

Russia: They're using us as propaganda

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The authorities and propaganda claim that “the oppression of Russians and the Russian language” was one of the reasons for the war in Ukraine. Meanwhile, the study of ethnic languages has been made optional in Russian schools. Even in national republics, one cannot live and work in their native “non-Russian” language. Since the war began, we have not only seen a greater number of deaths among national minorities but also an increase in everyday racism. The mobilization signaled the start of the raids, resembling ethnic cleansing in many ways. As a result, the peoples of the national republics are fleeing Russia in droves. These peoples have already suffered from deportations and genocides under the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. They know that during colonial wars, they will not only be used in the first place but also be blamed in the end. This is largely due to propaganda.

This propaganda campaign tries to play both cards simultaneously: unity and guilt.

“We are united” symbolizes total unification, the transformation of everyone into one organism without considering their differences. The propagandists emphasize “multinationality”, claiming that “fraternal peoples”, both inside and outside the Russian Federation, fully support what is happening. There were a lot of videos we saw over the summer, where various ethnicities were listed (“I am Tatar”, “I am Dagestani”). These videos end with the words, “We are Russians” and “The people of the Russian Federation support the president”. Not only does this look ironic, but it's also depreciating. Videos like these exoticize national minorities. Their culture, represented by national costumes, is used only to demonstrate unity, which de facto has not existed in Russia for a long time. Cynically enough, the regime only cares about us when it can take advantage of us and uses only the outer shell to do so.

The second card is guilt. Propaganda plays on everyday racism and xenophobia to make “those who are not like them” guilty of all sins. One of the most striking examples of this approach fell to a lot of the Buryat people. At first, they were accused of atrocities in Bucha (even though it was the Pskov paratroopers who were stationed there at the time), then looting and many other war crimes.

It is evident in both cases that a significant layer of propaganda exploits national minorities. From abroad, we are all perceived as Russians. There is no separate word: Rossiyanin and Russian are the same things to a foreigner. The non-Russian nationality only appears when the lousy side should be shown: “A Dagestani man attacked”, “A Buryat man stole”. Whether you are a national minority or not, fulfilling the desires of those who do not consider you an equal is a dangerous path to take.

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