

## 'BE WHITE!' MUSIC IN THE FAR-RIGHT YOUTH SCENE IN RUSSIA

Tatiana Golova

## sketch

Like many other forms of self-expression in youth culture, Russian Neo-Nazi skinheads are an 'import' from Europe and the USA. However, since the late 1990s, this trend has developed its own momentum. The term 'Nazi skinhead' is still common in Russia, nowadays rather as a definition from outside. It is a label applied to a section of the militant, right-wing extremist youth scene, which has as the central elements of its group and individual self-image a pronouncedly racist, homophobic and Russian nationalist view of the world, a cult of aggressive masculinity and physical violence, as well as an idea of fun centred around collective physical exertion. This scene overlaps, both in terms of its culture and its composition, with that of the football hooligans. Here, the characteristics mentioned above are combined with symbols from different contexts and styles: the typical styles of the Neo-Nazi skinheads (also known pejoratively as *boneheads* or "*bony*") represent just one of a number of variations, which often conform to conventional tastes, for example having short hair instead of a skinhead or wearing casual sportswear from well-known labels such as Fred Perry rather than bomber jackets.

Cultural variety is also evident in the realm of music – an extremely important area for youth cultures. It contradicts the radical right's discursive assertion of the existence of a 'natural', ethnically homogenous community of Russians, Slavs or Whites, revealing this claim to be an Ideologem. Here, it is worth mentioning a comparatively new style of music – white rap. The name of the project '25/17' is a reference to the supposed bible passage from the Book of Ezekiel quoted by Samuel L. Jackson in Quentin Tarantino's 'Pulp Fiction' and used in a song by the Latino rappers 'Cypress Hill': 'And I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger those who attempt to poison and destroy my brothers'. The project's

recordings usually play down their political message, using it selectively and surreptitiously. The songs deal with the struggle for individual freedom or the desire to have a normal family, but also with the fear that one's children will become foreigners or Goyim in their native country. They interpret social grievances nationalistically or using conspiracy theories, for example: 'it is obvious that you find the way to patriotism when the city cheats you out of your flat'. This allegedly 'obvious' connection is underscored by catchy, tranquil beats that magnify the emotional impact of the music and put across the statement. The systematic mix of right-wing thought patterns and apolitical content allows the band to achieve popularity beyond the right-wing niche. However, at concerts, they happily chant with the audience from the hooligan scene: 'Be white! Be yourself!'.

As one might expect, many on the extreme right criticise such stylistic excursions into Hip Hop as 'racially alien'. This makes clear the fact that ideological motifs can be coupled with symbols from different origins; however, *cultural* pluralism, which can be understood as a dilution of once strict codes, does not lead to political deradicalisation. Of course, in Russia there are also the 'classical' genres of white power rock, such as RAC (Rock Against Communism) and Hardcore/Hatecore. Bands such as *Kolovrat* (Swastika), *T.N.F.* (Terror National Front), *Vandal*, *Kiborg* (Cyborg) and *Position* employ explicitly racist or anti-Semitic lyrics that speak of the infiltration of Russia by foreigners, masses of immigrants, foreign finance capital, and the moral and racial disintegration promoted by the 'un-Russian' government. They use potent motifs, some of which are reminiscent of those employed by the Nazis, such as blood-sucking parasites on the national body, criminal immigrants, Jewish conspiracies, the passive masses vs. the bellicose elites, Judeo-Christian subjugation

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and merciless race war. The audience are encouraged to think of themselves as a community of Russian/white soldiers on the front lines in this war, always prepared to sacrifice themselves and above all the others, the enemy, for national or racial unity.

The community is formulated not only through lyrics, but also expressed physically, through punch-ups and group attacks on 'non-whites' and political enemies, and by attending concerts. The meanings conveyed in music, pictures and words become a component of collective emotional experiences, strengthening the group identity through the acts of chanting well-known song lyrics, dancing or giving the Hitler salute or its equivalent.

Moreover, the concerts offer the opportunity to make new contacts and cultivate social networks; at the same time, CDs and accessories are sold. Incidentally, the wide-spread culture of pirate downloads in Russia has affected the revenue of right-wing labels and distributors significantly. The purchase of originals can therefore be understood as an act of political or artistic respect.

The concerts, which regularly draw an audience from throughout Russia, often take place on particular occasions, for example, the 'Day of Solidarity with Right-Wing Political Prisoners' established by members of the scene in 2009 or international days of remembrance such as the anni-

versary of the death of Ian Stuart Donaldson, the singer of the cult white power rock group *Skrewdriver*.<sup>1</sup> The large concerts have several hundred participants, but more often they only number 200 or fewer. For many performances, there is no public advertising: the invitations are passed on by word of mouth. An invitation of this kind confirms



*Split album: The US band ORW and the Russian band Wewelsburg. Symbols: Confederate flag, old flag of the Tsarist Empire, white power Celtic cross, sculpture 'Relay runners' by Karl Albiker (Olympic stadium Berlin 1936), SS cuff title. [http://aryanmusic.net/e107\\_plugins/content/content.php?content.127](http://aryanmusic.net/e107_plugins/content/content.php?content.127)*

one's membership of a select community, the scene or its core. Alongside the guarantee of exclusivity (and thus the desired confirmation of the status of those invited), this form of 'private function' aims to prevent punitive measures from the state organs. The first known case of a large-scale crackdown was the joint raid by the police and internal security forces at a memorial for Ian Stuart Don-

aldson near Moscow in 2002. The several hundred participants had their personal details noted, their fingerprints taken and were recorded on video; all this was carried out in the somewhat insensitive manner for which the Russian security services are known.

Recently, the Ukraine has become the location of larger events in which Russian white power bands have taken part. On the one hand, this is out of practical considerations because there is less danger of repression here and it is easier for the participants, including those from Western Europe, to

<sup>1</sup> 24 September 1993; I.S.D. was founder of the British and now international 'Blood and Honour'.

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enter the country. On the other hand, the Ukrainians are seen as a people with close 'racial' and historical ties to Russia. The Ukrainian and Russian sections of international white power rock networks provide each other with the affirmation that the 'Slavs' often do not receive from their West European counterparts. This rejection has clear historical examples, e.g. in the racial ideology of the German National Socialists. Those Russians who follow this ideology have to resolve the tension between the disparaging opinion of their ideological role models towards the Slavs with their own claim to belong to a 'master race'. The Russian units that fought on the side of Nazi Germany during the Second World War, especially the Cossack formations, provide a useful bridge. For example, a picture of Ivan Kononov – Cossack leader, former Red Army major and later *Wehrmacht* colonel – adorns the split album of two South Russian

RAC bands, which in 2008 appeared on the Russian Blood&Honour division's record label. This also shows how Russian white power rock is flexible in its use of different historical symbols. However, flexibility and cultural pluralism deceive one as to the true nature of this scene's fundamental inhuman ideology.

*From the German by Christopher Gilley*

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Tatiana Golova studied sociology and works as a research associate at the University of Magdeburg's Institute of Sociology. Her research interests include political sociology, social movements, urban and spatial sociology and right-wing extremism. Her doctoral thesis investigates the role of urban spaces in the construction of the collective identity of social movements.

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MODELS OF 'TABOO BREAKING' IN RUSSIAN ROCK MUSIC: THE  
AMBIVALENCE OF THE 'POLITICALLY INCORRECT'

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*Ewgeniy Kasakow*

## analysis

*Just as in the West, provocation and taboo breaking were from the onset an essential element of the musical subcultures among Soviet – and later, Russian – youth. In itself, the existence of a youth culture independent of the state represented within Soviet society a political matter and a challenge to the dominant order. At the beginning of the 1980s, rock musicians' lyrics became increasingly political. This article will examine the interaction between politics and subculture in Soviet and Russian rock music through examples of its different approaches to aesthetic and theoretical elements, with particular reference to anti-Semitic vocabulary.*

## PROVOCATION AS EXPOSURE

Yegor Letov, the founder of Siberian 'suicide punk', has, ever since the start of his career in the musical subculture, sought to intensify the confrontation with the dominant order. While earlier rockers tried to disguise their political criticism with, as far as possible, an outwardly apolitical image, the Siberian punks' projects revealed

their political character right from the beginning. This was already reflected in the bands' names: in 1982, Letov named his first band *Posev* after an anti-Communist publishing house; *Armiya Vlasova* (The Vlasov Army), a project of his comrade-in-arms Oleg Sudakov, took its name from the union of anti-Soviet Russian collaborators during the Second World War. Letov's first big pub-