regime or domestic policies.

Most striking was that almost all respondents characterized the activation of patriotic sentiment as something that happens to *other* people (usually characterized as youth, older generations, or veterans). Yet they also estimated that the vast majority of their fellow citizens were genuinely affected by the activation of patriotic sentiment. In other words, few respondents were willing to claim to have been affected by the activation of patriotic sentiment, contrasting themselves with a patriotic (albeit deceived) majority or suggesting that the majority of people are engaged in public dissimulation:

Putin’s rating is about 90%, if you believe the surveys. Not even a rating but level of support for his actions. It’s these people that drink in propaganda. I know people that never used to watch television, thinking that they were being deceived. But now they watch and believe that everything said is true. (Respondent 154510)³⁸

³⁶ Author’s interview, Perm’, November 24, 2015.

³⁷ Author’s interview, Tiumen’, August 10, 2015.

³⁸ Author’s interview, Tiumen’, August 7, 2015.

I understood what the government could demand of me and that, at least, I'm not prepared to sacrifice my own interests and priorities. ... Yes, I work in a government structure, so maybe that sounds peculiar. But I assure you, that the majority are like that. [laughs] (Respondent 182619)³⁹

Respondents further explained the contrast between self and majority with reference to additional reinforcing distinctions concerning education, rationality, with authentic patriotism associated with lower education and irrationality. When it comes to age, there are multiple gradations, with the oldest and youngest respondents perceiving each other as most authentically patriotic. However, most respondents conveyed the impression that they stood alone, isolated by the mass activation of patriotic sentiment.

Hence, one finds citizens distancing themselves from state patriotism at the same time they contrast themselves with a presumed patriotic majority. Not surprisingly, Levada Center polls on educational priorities found that only a quarter of Russians think that schools need to produce patriots, while more than half favor preparing “thinking people, capable of taking responsibility.”⁴⁰ In combination, these observations suggest that the activation of patriotic displays ‘from above’ induces a kind of preference falsification (see concluding discussion). Indeed, the differentiation of individual from majority largely disappeared in the focus group discussions. In this fashion, it is easy to see how activated patriotism—even when viewed as inauthentic—works to raise barriers to collective action.

Performing: Patriotism for Show

Even as one accepts the motherland ‘as is’, respondents identified different categories of practice through which a patriot can go about the task of loving the motherland. These can be divided

³⁹ Author’s interview, Perm’, November 19, 2015.

⁴⁰ Analiticheskii Tsentr Iurii Levady, *Obshchestvennoe Mnenie - 2014 [Public Opinion - 2014]* (Moscow: Levada-Tsentr, 2014), 82, <http://www.levada.ru/sites/default/files/om14.pdf>.

into two broad categories: those practices which are externally imposed (by the state, by society) and abstract in nature, and those which are directly associated with individual behavior or agency.

At the intersection of ‘loving’ and ‘activating’, one particularly finds patriotism described as ceremony: simulating traditional Russian hospitality for foreigners, observing Victory Day, or simple flag waving are all examples of how Russian patriots demonstrate their love for the motherland in accordance with prescribed social and legal scripts. Respondents sometimes called these variants of practice ‘patriotism for show’ (*ura-patriotizm* or *pokaznoi patriotizm*). ‘Patriotism for show’ is episodic and intermittent, arising at designated moments like holiday parades or sporting events like the World Cup or the Olympics:

Well I don’t see it every day. That is, take for example some kinds of holidays. Victory Day, without a doubt. It’s a patriotic day for all in general. But on ordinary days, well, in principle I wouldn’t say so... (Respondent 154510)⁴¹

Well, of course, during the Olympics, we all became patriots. We all followed the triumphs of our sportsmen, we all discussed them, and patriotism was very, very timely. (Respondent 121427)⁴²

Respondents also referred to performing or fulfilling one’s constitutional responsibilities as patriotic, by which they meant military service. It is perhaps worth noting that not a single respondent suggested voting as a constitutional responsibility or even as patriotic.

In contrast to spectators at parades or sporting events for whom patriotism is ‘for show’, active duty personnel and veterans (along with pensioners) were widely assumed to be authentically patriotic in such performances:

I have my own business, after all, and I thought a lot about how people behave. And so I considered whether I should start using patriotic themes. I conducted my own survey and understood that one shouldn’t mix business with politics. You can use [patriotism] if the target audience is appropriate – that is, soldiers, pensioners, not youth though the

⁴¹ Author’s interview, Tiumen’, August 7, 2015.

⁴² Author’s interview, Perm’, December 4, 2015.

country supports them, for instance, for having children. That is, the topic sticks to just three types, but others don't react to it. They don't even think about it. As long as people don't say that they're Russian [*russkii*], they don't even think about it. I think Victory Day is done so that people don't forget about it. (Respondent 154217)⁴³

In this fashion, the activation of patriotism through ceremony and performance is understood as a momentary activation of national identity, but it was not perceived as constantly active or binding except for those who continue to serve in the military, pensioners, or state employees (*biudzhetniki*) – in other words, those whose jobs depend upon the state budget.

Similarly, one finds awareness of official expectations that patriots ought to be ready to defend the motherland (also expressed as the country or even as domestic markets) when called, to preserve Russian culture and traditions, and to sacrifice (possibly one's life or well-being) for the motherland. Yet these mostly abstract notions were felt as obligation or duty, and many respondents readily admitted to avoiding military service⁴⁴, being annoyed by flag waving, or finding patriotism to be unprofitable for their business. In other words, the duties and obligations associated with loving the motherland in official patriotic narratives proved, in fact, a poor guide to how ordinary Russians actually practice patriotism beyond such episodic performances.

Comparing: The Normality of Russia

As a practice, comparing is a form of talk that situates the present in relation to a country's past or in relation to other countries. It is a means not merely of making sense of the present, but specifically of accounting for why it is normal or exceptional. In the Kremlin's patriotic narratives, legitimation is sought by situating Russia as a continuation of previous imperial eras (mainly the Soviet era or sometimes Tsarist Russia), or relating Russia to neighboring or distant

⁴³ Author's interview, Tiumen', August 6, 2014.

⁴⁴ Respondents who served in the military resisted the use of the word *dolg* (duty) because it implied some degree of choice. Instead, they preferred to talk of military service as an obligation (*obiazannost'*).

Others (former Soviet states or the West). Comparing as a ‘bottom-up’ practice similarly serves as a foil for Russians to make sense of the present and to establish one’s relationship to it. In this sense, comparing is an interpretive practice that may also serve as an assertion of authority over history or culture.

Comparisons with former Soviet states usually served to confirm the normalcy of Russian politics, though respondents who opposed the war in Ukraine tended to invert the nature of such comparisons and viewed the relationship as exposing Russia’s political backwardness. When invoking comparisons with Western countries (Europe and the US), respondents emphasized their appreciation for those countries’ clean and orderly appearance. Cleanliness (as discussed below) also featured as a prominent dimension of living daily life as a form of patriotism.

When comparing Soviet history with US history, it was common for respondents to claim that an historical process during the Soviet era was shared by the US:

Russia...is a multinational country. The USSR in its time was understood as a ‘prison of nations.’ Because, at times, we united peoples using violent means... In the history of [the US] it was just the same, as with the history of any large government. (Respondent 145822)⁴⁵

The concept of patriotism for us hasn’t changed its meaning, not in pre-revolutionary Russia, not in the Soviet era, not now. That is, it always signifies love for the motherland, for one’s fatherland, but if we take other states for example, you can see similar cases. For instance, you could look at the war for independence of the US, the conflict between Great Britain and its North American colonies. You’ve probably seen the Mel Gibson movie, *The Patriot*? (Respondent 145058)⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Author’s interview, Tiumen’, August 15, 2014.

⁴⁶ Author’s interview, Perm’, November 27, 2015.

Such comparisons aimed to minimize Russia's historical exceptionalism and, by implication, strengthen the claim to the normalcy of the present. However, the comparisons were not always flattering. Comparisons with US history were also invoked to condemn present day Russia:

I really like those old black-and-white American films... the McCarthy period was terrifying. A couple of FBI officers come up to a woman and tell her, "something bad happened to your son," and she fears, "what if he joined the Communist Party? No, surely he died in a car wreck." Here it can happen just the same with [anyone]. Some police come up and say that you spoke out against the war with Ukraine. (Respondent 175248)⁴⁷

Even in such instances, the fact that the latter respondent reached for an example from US history—rather than, say, Stalin's terror—preserved the impression that Russia is still normal in the sense of a shared (albeit unfortunate) history. More importantly, the selective invocation of US history may serve a pragmatic purpose of observing the strategic silences about the Stalinist past cultivated in official narratives. Almost certainly, comparisons with the West were prompted at least in part by the interview context, possibly reflecting respondents' desire to communicate a point creatively and efficiently to a self-identified American interviewer. Indeed, comparisons with the West almost completely disappeared in focus group discussions, replaced by comparisons with other periods in Russian history.

In comparisons with the Soviet era, the most common point of reference was the 1960s and 1970s though respondents often lacked precision in their comparisons (increasingly evident in focus groups with younger cohorts). Rather, general assessments of the Soviet era predominated in comparisons with the present. Hence, the Soviet era was presented as a necessary stage of development, as an example of stability, or even as less of a police state than today's Russia. In focus groups, the Soviet era was remembered with pride and nostalgia, with respondents usually associating patriotism with ordinary items from their grandparents' apartments. Yet nostalgia inevitably leaves the present day wanting by comparison, and

⁴⁷ Author's interview, Tiumen', August 13, 2014.

participants often called for a return to Soviet-era education and social practices, or even for a return to Soviet-style patriotism. In effect, the Soviet era has become increasingly relevant in comparison with the present but it is also something of a cipher.

In contrast to evaluations of the Soviet era, assessments of the 1990s were definitive. As one respondent put it, “It seems to me the 1990s were the least patriotic time in our country.”⁴⁸ Another commented that, “in the 1990s in Russia...everything was awful. If there was news, then it was bad.”⁴⁹ These were common sentiments. In the collective memory, the 1990s are a black hole of interrupted time situated between the Soviet era and Putin’s regime. One respondent characterized the 1990s as a “forbidden topic” for conversation in family gatherings.⁵⁰ Focus group participants also struggled to come up with a list of patriotic associations with the 1990s. The decade lacked definitive markers in time compared to the decade’s bookends, with *perestroika* blurring into the early-1990s. Interview respondents even defined the Yeltsin era in terms of Putin’s rise to power: “Today people don’t talk at all about the 1990s. Either [they talk about] the USSR or the period just before Putin became president. Not the early 1990s, but before Putin’s rule.”⁵¹ Indeed, only a couple of respondents even mentioned Yeltsin’s name in relation to the 1990s.

Yet if the Kremlin’s legitimating narrative emphasizes comparisons with the 1990s to highlight the stability and prosperity of the present day, respondents drew different lessons:

If at the end of the 1990s...the individual played some kind of role, now the individual takes a back seat. And they try to convince people that everything should be for the country, that Russia should be great. (Respondent 154510)⁵²

⁴⁸ Author’s interview, Perm’, November 26, 2015.

⁴⁹ Author’s interview, Tiumen’, August 10, 2014.

⁵⁰ Author’s interview, Perm’, November 25, 2015.

⁵¹ Author’s interview, Tiumen’, August 8, 2014.

⁵² Author’s interview, Tiumen’, August 7, 2014.

There was democracy – some kind or other, but it existed. Local government developed and, in fact, Russia was saved from below, not from above. It saved itself. (Respondent 110526)⁵³

In contrast to the 1990s, respondents viewed the present as less creative, less free, and more politicized. This was particularly the case with reference to the official brand of patriotism, which was interpreted as an attempt to deflect attention from domestic matters or to revive Soviet era propaganda.

Living: Clean in Russia

For Russians not actively involved in the military or politics, patriotism ‘from below’ most often found expression through the ways people live their daily lives, raise their children, do their jobs, and even through the simple fact of survival.

For me, as a simple citizen, I think that my patriotism is shown in the fact that I work here, I spend my money here, I raise my child here and plan my future here, because I don’t want to go anywhere else. It’s my home. (Respondent 145822)⁵⁴

What is a patriot? Well, probably...I think it is every person born in Russia, working one’s whole life, and not even a thought of leaving Russia. Well, and by my actions I affirm that I love my country, that I work here, that I share those feelings with people around me. Something like that. (Respondent 100446)⁵⁵

For a number of respondents, simple survival or day-to-day existence was not enough. Instead, they associated patriotism literally and metaphorically with cleanliness. Littering in this sense is emblematic of hypocrisy, in that one cannot legitimately claim to be patriotic if you are noisy or throw trash on the street:

⁵³ Author’s interview, Perm’, December 10, 2015.

⁵⁴ Author’s interview, Tiumen’, August 15, 2014.

⁵⁵ Author’s interview, Perm’, December 9, 2015.

Personally for me patriotism is when you live in your city and you don't yell that you're a patriot, but you do something to be a patriot. If I were to yell that I'm a patriot and then throw cigarette butts on the street, then I can't say that I'm a patriot. (Respondent 165512)⁵⁶

Of course, it in no way means that I should watch Channel One and in listen in awe to the president's address because it's the President of Russia and he will tell me what I should do. [Patriotism] is when I don't throw trash out the window, but when I carry it to the designated place for it. Or when I tell my child about his relatives, it means...our city has some meaning for Russia, how her great grandfather fought or other kinds of things that are completely unrelated to government policy. (Respondent 121427)⁵⁷

The juxtaposition of shouting or yelling and littering with being a patriot is a pointed (if implied) contrast with 'patriotism for show', especially in relation to official patriotic displays (parades or street celebrations) involving lots of noise and litter. Understood in this fashion, being an everyday patriot can be a covert form of dissenting from the activation of patriotic sentiment 'from above' that individuals exercise through private (rather than social) approbation.

Improving: Just Do It (Quietly).

In evaluations of politics, respondents characterized this approbation through a simple test of whether one has done anything to *improve* the motherland:

There are two aspects. First, it's one's profession: doctors are supposed to heal, politicians should make laws that are comfortable for the people. Second, insofar as they were chosen by the people, they should feel grateful to the people for their election and they should somehow meet their expectations. Theoretically, a person goes into

⁵⁶ Author's interview, Tiumen', August 12, 2014.

⁵⁷ Author's interview, Perm', December 4, 2015.

government not because he wants power but because he wants to help people. He goes into government to improve the life of the people. (Respondent 112556)⁵⁸

[If] one wishes one's country well, find something that's wrong and try to fight it or show those people who are supposed to fight it. And know for certain that things really are good in your country. At the same time, listen to different positions, be able to listen to different positions and be able to comprehend them. ...Not imposed by someone's side, but what you yourself see and feel. (Respondent 104918)⁵⁹

Hence, patriotism is realized through living clean, doing one's job, staying quiet, and improving one's surroundings. In this important sense, everyday patriotism dovetails with a withdrawal from active participation in public politics, perhaps explaining in part the often-observed apolitical tendencies of Russian citizens. Moreover, insofar as this form of everyday patriotism serves as a basis for evaluating the work of politicians, it cannot escape notice that this collection of personal qualities is most often embodied by Vladimir Putin in the popular imagination.⁶⁰ Authentic patriotism, like Putin, is above politics. In practical terms, of course, this puts every other politician in the country in an impossible position.

Choosing: Russia is Hard

To this point, there has been little discussion of agency in relation to patriotism. Rather, the most commonly observed everyday practices related to patriotism were oriented towards coping with daily life. However, Russians do recognize that patriotism may be evidenced through one's daily choices in ways that are closely related to *living* and *improving*. Individual patriotic choices emerge within specific contexts, particularly in relation to the activation of patriotic sentiment 'from above' or the ways patriotism is lived on a quotidian level. In terms of the former, respondents

⁵⁸ Author's interview, Tiumen', August 12, 2014.

⁵⁹ Author's interview, Perm', November 27, 2015.

⁶⁰ Julie A. Cassiday and Emily D. Johnson, "Putin, Putiniana and the Question of a Post-Soviet Cult of Personality," *Slavonic & East European Review* 88, no. 4 (2010): 681–707.

characterized patriotism in terms of making hard choices rather than visible displays of support for the government:

See, if a person has gangrene, then you have to cut off the limb. You can't put it off.

That's how it is in Russia. You have to resolve the problem. It will be painful, but you have to do it. (Respondent 133514)⁶¹

In most cases, making the hard decision meant simply choosing not to leave Russia when one has the means and opportunity to do so, or simply not wanting to leave but to continue living in Russia.⁶²

I had the chance to live outside Russia. I can live in the US, [but] I chose to live in this country. That is, I live here not because that's how it is, but because I chose to do so. ...the majority of people live in this country not because they chose it, but because they live here and they don't have a choice. They lost their point of reference for what to love here. (Respondent 160136)⁶³

The nature of the hard decision is inflected by the degree to which respondents believed one can also choose one's motherland. For those who believe that one cannot change one's motherland, choosing to stay is a patriotic decision in the face of the manifold difficulties and stress of daily existence in Russia. Hence, one respondent observed that teachers have to be "big patriots" because they simply "can't live on what the state pays you."⁶⁴ By contrast, respondents who suggested one can choose one's motherland (typically more affluent businessmen) saw choosing to stay in Russia as a positive assertion of Russia's value despite the attractions of living or

⁶¹ Author's interview, Tiumen', August 6, 2014.

⁶² The means and opportunity to leave are crucial for there to be a choice. According the Levada surveys, more than 70% of Russians have never given any thought to leaving. Analiticheskii Tsentri Iurii Levady, *Obshchestvennoe Mnenie - 2014 [Public Opinion - 2014]*, 40.

⁶³ Author's interview, Perm', November 26, 2015.

⁶⁴ Author's interview, Tiumen', August 7, 2014.

working abroad: “for example, they might offer to pay you more in the West, but you’re a patriot so you answer that you want to work here.”⁶⁵

In terms of choice, then, authentic patriotism is expressed by making tough or possibly even irrational decisions: in political terms, to adopt unpopular but needed reforms could be considered patriotic, though respondents often opposed politics to patriotism. Choosing to work or provide public goods in the absence of worthy pay is patriotic. And, ultimately, choosing to stay in Russia when one has the means to leave is patriotic. It bears observing that the latter two aspects of choosing are not really about choice or action, at all, so much as they are about acceptance and rationalization. For example, in relation to the notion of living and improving discussed above, a true patriot is obligated to do one’s job and improve one’s surroundings quietly. If you have a complaint, a true patriot should not be noisy about it or make other people unhappy. Instead, a patriot makes the hard decision to accept difficult living conditions in the name of improving one’s community or surroundings by providing public goods, doing one’s job, and staying put. In brief, when it comes time to make a hard choice, the patriotic choice is to choose not to choose. Accepting this displacement of agency might be the hardest choice of all.

CONCLUSION

This cursory glance at citizens’ patriotic practices provides a foundation for linking varieties of practice with orientations towards regime (see **TABLE 4**). In addition to dividing categories of practice in terms of their directionality (top-down or bottom-up), closer scrutiny suggests that orientations towards the Kremlin also corresponds to the perceived authenticity of a practice. Inauthentic practices are those that are performed or activated ‘from above’. Respondents tended to view inauthentic practices as personally unconvincing and yet effective in manipulating other people. Invoking patriotism for political gain or profit was further discussed as cynical and opportunistic. In interviews, these were often associated with ritualized support of the regime. In focus groups, however, the discussion and representation of patriotic performances shifted from

⁶⁵ Author’s interview, Tiuemn’, August 7, 2014.

inauthentic to authentic with only occasional dissent. This contrast between interviews and focus groups suggests that individual Russians may be disdainful of officially-sponsored patriotism in private while openly supportive in social settings.

Conspicuous by their absence, of course, are any authentic patriotic practices that relate specifically to regime support. The disappearance of the 1990s from personal timelines is notable in this regard since most Russians associate the decade with a flawed democratic experiment. An ambivalence towards regime also coincides with the delegation of freedoms and sovereignty to the Russian presidency, which was originally conceived as being 'above politics'. This missing category further corresponds to the observed tendency among interview respondents of distinguishing between real or authentic patriotism and patriotism 'for show', as well as the assumption that the vast majority of one's fellow citizens are (perhaps inauthentic) patriots. Once again, the contrast between interviews and focus groups serves to illustrate this dynamic: whereas not a single interview respondent named Putin as patriotic, he was mentioned in every focus group (though in two cases, accompanied by knowing laughter).

By the same token, authentic 'bottom-up' practices are uniformly associated with ambivalence towards regime type. Patriotism for Russians is not about democracy or authoritarianism, but acceptance and tolerance: accepting the motherland 'as is', accepting Russia's history as normal, tolerating a limited scope of agency, and tolerating the absence of real choice. In other words, authentic patriotism is private and even romantic. And it is also obsessed with cleanliness. As Anderson (2006) notes in his analysis of patriotism, cleanliness is a common symbolic component of civic responsibility: "...it represents an awareness of the individual as inextricably part of one's community, and posits an ideal state exemplified through individual behavior: if individuals act individually to keep things clean, then the state and nation will be clean."⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006), 144.

Yet if cleanliness is related to individual patriotism, how to reconcile this with individual perceptions of other citizens as activated (inauthentic) patriots? The answer lies in the subtle difference in usage between ‘patriotism’ and ‘being a patriot’ in Russia. The practices related to ‘patriotism’ tend to be individual, local, and normative. Respondents talked about “my sense of patriotism” as an ideal, though not necessarily as something shared by all Russians. They expressed an intense attachment to their little motherland (*malaia Rodina*) and enjoyment from visiting and learning about different parts of their home regions, while the motherland as a whole was felt to be too abstract and distant to be meaningful. Hence, respondents associated patriotism in their daily lives with such practices as living clean, raising one’s children properly, not making trouble for others, doing one’s job, and improving one’s surroundings. For the most part, these practices are not imposed from above and instead tend to be reproduced through family circles and friendship. Strikingly, none of the practices associated with patriotism are even remotely political. Rather, they focus on living well and maintaining appropriate relations with others.

By contrast, ‘being a patriot’ is expressly political, denoting both loyalty and collective membership. This helps to explain, in part, why many respondents grew visibly uncomfortable when asked what it means to be a patriot and sought to clarify whether I wanted their opinion “or how it is for everyone” (*ili kak u vsekh*). ‘Being a patriot’ is not self-defined in the same way as patriotism because it involves the subordination of one’s own opinions and interests to that of the collective. ‘Being a patriot’ ultimately signifies loyalty and membership in accordance with existing tropes which are defined by the state or ‘from above’. Practices associated with ‘being a patriot’ therefore include various forms of mobilization and support (activating), or duty and emulation (performing), that nonetheless are mostly separate from citizens’ daily lives.

On the one hand, this difference between ‘patriotism’ and ‘being a patriot’ confirms that official patriotic narratives have been successful in transmitting the kinds of public practices that signal loyalty, albeit at the cost of appearing to others as ‘patriotism for show’. On the other hand, outward conformity with prescribed patriotic practice does not make one patriotic. Rather, individuals have their own notions of patriotism, imagined in terms of an apolitical ideal that

does not require public display or civic engagement. In this sense, official patriotism in Russia cannot be said to generate regime legitimacy so much as it produces and regulates public displays of regime loyalty, even when such displays appear to others to be ritualized or inauthentic. The resulting perception among individuals is that society is comprised of loyal patriots—a perception reinforced by the narrowing of public space for the airing of dissent.

The public/private distinction between ‘being a patriot’ and ‘patriotism’ bears some similarity to preference falsification, suggesting not merely that patriotism masks a privately-held sense of the regime’s illegitimacy but that a breakthrough moment could provoke a popular political response and cascade into regime change.⁶⁷ The crucial difference, here, is that the privately-held sense of patriotism is deeply personal and apolitical. Not only does it lack an alternative political project for mobilization, everyday patriotism views politics as generally opposed to patriotism. Consequently, it might be more accurate to call this public/private distinction a form of preference *compartmentalization*—or a way of managing the cognitive contradiction between simultaneously being a patriot despite one’s own sense of patriotism—rather than falsification.

Hence, it is possible to make sense of why Russians might find cheese to be more important than Crimea. Crimea may be claimed by Russia and inhabited by Russians, but ultimately changing the motherland’s borders changes nothing about one’s relationship towards it. Truly patriotic Russians will accept the motherland as it is, and focus their energies on private duties and obligations like doing their jobs, feeding their families, and staying out of politics. Crimea may come and go (or, rather, the reverse), but cheese is truly patriotic.

⁶⁷ Timur Kuran, “Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989,” *World Politics* 44, no. 1 (October 1, 1991): 7–48, doi:10.2307/2010422; Henry E. Hale, “Regime Change Cascades: What We Have Learned from the 1848 Revolutions to the 2011 Arab Uprisings,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 16, no. 1 (2013): 331–53, doi:10.1146/annurev-polisci-032211-212204.

FIGURE 1: Survey on Znak.com (August 7, 2014)



TABLE 1: Interview Respondents

	<i>Arts</i>	<i>Business</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Non-Profit</i>	<i>Politics</i>	<i>State Employee</i>	<i>Student</i>	<i>Unemployed</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
<i>18-22</i>	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	3	0	6
<i>23-29</i>	0	6	10	0	0	3	0	0	0	19
<i>30-39</i>	0	3	5	1	1	4	3	0	1	18
<i>40-49</i>	1	1	2	0	1	2	1	0	1	9
<i>50-59</i>	0	0	4	1	2	0	5	0	0	12
<i>60+</i>	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
<i>TOTAL</i>	2	11	23	2	5	10	9	3	2	67

TABLE 2: Everyday Practices in Russia (Total Coding References)

TOP-DOWN	BOTTOM-UP
Activating (187)	Loving (118)
Symbolizing (63)	Comparing (115)
Performing (59)	Living (102)
Supporting (50)	Ethnicizing (62)
Opposing (33)	Improving (49)
Organizing (27)	Choosing (34)
Defending (26)	Consuming (24)
Providing (11)	

TABLE 3: “What Does It Mean to Be A Patriot?” (Levada Survey, 2007-2014)⁶⁸

	2007	2010	2013	2014
Loving one’s country	66	59	59	68
Considering one’s country better than others	18	21	21	16
Considering that your country has no faults	4	6	6	5
Defending your country from any attack and accusation	21	22	21	18
Speaking the truth about your country	10	13	11	11
Working/acting for the benefit of your country	27	27	21	27
Striving to change your country for the better	21	22	21	22
Non-response	6	9	6	4

TABLE 4: Everyday Patriotism and Regime Orientation

	<i>Authentic</i>	<i>Inauthentic</i>
<i>Regime ambivalence</i>	Loving Comparing Living Choosing Improving	
<i>Regime support</i>		Activating Performing

⁶⁸ Analiticheskii Tsentr Iurii Levady, *Obshchestvennoe Mnenie - 2014 [Public Opinion - 2014]*, 35.

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