

Russia's Rape Culture

The Centrality of Rape in the Russian World

Like all things Russian, whatever Russia professes as true is often the complete opposite of reality. For example, while Russia promotes itself to a naïve international audience as an anti-colonial, anti-imperial state, it is in fact the world's last surviving imperial, colonial system. While it professes to "liberate" those nations it occupies, its' rule surpasses in cruelty the excesses of the Mongol Empire which it overthrew and expanded through a policy of cultural and oftentimes physical genocide into one of the largest – not "greatest" – empires in history.

That Russia is so often taken at its word is astounding but not totally surprising. US Department of State reports that Russia's target audiences in the West and throughout the global south are not defended against the level of sophisticated [propaganda Russia employs](#). Recent disclosures of long-standing KGB/FSB expenditures reveal that a major part of [Russia's security budget](#) – now estimated at [1.9 billion USD for 2024](#) – has been going into its vast projects to the world that bears little-to-no resemblance to the reality behind the glittery images of its well-dressed elites and their multi-million-dollar yachts.

The KGB/FSB's recent project to project an image of itself into the world as a traditional, Christian, values-based culture is a master-class in concealing the seedy and degenerate truth of the violence and oppression of Russian imperial "culture". As far back as 1987 during the height of the AID's epidemic Russia's newspaper Izvestia – and state broadcasters – reported to the world that it did not have any HIV/AIDS problems because, unlike the degenerate, capitalist West, there were [no homosexuals, drug addicts, prostitutes or alcoholics in Russia](#) – a theme Russian propagandists have continued to vigorously promote in the West to the present day.

What's the reality?

Prostitution? Well, Russia may well have [more prostitutes than doctors, farmers and firemen combined](#). While no official figures exist, human rights organizations estimate that there are between [one and three million sex workers](#) (prostitutes) working [in Russia](#). Even women in the Russian military are [routinely forced by senior officers into prostitution](#) to serve their sexual interests. Women comply for the "protection" offered by senior officers as the option is to suffer more frequent and random rape by the female soldier's male peers.

HIV/AIDS? Epidemic. In 2017 the Russian Federation had the [highest number of HIV positive people of any country in Europe](#), adding between 70,000 and 100,000 new infections each year. An estimated 1.137 million people, constituting 1.5% of the adult population are infected. As high as they are these figures are considered low as HIV infections are vastly underreported.

Alcohol and Drug Abuse? Epidemic. Among the [highest in the world](#). After Belarus and Mongolia, [Russia has the highest alcohol death rate in the world](#). Quoting Russian journals, Wikipedia states: “Alcoholism in Russia has, according to some authors, acquired a character of a national disaster and has the scale of a [humanitarian catastrophe](#).” Trite to say that among the social problems that high rates of alcoholism produce are large numbers of fetal alcohol children (FASD) many of whom as low-functioning adults end up engaging in violent criminal activities and joining the ranks of [Russia’s gopnik gangs](#). Regarding the prevalence of studied FASD inside Russian orphanages the [National Institute of Health reports](#) that between 30% and 66% of the children are affected by FASD and that a total of 90% of Russian women of childbearing age consume alcohol with 20% continuing to drink throughout their pregnancy. The [classic facial features](#) of FASD can be easily observed in many of the Russian prisoners pardoned in exchange for becoming soldiers who are depicted on Russian social media.

Divorce? Notwithstanding Russia’s domestic and international media campaign that extols the virtues of traditional marriage and family values, [60% of Russian marriages end in divorce](#). The rate of [divorce in Russia is the highest in the world](#), with infidelity, poverty, inability to relate, and drug and alcohol abuse reported as the four principal reasons for ending relationships.

Abortion? More troubling for the Russian state than the divorce rate, is the fact that fewer and fewer women are prepared to give birth. The American Rand think tank reports [Russia’s abortion rates are the highest in the world](#). Anti-abortion may be the state’s expressed position to feed the international press but it is not the reality. Official figures likely vastly underestimate the true abortion rate but even official figures reveal that many women average several abortions over their lifetime. Throughout the sixties, the abortion rate was a high of one-in-six having an abortion every year, decreasing to one-in-ten per year thereafter. [The national figures for abortion](#) from the 1950’s through to the breakup of the Soviet state in 1991 were six to seven million abortions each year. – a figure that vastly exceeds America’s highest recorded abortion rates by a factor of 500%. There is no reason to believe that the abortion rates following the collapse of the Soviet system are any different than they were. Indeed, given the seriously impoverished state of the Russian masses it is likely the abortion rates are back to all-time highs.

Family Life? Despite official propaganda, as evidenced by the divorce and abortion rates and the extensive demographic studies, the majority of Russians are not committed to a family life. The result is that Russia’s birthrate is well below replacement and the [Russian population has been in serious decline](#) for many years. In its essay [A Russia without Russians?](#) the Atlantic Council reports that Russia’s demographic problems are so serious that it may not have a future.

Religion? Hardly free. Russia's Jehovah Witnesses for example face years-long prison sentences for [practicing their faith](#) and Christian evangelicals are targeted both in Russia and in the Russian [occupied territories](#) of Ukraine with [extreme repression](#). While Russian propaganda alleges that Ukraine is restricting and even prohibiting Christian faith, the opposite is true. Russia has deliberately bombed Ukrainian Churches and under Russian occupation, Ukrainian Orthodox priests have been arrested, beaten and [systematically murdered](#) in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. And not only Protestant faiths have been targeted by the Russians. Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, the head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church reported that the [Greek Catholic "Church was liquidated in the occupied territories](#). In fact, there is not a single Catholic priest in the occupied territories today – either Greek Catholic or Roman Catholic.” The murder of Christian clergy by Russians goes almost unnoticed and unreported in the West. For example, on February 18, 2024, Russian authorities in the Russian occupied Ukrainian District of Kherson [seized 59-year-old Father Stepan Podolchak](#) of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine from his home in the Ukrainian village of Kalanchak (under Russian occupation). With his wife witnessing the abduction, they placed a bag over his head and took him from his home, barefoot, stating that he was needed for questioning. Two days later his dead body was found on the street. Kherson Bishop Nikodim who helped identify the body with Podolchak's wife stated that he had been beaten to death and had a hole in his head likely from a gunshot. When Bishop Nikodim asked the Russian police what action they will take in regards to the killing, he was told: “Forget about it!”

For the Jews of Russia, the situation is equally dire. Signalling a potential new pogrom the Russian Justice Ministry in July of 2023 [branded Russia's Chief Rabbi, Pinchas Goldschmidt, a "foreign agent"](#) a designation intended to label Goldschmidt personally and Russian Jews generally as enemies of Russia. In what now appears as prescient, Goldschmidt had fled Russia over a year earlier while warning Jews still remaining in Russia that their safety could not be counted on. He urged all Jews in Russia to leave ["before it was too late"](#).

By contrast, [Rabbi Avraham Wolf](#), Chief Rabbi of Odessa and Southern Ukraine, asserts that apart from the war, ["Ukraine is the safest country](#) in the world for Jews.” Regarding the Ukrainian people Rabbi [stated](#) that “previously I loved and respected the Ukrainian people. But now, after the beginning of the war, I'm simply over the moon about them.” His views are echoed by Chief Rabbi of Ukraine [Moshe Reuven Azman](#), both of whom have worked tirelessly to debunk Russian propaganda that claims that Ukrainians are Nazis and that Russia was “de-nazifying” Ukraine. There is no merit whatever to the Russian charge. The vast majority of [Ukrainians identify as Christian](#), some 85%. To his Jewish audiences Azman points out that 7 million Ukrainians fought in the Soviet Ukrainian Armies against Nazi Germany. Millions died in the war. It is not Ukraine, Azman says, which has a Jewish President, but modern Russia that behaves like the “heirs of the fascists” noting further that more than 2,500 Ukrainians have been honored

by the state of Israel as “Righteous Among the Nations” for risking their lives to save Jews from the Holocaust.

Travelling frequently to Israel, Rabbi Azman expresses outrage that the Putin regime, together with the head of the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill, and Russia’s state media continue to push the propaganda lie among American and other Western audiences that Ukraine is a neo-fascist or fascist state. Azman has made it his life’s mission to [debunk this Russian propaganda](#) and these false narratives about Ukraine and the Russian invasion.

Some brief comments on Russia’s Orthodox leadership are also in order. Unlike Churches in Ukraine and across Europe and in the United States, Russia’s Orthodox Church is not free of state control. In its November 27, 2024, report [The International Christian Concern](#) (ICC), a non-profit based in Washington DC, made it clear that the reality of religious freedom in Russia bears no relationship to its publicly professed “freedom”. The ICC which monitors religious persecution around the world had this to say about Russia’s repressive religious practices: “On paper, Russian law allows the government to restrict religion only to the extent necessary to protect the country’s structure and security. In fact, the Russian government allows religious practice only insofar as it promotes the political interests of those in charge. It meets all other religious expressions, [Christian or not, with severe punishment and swiftly extinguishes them whenever possible.](#)”

In short, Russia’s vaunted image as a Christian haven holding itself out as the successor of the Holy Roman Empire centred on [Moscow as the Third Rome](#), is pure propaganda. Nothing about Russia is free. To the contrary Russia’s Orthodox Church is operated by the state itself, or more specifically by the FSB. Russia’s Orthodox Church is headed by a man called [Vladimir Mikhailovich Gundyaev](#). His official church history leaves out important biographical facts, chief among them that Gundyaev was/is a member of Russia’s state police, the FSB. The successor to the KGB, the Federal Security Service (FSB) under the leadership of Vladimir Putin, effectively holds power over all other state functions and departments. Born in 1946, in Leningrad, (now known as Saint Petersburg), Gundyaev was ordained (tonsured) in 1969, given the name Kirill, and quickly rose through the ranks of the Church, no doubt under the direction of the KGB. Soon after, in 1971, he was assigned the role of representing the Russian Orthodox Church at the World Council of Churches headquartered in Switzerland.

In February, 2023, the Swiss press [published recently declassified archival material](#) that had been accessed by Swiss authorities from Soviet archives. What was revealed was that Gundyaev while ostensibly serving as Kirill, an Orthodox priest in Switzerland, was an active officer of the KGB secretly working under the code name “Mikhailov”.

His purpose? As a KGB officer, Mikhailov/Gundyaev/Kirill was [assigned to work with other members of the KGB](#) who had previously infiltrated the World Council of Churches, to push the Council to denounce the United States and its allies and to limit criticism of religious repression in the Soviet Union. The tactic was, and remains, classic Russian projection; namely, to deflect criticism of Russia's religious repression by accusing its enemy, America, of the very offences it itself is guilty of. One will of course note that Kirill's present advocacy of Russia's war against Ukraine and his denunciation of Ukraine's and America's religious expression is in almost identical terms and tactics with Kirill's earlier work for the KGB in Switzerland.

In February 2009, after the death of Patriarch Alexy II, Kirill was elected by the Council of the Church as [Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus](#), a position synonymous with that of the Pope in Roman Catholicism. As head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Kirill commands considerable authority over the Russian laity. In full support of Putin's war effort Kirill released a document [justifying the war on religious and moral grounds](#) together with the genocide of Ukraine and Ukrainians. Declaring the Russian invasion "a Holy War" to exterminate the Ukrainian nation and create a "single spiritual space of Holy Russia" Kirill accuses the West and Ukraine of embracing "satanism". No longer a fight against "Nazism" the new rallying battle-cry is a religious war against Satan himself. Kirill has promised the Russian faithful that fighting in Ukraine was their holy duty and that dying there would be rewarded by a cleansing of all their sins and heavenly rewards. All that's missing from the Islamist playbook is the guarantee that the dead would be met by 72 virgins. Kirill and his views have a lot of support within the Russian Orthodox Church which was recently banned in Ukraine for its overt support of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Of the approximately 400 Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church [not a single one has criticized Russia's war](#) or its numerous (well documented) atrocities and war crimes.

Far from attending to the spiritual needs of the Russian people, Kirill's role is more akin to that of Nazi Germany's propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels. And, as Goebbels was to Hitler, Kirill is a close confidant of Putin, whose rule over Russia he declared "[a miracle of God](#)". A member of the ruling oligarch class himself, Kirill has been richly rewarded by Putin for his service. [Kirill's net worth](#) was estimated by Forbes in 2006 at \$4 billion and thirteen years later by Novaya Gazeta in 2019 at \$8 billion. Like Putin who sports expensive European acquisitions, Kirill was photographed wearing a \$30,000 gold Breguet watch which state broadcasters airbrushed out but inadvertently left the watch's reflection in the photograph. Kirill lives in a private [\\$43 million mansion](#).

So much for Russia's "traditional Christian values".

After that brief look at the real Russia hiding behind its propaganda curtain, a closer examination of another core feature of Russia's practice of social control is also in order; namely, Russia's use of homosexual and heterosexual rape to break the will of resistance.

Modern Russia's self-constructed image of itself as a Great Power rests both on its historical conquests and more recently its defeat in war of the world's then most militarized and powerful state, Nazi Germany. In the former case, the abuses and atrocities committed by the Russians in their expansion out from their homeland, formerly Muscovy, have largely gone unrecognized and undocumented. Nevertheless, what most of the world believes to be "Russia" is in fact a large collection of conquered states and peoples, forcibly integrated into the "Russian Federation" – another fiction, like the Soviet Union, of supposedly fraternal nations collected together under the protective umbrella of Moscow. In reality an Empire embracing numerous colonized peoples. The decolonization of the Russian Empire is long past due.

In the latter case, too, Russia has largely rewritten its recent history and has succeeded in convincing much of the world that its version of events is true. What the Russians call the "Victory", the surrender of Nazi Germany in Berlin on May 8, 1945, is celebrated across the Russian Federation in every village and city as the most important of all national holidays. It is Germany's defeat that gives Russia and Russians their greatest sense of achievement and identity. While the West celebrates Armistice Day, now Remembrance Day, or Veterans Day, and remembers with prayers the sacrifice of its dead, Moscow parades its power in columns of marching soldiers, tanks, and missiles, including real or mock-ups of its intercontinental ballistic rockets. Power – the ability to deliver death – is celebrated. The reason why, as [Katie Davies writes in the Kyiv Independent](#), is important. Control over the narrative has given the Putin regime an endless source of propaganda material with which to foment Russian Imperial Nationalism and to justify its wars of aggression, including of course its invasion of Ukraine.

Davies writes: "The legacy of Soviet victory over Nazi Germany feeds pro-war aggression in Putin's Russia — and is [celebrated with a religious fervor](#)." The Great Patriotic War which saw the defeat of Nazi Germany is now the Great Patriotic War to defeat a resurrected Nazi state, Ukraine.

In the ten years since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014, very few, if any, commentators have challenged Russia's often repeated assertions that it alone – or the patriotic sacrifice of its Russian fighters – was primarily responsible for the defeat of Nazi Germany. It is this mythic victory that lies at the core of Russia's nationalist fervor – an identity embraced by the huge majority of Russians which has taken on the characteristics of a religious faith, as Davies explains. Of course, it, too, is a mixture of half-truths and outright lies. Fifty years ago, the Victory Day parades in Moscow recognized that the defeat of the Nazi regime was due not only to the collective effort of the allied armies and to the massive military aid shipped to the Soviet Union by America, but also by the massive sacrifices of the Ukrainians and the Belarusians. Today, and since the rise to power of Putin, the Victory Day parades and the official Russian state narratives have dismissed the dominant role played by Britain and America and have

completely eliminated the contribution of the Ukrainian and Belarusian Armies to the victory. The Victory is Russia's alone.

It would hardly further Moscow's narrative of Ukrainian Nazis to acknowledge that it was in fact the Ukrainian and Belarusian Armies that were the first to enter Berlin and end the war. Or that it was the Ukrainian and Belarusian peoples who suffered the worst deprivations during the war, both their soldiers fighting and their civilians under German Nazi occupation. To recognize Ukraine's wartime efforts is to recognize Ukraine as a state among other European states – a reality Russia has long fought to deny. However, all anti-Ukrainian propaganda aside, the truth is that Russia's claim to the WW2 victory is grossly overstated. Without American aid and without the engagement of the Ukrainian and Belarusian Armies, Russia would have been defeated and ceased to exist.

It is well beyond the scope of this essay to repeat what war historians have thoroughly documented – those sources are everywhere and are voluminous – but the briefest outline of Ukraine's involvement in the war is necessary to counter Russia's propaganda on this critical issue and to illustrate, in Russia's occupation of Germany, the Russian colonial model which remains extant to this day.

On April 20, 1945, the [1st Ukrainian Army \(Front\) reached Berlin's outskirts](#) from the south and the south-east while the 1st and 2nd Belorussian Armies (Fronts) were encircling Berlin from the east and north-east. Further south and completing the encirclement was the Ukrainian 4th army. As the [Ukrainian and Belorussian armies pushed into Berlin](#), on April 30, Hitler committed suicide and eight days later Berlin surrendered.

It is important to recognize that while the Ukrainian and Belorussian (Belarusian) armies were under the ultimate control of Soviet-Russian leadership they were not fighting for the survival of the Soviet system but for their own national survival. While [7 million Ukrainian soldiers fought the Nazi Regime](#) inside regular Ukrainian army units, tens of thousands of Ukrainians joined the [underground partisan resistance movement \(UPA\)](#) organized by Ukrainian nationalists (OUN). Like the French resistance, the goals of the Ukrainian resistance were the liberation of Ukraine from foreign occupation. But while the French resistance had only the German occupiers to fight, the Ukrainians had the Russians and the Poles as well as the Germans. *(Note that while pre-war and war-time tensions between Ukrainians and Poles – who occupied parts of Western Ukraine – were strained, the relationship today is one of mutual respect and support. Poland is and remains one of Ukraine's most steadfast allies. The two nations by themselves or in alliance with the Baltic and Nordic States are capable of presenting a formidable front both economically and militarily.)*

While the Germans initially presented themselves to the Ukrainians as liberators, promising Ukraine independence from the Russians, and they obtained some limited support from UPA units, it soon became apparent that the Nazi plan for Ukraine was

anything but liberation. It was, rather, another genocidal campaign similar to the Holodomor, a recent genocide committed on Ukrainians by the Stalinist-Russians. No different from Russia's goals, the occupation of Ukraine was a major war aim of Nazi Germany. Its vast resources were the prize Germany was fighting for. Not Russia and not Belarus. And the cost to Ukraine was enormous. Of Ukraine's pre-war population of 41.7 million people, the 1945 census revealed that [only 27.4 million remained alive at the war's end](#). Millions of Ukrainians were killed on the front lines while millions more were murdered in the Nazi concentration camps, as slave labor and in Germany's [genocidal policy of lebensraum](#). The Nazi German plan was the extermination of the entire Slavic population and its replacement by Germans. The scale of human suffering is impossible to recount in words but Svetlana Alexievich's Nobel Prize winning accounts of child survivors in *Last Witnesses* (Random House, 2019) gives poignant glimpses of the horror of the German invasions and occupation.

The Russian authorities in 1945 were well aware of UPA attacks on Russian positions throughout the war and of Ukrainians' deep aspirations to be free of Russian occupation no less than their desire to be free if Nazi German occupation. The Russians, however, were no less determined than they had been throughout the 1930's to crush all expressions of Ukrainian identity, language, history and culture. After the Ukrainian and Belorussian armies entered Berlin, the Russian armies entered from the north-east. As soon as Berlin surrendered, the Soviet-Russian High Command ordered the Ukrainian and Belorussian Armies to immediately leave Berlin, return to their respective countries, and disarm.

Left alone with the defeated German nation, now firmly under Russian occupation, the Russians began the wholesale and prolonged rape of the German people.

It's important to recognize that this mass rape was not carried out by "Soviet" soldiers but by "Russian" soldiers. This was not a "Soviet" crime that involved other soviet nationalities or one that disappeared when the "Soviet" adjective was dropped in 1991 but was and remains a Russian crime. Estimates are rough – the Russians were not conducting counts – but some [two million girls and women were raped](#). Many raped so brutally they died from their injuries. With no escape and no hope for a future free of Russian occupation and torture, many others committed suicide. As intended by the Russian authorities, thousands became pregnant and had to give birth to the children of their rapists. As elsewhere in the Russian empire, Russian occupation took several forms, ethnic population replacement being one of them.

In the years following Germany's defeat, the Russian crimes were not pursued for a number of reasons. Firstly, Russia won the war, achieving all its pre-war objectives, even adding to them the occupation of the Germany territories where it carried out its rape campaign. As a new world power, it was not about to indict itself and no other power had any authority over it. Secondly, after Nazi Germany's mass killing of Russians and other

ethnic Slavs – and [its own campaigns of rape of Slavic women](#) – it was hardly appropriate for the Germans to object. It was just punishment, a *quid pro quo*. And, too, at least equally as important, the German women who were raped and their families, humiliated and degraded, mostly said nothing. Who were they to complain to? Not only were there long-standing cultural and religious taboos around all things sexual, until relatively recently the belief prevailed that exposing and exploring pain only served to exacerbate the suffering. Silence was better. Forget and move on.

That was a mistake. Its silence allowed the Russian narratives to dominate the information field. Just as Russian propaganda increasingly filled western media and public perception, aided considerably by new Russian Studies' courses established with Russian "support" in all major western Universities, that equated Ukrainian nationalism – the expressed desire to be free from Russian colonial occupation – with Nazism, the fear of Russia's German victims to speak out and the failure of western researchers to document and expose Russia's numerous war crimes and crimes against humanity, has allowed Russia to construct much of the narrative, presenting itself as a model state.

Yet, the mass rape of German women and girls, often very young children, was not an aberration from the norm. Yes, men with guns who have ultimate power over others and whose authorities tolerate it, often rape but most civilized nations have laws they observe even in war-time conditions that proscribe rape. Russia does the opposite. It always has.

In the 1850's Russia pushed its empire southward into the Caucasus, the region encompassing the nations of Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Chechnya, the Circassians, together with numerous indigenous peoples. The Russian conquest was a fiercely resisted 47-year war that was ultimately won by Russian forces who pursued a scorched earth policy of total destruction. The Circassian nation, for example, [refusing to submit to Russian Imperialism was annihilated](#). It was a deliberate genocide. Records are incomplete but estimates place the number of Circassians murdered by Russians at between 700,000 and 1.5 million, nearly the entire population. The recorded methods of population subjugation employed by the [Russians included impalement, mass killing, starvation, rape and dismemberment of pregnant women](#).

Of those few who survived, as little as 3% of the original population, [they endured systematic torture, rape](#) and finally deportation to distant regions of the Russian empire. Rape then, as now, together with torture was a Russian tool to break the will of a conquered people.

The Chechens, too, were ultimately conquered, their lands annexed and [thousands deported to distant regions](#). Yet they managed to survive as a people. After the Communist revolution and the collapse of Tsarist rule in 1917 [the Chechens rose up and attempted a short-lived independence struggle](#). The Russians under Lenin were no less willing than the Czars had been to return Chechnya to the Chechens. The uprising was

crushed. In 1936 the Chechen nation was recognized on paper by Joseph Stalin, the Soviet leader, as the Checheno-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. Autonomous on paper only like all the other “autonomous” republics of the Russian empire, Chechnya remained firmly under the rule of Moscow. A fiercely independent Muslim people the Chechens however continued to resist. After the collapse of the Soviet Empire in 1991, the Chechens in their now renamed state, the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, sought their autonomy along with numerous other previously colonized nations. The Russians under the new leadership of Boris Yeltsin responded by sending the Russian army into Chechnya in 1994. [For two years Chechnya fought against a dispirited and disorganized Russian army and won](#). The Chechen death toll exceeded 100,000 and the nation was in ruin but independence – although never stable and corrupted by Russian agents – followed. Not, however for long. Russia recovered from the collapse of its Soviet empire, rebuilt its military, and in 1999, under the leadership of Vladimir Putin, resumed the fighting. Justifying the new invasion and re-occupation of Chechnya/Ichkeria as “self-defence” following the KGB/FSB fabricated provocation by bombing Russian apartment buildings in Moscow that Putin blamed on the Chechens, this [Second Chechnya War lasted ten years](#), until 2009, when Russian forces, with the support of pro-Russian Chechens, finally prevailed. Once again Russian tactics involved total war, razing cities to the ground, destroying infrastructure, and targeting civilian populations. With the forces of independent Chechnya defeated Chechnya was reincorporated into the Russian Federation. Deaths for this second war are estimated at excess of 60,000.

Relevant to this discussion, was Russia’s use of rape, once again, in the Second Chechnya War as a tool to punish and degrade the people it conquered. In [a report published by the California State University Journal, Culture, Society, and Praxis](#), researcher Valentina Rousseva documented Russia’s war crimes in occupied Chechnya. While 15% to 20% of the Chechen population were killed during this prolonged war and most Chechen women suffered from structural violence as well as experiencing the death of family members, the Chechen women described being raped by Russian soldiers as “worse than death”. The Rousseva report documents numerous first-person accounts.

One specific case [documented by Human Rights Watch](#) illustrates the Russian practice: Kheda Kungaeva was eighteen. Russian soldiers seized her from her home in Tangi-Chiby and took her to a Russian military camp where she was killed. A forensic examiner who conducted a post-mortem examination of her body after it was recovered, reported that “Kungaeva was beaten, anally and vaginally penetrated by a hard object, and strangled ... She was violently raped before her death.”

Mirroring the Russian practice in Berlin after the fall, Russian soldiers mass-raped Chechen women in a deliberate campaign to dishonour and break the spirit of the Chechen people. The Human Rights Watch report describes that Russia, soon after its victory over Chechnya, commenced the mass slaughter of Chechen men who had fought

against the Russians or who had assisted the Chechen resistance. Of those Chechen men who were not murdered outright, large numbers were removed from Chechnya and transported to Russian detention centres. Once the men had been removed the Russians then began the systematic rape of Chechen women. Impregnating Chechen women was viewed as key to Russia's policy of "ethnic cleansing".

As reported, Russians organized "sweep operations" during which they entered homes, dragged out women who were then beaten, raped – frequently gang raped – and often murdered. Besides dragging them from their homes, women were raped at checkpoints, at the outskirts of towns and in the Russian camps. While the rape and sexual degrading of Chechen women was described as entertainment for the Russians, for example by stripping them naked and forcing them to dance, it also served Russian state purposes. First and foremost, it was/is used by Russians as a weapon of war. Mass rape, planned in advance, is "[intended to destroy the soul of a nation.](#)"

As reported by the Jamestown Foundation, a Washington, D.C.– based conservative policy group focused on Eurasian security issues, [Lord Russell-Johnston, president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe](#) issued a warning to Russia concerning the behavior of its troops in Chechnya. "In recent weeks," he began, "there has been mounting evidence of a rapidly deteriorating human rights situation in Chechnya. I expect all human rights violations to be condemned at the highest level by the Russian authorities. The reports of new human rights abuses come against the background of the Russian authorities' deplorable lack of willingness to properly investigate allegations of past abuse. The failure to bring to justice those responsible for crimes constitutes a blatant violation of Russia's obligations as a member of the Council of Europe."

Needless to say, the demands that Russia investigate its own abuses and change its behaviour were naïve at best. Worse, as though the crimes were not central to Russian Imperial policy, the fact that the army's crimes were blamed on its local leadership and not officially recognized as directly authorized by Moscow, which exercised total control over battlefield tactics, excused Putin and insulated him and the ruling Russian oligarchy from personal liability.

The "abuses" that the Council were reporting on were described in another release from the Council of Europe, published by the Jamestown Foundation, titled [Mass Rape of Chechen Men by Federal Forces](#). "According to [Andrei Mironov of the Russian human rights organization](#) Memorial ... Russian forces stationed in Chechnya recently committed an organized mass rape of Chechen civilian males. During a fact-finding trip to the North Caucasus, Mironov learned of an incident which took place earlier this month: "Over 700 men (I was given a list of 762 names) were taken to a field. They [the Russian soldiers] raped a woman in front of them." The Russian troops, Mironov related, then taunted the Chechen men, calling on them to defend the woman's honor. Those who

intervened, sixty-two men, were themselves then “handcuffed to an armored personnel carrier, and publicly raped.”

“Never before have I heard about public rape,” Mironov commented. “Of course, people were systematically raped in prisons and detention centers, and [in] military units. This was intended to break their character. But now this is being done in public.” Mironov added that many of the Chechen men who had been publicly raped vowed that they would now become suicide attackers (Eurasianet, July 19, 2000).

“In the no. 49 (July 16, 2000) issue of Novaya Gazeta, award-winning war correspondent [Anna Politkovskaya](#)¹ discussed the same incident and added some details. “Sixty-eight men,” she wrote, “living in Sernovodsk, have announced that they were raped by [Russian] soldiers conducting a punitive action, but they have not found the necessary understanding [on the part of the pro-Moscow Chechen authorities]. Forty-eight of them then appealed to [separatist President] Aslan Maskhadov with a request that they be permitted to become kamikazes in order to exact recompense for these humiliations by committing terrorist acts. Maskhadov categorically refused to grant their request. Two of them then attempted to commit suicide. This took place on July 12 [2000] in Sernovodsk. One succeeded. The other was revived.”

Multiple organizations collected other first-person accounts of Russian soldiers detaining, torturing and gang-raping Chechen men. Of note in this 2000 [Amnesty Report describing Russian rape of male captives](#) as well as children is the reference to the Russian use of “filtration camps” – the very same system and war-crimes practice Russia is using now in occupied Ukraine. The Russian “filtration centres” are where the state, exercising total control over captives, systemically use torture and anal rape of men, as detailed in the report.

Putting the lie to the myth that Russia is a modern state that follows Western values is a more recent series of war crimes that Putin very directly acknowledged and approved of. Following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February, 2022, Russian military forces seized and occupied several Ukrainian communities including Amdriivka, Zdvizhivka, Vorzel, Bucha and others. Not anticipating that Ukrainian defence forces would successfully retake these communities and expose [Russian crimes of systemic torture, rape and murder of Ukrainian civilians, including the death of children by violent and multiple rape, and the random murder of pedestrians](#), the Russians did little to hide their crimes. Following the liberation of Bucha, the Ukrainian authorities discovered [the](#)

¹ **Of note**, Anna Politkovskaya was the daughter of ethnic Ukrainian diplomats representing the Ukrainian (Soviet) delegation at the United Nations. Born in New York City and educated in Moscow, her reporting on the Russian atrocities during the Second Chechen War led to her being arrested by the Russian military which staged a mock execution to deter her from further reporting. She was later assassinated in Moscow on October 7, 2006. She was 48. [Six other journalists with Novaya Gazeta were also murdered since 2000](#). Russia’s aggressive policy of killing independent reporters has been successful in limiting narratives that run counter to official Russian propaganda.

[horrors of Russian occupation](#) in torture chambers, mass graves, and dead bodies left lying in the streets where Russians had randomly killed them. The scenes were nearly identical to the worse atrocities committed by the Nazis – another terrorist imperial state it must be remembered that Russia had allied itself with to conquer Europe.

During those initial months of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine in 2022, Russia appeared to show some concern for its image and international reputation by attempting to manage the news that was emerging from the war. Following the revelations of Bucha and universal condemnation of [Russia’s barbarity – described as worse than ISIS](#) – Putin’s propagandists initially denied any Russian involvement and accused the Ukrainian authorities of staging the deaths as a “provocation” against Russia. As the evidence of Russia’s brutality mounted however and Russia’s continued denials became impossible to maintain, Russia then dropped its mask.

The new reality was communicated by Russian propagandists who now publicly embraced the random killing of Ukrainian citizens and the terror tactics of rape with a [warning to Ukrainians to “be afraid!”](#) The purpose of Russian terror campaigns, whether conducted by Imperial Russian troops in the 19th century, or Soviet Russian troops throughout the 20th century, or Russian national troops throughout the 21st century, has always been the same. To inflict such pain and fear that those who would resist Russian domination, would collapse and submit to whatever force Russians wished to exercise over them.

“BE AFRAID!”

The proof – if any more were needed – that Bucha and the hundreds of bodies and torture chambers that have been discovered following the Ukrainian army’s liberation of occupied territories is Russian policy that spans the centuries and Russia’s various Imperial iterations, was Putin’s formal reception in Moscow for the butchers of Bucha. Far from condemning them for their atrocities, [Putin rewarded the Russian paratroopers from the 234th Air Assault Regiment with state honours.](#) Their brutality was lauded and Russians were encouraged to emulate their crimes. The purpose of the war now was not to protect Russian interests – that mask too was dropped – it was to destroy the Ukrainian state, annihilate the Ukrainian people and “conquer” the country, as Putin has now publicly acknowledged.

Not all of Russia’s masks have been dropped however, only those whose existence is manifestly false and whose utility no longer serve Russia’s interests. Those that do, continue to be vigorously advanced and will continue to be promoted as real until they too are debunked. Among these remaining myths is the constructed narrative that Russia is a Christian nation that reflects the same values that the Christian right in America believes in, among them, the promotion of family values, anti-abortion, opposition to gay and lesbian marriage, and rejection of any recognition of LGBTQ rights.

Putting the lie to Russia's moral posture is the reality that Russia is an Imperial state that relies heavily on the homosexual rape of colonized men as well as the rape of women and children, to enforce its control, as discussed above.

I have already touched upon the approved sermons of the Russian Orthodox Church that the duty of the Russian citizen is to kill Ukrainians and that doing so ensures them a place in heaven. While nowhere does Christianity encourage the murder of innocents, Russia goes further and imprisons anyone, including [the rare doctor, who protests the war](#). In Russia, unlike America or any western nation, one cannot take a position against the state, however immoral and criminal its actions. Even children who express [pro-Ukrainian or anti-war sentiments are sent to prison](#). As [Oleg Kozlovsky writes for Amnesty International](#), "Despite all the Kremlin's talk about the value of the family, it is the very bond between children and their parents that is being shamelessly exploited to crush dissent."

Regarding family values, we have first to acknowledge that Russia, alone in the "modern" world, has repealed the criminal sanctions that all Western states have placed on family violence. While we have, in the West over the past 50 years or so, made huge progress in recognizing that family violence is a crime invoking a legitimate public interest in extending the protection of the law to vulnerable women and children, Russia has gone in the opposite direction. Under Putin's regime, with the support of the Patriarch Kirill's Russian Orthodox Church, Russia has *legalized* spousal assault as a *traditional* male prerogative. Family violence in Russia is endemic.

To be clear, it should be understood what *traditional* family values meant in the West. Until January 4, 1983, the status of a "married women" (in Canada) was akin in some respects to property. Legally married, one of the recognized rights of a "husband" was [his absolute right to sexual access](#). The wife's corresponding duty was not to obstruct his access to her body. *Forced* sexual intercourse was a crime only when committed against a woman "not his wife". [Under the criminal law, marriage was a complete bar to a prosecution for rape](#). While any assault of another was long recognized as a separate crime, spousal assault *per se* was rarely investigated or prosecuted as it was rationally and logically – as well as socially – at odds with the notion that a man could rape his wife but not assault her. How, indeed, was rape not an "assault".

In any case, the prevailing social-cultural view – and one that British common-law long respected – was that a "man's home was his castle". The state could not enter that private domain without good and legal cause. In effect, whatever happened inside a man's home was "his private business". (And, yes, it was a patriarchal system.)

A detailed examination of the evolution of the law and practice in the British legal systems concerning protection of women's rights is beyond the scope of this essay.

Suffice it to say that many members of traditional Christian faiths continue to see any intrusion by the state into the internal dynamics of a family as unwarranted and contrary to the “divine” rights of a man and parent as set out in the Bible – which is exactly the opening that the Russian propagandists utilize to divide America and solicit support for the “Russian world”. As the right of a Russian male to assault his wife is enshrined in the Russian civil code, one can assume with some certainty that spousal rape is a very common feature of Russian domestic life. Indeed, at the outbreak of the war, Russian women were frequently posting on social media their relief that their men were sent to the front and could no longer beat them. Whether they lived or died, was seemingly of little to no consequence to them. Anecdotally, Russian women seeking divorces from the courts, when divorce was opposed by their husbands are routinely told to go home and obey their husbands.

Perhaps the most extreme example of how the Russian state does not exemplify Christian values is its long standing, systemic practice of using rape, including homosexual rape, as an instrument of social control.

Just as the Russians mass raped the Circassian population (even as they exterminated them) and raped the German women who had fallen under their control, and raped the Chechen men who lost their battle with them, and doubtless millions of others whose tortures were never recorded although their numbers, in the tens of millions, were, the Russians routinely rape Ukrainian prisoners of war even as they torture and murder them. In its latest report on October 30, 2024, to the UN General Assembly, the Commission of Inquiry concluded that Russia was committing multiple war crimes in its treatment of both Ukrainian civilians under Russian occupation and of captured Ukrainian soldiers. Russia’s use of torture, including sexual torture, was, they found, not random but widespread and systematic. The Chair of the Commission, Erik Mose, said, “Based on our evidence, we have found that the Russian authorities have acted pursuant to a [coordinated state policy of torturing Ukrainian civilians and prisoners of war](#) and are therefore committing Crimes Against Humanity.”

[Ukrainska Pravda adds further details](#) namely that Ukrainian prisoners suffer torture “at all stages of captivity.” Virtually all Ukrainians in Russian captivity are tortured in Russian camps and in torture chambers set up across occupied Ukrainian territory.

Other reports record [“startling” numbers of Ukrainian victims of Russian sexual violence](#) involving men and boys. Not surprisingly very few men – exchanged in prisoner swaps – are willing to detail the torture they suffered at the hands of the Russians. In one CNN report, however, Roman Shapovalenko is reported to have said that the Russians appear to have a fetish for male genitalia. The CNN report adds that male rape was long known to be widespread inside Russia, practiced in particular by police and security forces against Russian detainees, but that Russian has now [“exported the practice to occupied Ukraine”](#).

Rape serves its state purpose. In the case of Germany, the terror the Russians inflicted on the German civilian population during its mass rape campaign served to turn them into a servile population that obeyed and worked closely with the Russian authorities for two generations. The Stasi, the German secret police, modelled after the KGB, operated the largest internal spy system in the Soviet Union in which East German citizens oppressed each other on behalf of their Russian overlords. Similarly in Chechnya, faced with a Circassian genocidal option, the Chechens instead surrendered their honour and their country to the Russians and some, like Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, switched sides from an independence fighter to a pro-Russian loyalist who was rewarded by the Russians for his betrayal of the Chechen people by being appointed as the President of the Chechen Republic and lavished with gifts and absolute power by the Putin regime, benefits he has extended to his family and closest supporters in classic colonial political style. Awarded the Russian rank of Colonel General in the Russian military, with his private army of some twelve thousand men, named Kadyrovites after their leader, Kadyrov supports the Russian invasion of Ukraine and has participated in atrocities committed against both occupied populations and captives, repeating the very behaviours Russian invaders committed against his own people.

Assessments of Chechnya's future are uniform in projecting that when Moscow's control of Chechnya/Ichkeria fails, the people will rise up against Kadyrov, his family and supporters. Knowing this, Kadyrov rules Chechnya with an iron fist in like manner to Putin's rule over the Russian empire, committing widespread torture and killing among the Chechen people to a [degree amounting to the ICC's definition of crimes against humanity](#).

Not all Chechens surrendered their will to their colonial oppressors or to their Chechen agents. Some have joined the Ukrainian resistance against the Russian invasion and fight bravely with them as volunteers. They know that if the Russian army in Ukraine is defeated the Russian hold over Chechnya will break. It is ultimately freedom for Chechnya they are fighting for.

Similar to the impact suffered by German women and Chechen men who were raped by Russians, the psychological effects on Ukrainian men and women is profound. The torture inflicted is often physically irreparable. Men whose genitals have been cut off in torture chambers and yet managed to survive and women whose rapes were so violent their perineums are destroyed and incapable of being rebuilt, are at extremely high risk of suicide. Many commit suicide. Severe depression naturally follows in all cases of rape and torture. Given the priorities of surviving the war, the focus is necessarily on the battlefield but the long-term emotional and psychological toll the war is having on the people, is very serious. The task of dealing with the effects of trauma deliberately inflicted on the nation by the Russians will require a coordinated response equal in commitment and resources to the military battle itself. First survive, then recover.

The experience of the Canadian justice system has been that rape victims all too often internalize the abuse, in effect accepting the abuse, consciously or unconsciously, as a judgement on their own value and integrity as human beings. In the systemic Church abuse cases, typically there are suicides among the survivors that are clearly attributable to the sexual violence committed against them. Self-harm, drug and alcohol abuse, social isolation and emotional disorders are a natural consequence of being sexually violated. Just as the rape of the Chechen Muslim women had more profound effects on them than the rape of non-Muslim women due to their deeply held cultural and religious values, males, generally, more than females suffer on deeper levels the humiliation and degradation of being raped. Men more often than women fatally self-harm. Social standards that define masculinity – the very essence of maleness – require that one’s masculinity be defended. Whether it has a physiological or social basis or a combination of both, men who have suffered rape suffer not only from the effects of powerlessness to resist violence and the inability to protect themselves – the shock that accompanies fear of death, total powerlessness, and the instinctive desire to survive – but also the uniquely male trauma of being demasculinized. Raping males attacks the essence of their sexual identity, universally understood to constitute the very foundation of our sense of self. Once broken, how can that be reconstituted? The short answer is through intensive trauma therapies.

What justice systems do is focus an objective re-examination of the details of the crimes and the circumstances in which they were committed. Regardless of the negative self-judgement victims frequently carry, the essential fact in every case is that the victims were literally powerless to resist and that they bear no blame or responsibility for their victimization. It is taking that negative self-judgement and redirecting it at its original source, the offender, that starts the process of healing. Through insight, awareness of the dynamics of power and our relationship to it, the victim can separate their essential being from the experiences they have endured. Our experiences educate and inform us but they do not define who we are. By internalizing the experiences as definitional we become our own enemies and, in effect, repeat endlessly the crimes of our oppressors. That, at least, is one of the messages prosecutors in the justice branch share with those with the courage to stand up, whenever they are ready, and publicly condemn their oppressors.

In particular by standing with the victims the justice process seeks to re-empower them. Justice changes the narrative: you *were* a victim of abuse, but you *are* a survivor. You *are* alive. Having the power of the state behind you in the prosecution of the oppressor for their crimes is a hallmark of justice. Although the Russians have committed hundreds of thousands of war crimes – each one as serious as the very worst crimes our courts have ever seen – and their prosecution is a near impossibility given the sheer numbers involved and their protection by the Russian state, nevertheless justice requires a firm commitment to hunt down and hold every Russian criminal, co-conspirator, accomplice, and party fully accountable for their crimes. It is the work of a lifetime and dedicated resources

must be put into its service but justice demands it. Just as cultural and intergenerational trauma passes down to our children and grandchildren, affecting their own ability to become self-realized and achieve their full potential, so too does healing and justice inform the lived reality of future generations.

Some final comments about Russia's rape culture are in order. While the Russians publicly acknowledge the existence of rape culture inside their extensive prison systems, they tend to eschew the prevalence of homosexual rape outside the prison system.

The truth is that homosexual rape is a fundamental part of Russian male culture. Far from being the homophobic culture that they aggressively promote in Western media, as part of their overall "Christian" character, the Russians practice violent male-on-male rape as integral to their vertical systems of power. The concept of equality, that is the essential foundation of both democratic philosophy and of human rights, is totally foreign to the Russian socio-political system that has no experience with nor ever embraced democratic principles or human rights. With its roots, instead, buried deeply in systems of hierarchical, autocratic power that go back to the Mongol world of the 15th and 16th centuries, the privilege of power was always the right to abuse those with less power. Corruption in the Russian world has no equivalent to corruption in the West. What we see as "corruption" in Russia is in fact the Russian system of rewards, privileges and punishments that enabled the Russian imperial, colonial system to survive intact throughout these centuries of external change.

The hierarchical pecking order means that those in authority abuse those with lesser authority. And the corollary is that those with lesser authority bow down to greater authority and expect and tolerate the abuse they receive. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Russian military which, like the Russian prison system, is a closed system of power structures where superior officers regularly beat, rob and even rape junior officers and members of the lower ranks. Hundreds of videos of collective rape captured by overhead drones or filmed by the rapists themselves, attest to the widespread use of rape inside the Russian military as a primitive method of asserting dominance and control.

Russia's paper war against homosexuality is real in that it is enacting laws that criminalize same sex relationships and all LGBTQ+ messaging. It is likely true, too, that the Russian gangs, who target gay couples to assault, have themselves engaged in violent sex crimes including male-on-male rape. Russia's cynical and hypocritical international stand opposing what its Church calls unnatural and immoral behaviour in favour of traditional family values – aimed primarily at American Christian audiences and the Western far-right movements – is belied by the fact that it practices homosexual rape at the state level. Curiously, the Russians themselves who engage in orgasmic, forced anal intercourse – rape – deny that their actions are "homosexual". Instead, they assert they are motivated by power and are adhering to the accepted Russian rules of dominance. Homosexuality involves love, a mutual respect, whereas they act out of the pure physical

pleasure of dominating and degrading others, in particular other males – in essence an expression of contempt and hate.

As the Russian human rights activist Mironov, quoted above in reference to the mass rape of Chechen men, commented, “Of course, people were systematically raped in prisons and detention centers, and [in] military units. This was intended to break their character.” The fact Mironov states this almost as a throw-away comment is itself revealing. As a human rights activist he saw nothing unusual in the systematic rape of a conquered people and seemed to justify it as a necessary disciplinary measure designed to break them. His surprise was not the existence of systemic male rape by the Russian military but the fact that the Russian state would do so in broad daylight. This was merely a new level of the well-recognized Russian practice of utilizing rape as a state tool for oppression.

That Russians themselves identify systemic rape inside their military as enforcing necessary “discipline” and “order” and deny any homosexual interest, the fact remains that regardless of whatever label they wish to attach to their behaviour, their engagement in forced, and orgasmic, anal intercourse is clearly more perverse, immoral, anti-Christian and criminal than anything they profess to abhor.

The image Russia is projecting through their state propaganda of a morally superior culture and indeed, one that ought to be emulated by its western consumers, is, like its self-characterization as an anti-imperial and anti-colonial crusader, another fabrication. It’s a complete fraud.

What remains is to ask why.

Why would Russia have a deeply ingrained politico-cultural practice of rape? The short answer is, because it works. In his book, *War before Civilization*, (Oxford University Press, 1996) Lawrence Keeley, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Illinois, makes the important observation that severely abused persons – essentially those whose spirits are broken the way animals can be broken – are both compliant and dangerous. Dangerous when placed into positions of power, and docile when under the command of superior officers. Not all people submit to arbitrary power. Many resist. Those who resist in conditions of enemy occupation are usually killed. It is trite to say but worth repeating that those who find submission easiest are those who have already accepted an inferior role for themselves. Abuse degrades people and degraded people are in turn more easily controlled.

The Russian empire, like the Mongol Empire it inherited through force, early on learned the value of degrading people through the use of mass terror. In controlling its numerous colonized nations utilizing systemic torture, rape, and genocidal campaigns, it

deliberately sought to break the people, making their submission to Russian control – or, like Ramzan Kadyrov, their subsequent complicity in forcing others into abject submission – absolute.

Nowhere is this submission more evident than in the endless and seemingly mindless assaults against Ukrainian defences that the Russians themselves call “meat” assaults. “Meat” because they have no value beyond agreeing to die in the hopes of exhausting Ukrainian ammunition or for some other perceived military gain that recognizes no value whatever in the lives of the Russian invaders. That they do not resist – although those that do are frequently raped to remind them of their zero status – has been a mystery to Western observers. Described as attacking like zombies and submitting to their orders to continue advancing until dead, observers, including the Ukrainian soldiers killing them, ask why they don’t object to save themselves. Why are they not killing their own officers? Why are they surrendering their own lives in a foreign country in an Imperial campaign that will ultimately bring no benefit to them? Their placid submission to an order to die “like meat” is puzzling because the behaviour of the Russians is unlike anything we experience in the West. We are not broken and cannot fathom the experience and reality of being Russian.

Professor Keeley writes: “It is not a mystical patience that makes civilized men easier to reduce to strict subordination and military discipline, it is their habituation to hierarchy and obedience as a result of being raised in a state, which by definition is a polity with class stratification and monopolized coercive powers.”

In facing Russian invading forces, the choices available to the Ukrainians are stark. Surrender and face inevitable torture and possibly death, or fight until the end. The Africans kidnapped and shipped to the Americas to be sold into slavery faced a similar dilemma but, without the ability to effectively resist, their options were limited to death or survival as slaves. Many chose death, throwing themselves overboard to drown if given the opportunity. Submission, at least potentially, maximizes the possibility of survival, and survival contains the potential to fight again. But the question of life or death is an individual one that no one has the right to impose on another.

Would we respond, like [Oleksandr Matsievskiy](#), the Ukrainian soldier who when captured by Russians, stood proudly and lit a cigarette as he proclaimed “Slava Ukraini” – glory to Ukraine – as the Russians murdered him on video, or like [Stepan Chubenko](#), the 16-year-old Ukrainian boy who as a student in 2014, at the beginning of the Russian war against Ukraine, was dragged off a train in the occupied city of Donetsk for wearing a ribbon on his rucksack in the blue and yellow colours of the Ukrainian flag. Because of it, he was tortured for days until all his teeth were knocked out and then, with his hands tied behind his back, shot 5 times in the head. His mutilated body was found in a dump. According to a report from a soldier present during his torture, the boy had “not cried and had not asked for mercy.”

We will never know how the thousands of other Ukrainians who were tortured and murdered in the dozens of torture chambers and “filtration” camps set up by Russian authorities throughout the occupied Ukrainian territories, died. We will never know but we ought never to forget them.

Russian crimes and the intense suffering they cause is not without purpose. With the continued support of the great majority of the Russian populace, as evidenced not merely by polling and the absence of any large-scale protests by the millions of free, diaspora-Russians living throughout the West, but by the enthusiastic participation in the hundreds of thousands of war crimes committed by ordinary Russians directly engaged in Russia’s war of conquest, the Russian leadership wishes to crush Ukraine, seize the immense resources of the country – which were already planned for distribution among the Russian oligarchs prior to the full-scale invasion – and, with this first step, regain the status of a global power. As the Russians put it, what they are fighting for is the triumph of the Russian World.

The goal is classic Imperialism, immense power and wealth for a tiny elite at the expense of the immense suffering and deprivation of the huge majority, indeed at the virtual enslavement of millions.

A final word on Russian propaganda.

Not all states are created equal. There is no moral equivalence between the state of Russia and America or Canada. Or between North Korea and France; or between Iran and Britain. The fundamental difference between representative democracies and autocratic states is in the distribution of power. In the former we have devised legal structures which govern our politics and societies. What a society founded on civil and human rights does with power is to spread it out horizontally to the extent that that is socially desirable and practical, which provides even the least successful of us a broad range of rights – powers – that we can rely on for our personal protection and freedom. The right, for example, to be free from arbitrary arrest and detention or search and seizure are rights protected by the state with penalties for those who violate those rights. The police are not above the law. Nor are the state’s prosecutors or Judges. Not so in Russia.

While Russia has, on paper, a constitution with a democratic process and a legal system that protects citizen rights, the reality is something else. The Russian legal system is a chimera. The state has an absolute monopoly on power. Herein lies another fundamental distinction between western systems and autocratic states. Liberal democracies, as rights-based societies, embrace the principle that the law applies equally to all, meaning that no one is above the law. Law is supreme. While there are certainly examples of unequal treatment by the law or within the justice system, the ideal nevertheless remains the goal and guiding principle. But we are, of course, human and the administration of justice is

subject in its execution to the vagaries of human judgement, preferences, biases, prejudices, laziness and ignorance. We make mistakes, but we accept them and strive for improvement. We can only do our best. But our worst is far superior to autocracy's best.

Because autocracy refuses to admit mistakes and does not tolerate criticism it appears to be more stable than unruly democracies which by definition tolerate diverse and even opposing views. We allow criticism even of our highest office-holders. Criticism is healthy. In Russia as in North Korea and Iran, the critics are killed – and, for good measure, typically tortured before being killed.

While liberal democracies spread power out into the opposition and among the people through their rights-based systems, states like Russia, China and North Korea are entirely vertical in their distribution of power. That is that power is absolute at the top and descends down through ranks of increasingly diminished power to the bottom. Everyone owes their security not to the law or state-enforced rights but to the personal support and “protection” of higher-ranking officials.

We may not easily see the reality behind Russia's masks but Russia well understands the differences between our systems of power and theirs. Let's be clear: If Russia truly believed western systems were inferior, that democracy, human rights and a fair and impartial justice system were not the necessary foundation for a successful, modern state they would not put so much effort into pretending that they, too, embrace and practice those very democratic systems that are the cornerstones of Western culture. Why even stage “elections” when the entire process is fraudulent and the outcomes determined in advance behind the state's closed doors? Russia can point to their constitution as “proof” of their commitment to a rules-based justice system but the most cursory examination of their courts and disputes reveals immediately the depth of their corruption from the western model. In Russia, like any mafia organization, it's all about connections to power.

Russia knows it cannot compete openly with the west in terms of the quality of life the Russian state offers its citizens, or on civil rights or personal freedoms. So it focuses its propaganda instead on “values”. Values are intangibles, outside the state or legal system. Its propaganda system pushes the model that in Russia basic moral values, if not legal ones, govern. While Russians daily commit war crimes in their invasion of Ukraine, destroying cities and towns while raping, torturing, and murdering Ukrainians who only asked to be free, Russia, they proclaim, is the last moral bastion in a degenerate and immoral world.

Why Russia Lies

Why do they lie? For the same reason we all lie. To gain some benefit. In Russia's case to hide the inconvenient truth that the regime's hold on power has no legitimacy other than that which raw power alone provides. Because those who exercise power and enjoy its absolute privileges are not willing to give them up without a fight. Hence the centuries of Czarist-Soviet-Imperial Oligarch brutality that has crushed and impoverished millions.

They lie because they understand that the truth is Russia's demise.

If, for example, Russia acknowledged the critical support given to it during the Second War by America and Britain, it would be more difficult to define two of the world's greatest democracies as "enemies". And Russia needs "enemies" to justify – in classic Orwellian analysis – its very existence. In like vein, as any acknowledgment of Ukraine's major role in the victory diminishes proportionately Russia's claims both to the victory and to the human cost, Russia has consistently denigrated Ukraine's involvement – if even acknowledged – in order to project the image of *Russian* power. Russia's propaganda narrative of nearly single-handedly defeating Nazi Germany, although patently false, remains a central tenet of its Imperial Great Power image – and one that citizens of west European nations and America appear to have largely accepted, totally unaware of the history of the war and involvement not only of Ukraine but of Belarus and other Russian-occupied Soviet states. So, too, if Russia honoured the immense sacrifice of Ukrainians and Belarusians in defeating the Nazis, the millions who died defending their respective nations from Nazi German occupation and their planned genocide, it would run counter to Russia's claim that they are – still – defending themselves against a Nazi threat. As though Ukraine ever had any intention to attack Russia or, even more insane, to embrace the very ideology of a system that had at its core the annihilation of the Ukrainian people.

So, instead, Russia lies. And, free from the constraints of a free press and critical populace, Russia's propagandists who, like the entire ruling class, are dependent upon the continuation of the state for their own privileges and their European summer homes, are committed to promote any distortion of the truth that perpetrates the status quo, deflects criticism of Russia's own considerable failings and obscures its ugly reality. They are all in on the same cynical game.

And they lie because it works. Putin's propagandists give the Russian people what they crave: meaning. Whether in Russia or spread throughout the diaspora, Russians know the poverty of Russian culture. What substitutes for culture, as Russian authors uniformly write, is Russian suffering. Russians take pride in their ability to endure. Apart from their narratives of deprivation and suffering there is virtually no authentic Russian culture. Muscovy's own history as a riverside tax-collecting agency for the Mongol Empire has absolutely nothing to commend it. Russia's desperate attempts to appropriate Ukraine's

history for itself – by annihilating Ukrainian identity so its very existence cannot contradict Russia’s claim to Ukraine’s inheritance – is a reflection of the emptiness Russia experiences in its own existence. A powerful Russia, a Great Russia that the world fears, a Russia that rapes and tortures its victims, gives them something that sanitation and running water cannot, pride. A sense of power they can identify with.

A stirring military nationalism, promoted by Russia’s Orthodox Church and attached to imperialist ambitions is a perfect solution for a meaningless empire filled with degraded and powerless people.

That’s all Russia offers. Empty slogans and suffering.

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*Vernon Frolick is the son of **Stanley W. Frolick, Q.C.** a Canadian lawyer who served as a Captain in British Army Intelligence in the Second War. As a student in the 1930’s, Stanley was living with his uncle, a Catholic priest in Polish-occupied Ukraine across the border from Soviet-occupied Ukraine and witnessed the horror of the Soviet Russian-directed forced famine of Ukrainians, a globally recognized genocide known as the Holodomor, that killed millions of Ukrainians by starvation. Later, in his capacity as a British officer, he was in the lead Allied forces that liberated the Nazi slave labour factories and again witnessed first-hand the mass death that the Nazis had inflicted on Europeans. He worked with **Eleanor Roosevelt**, the American diplomat and President’s wife, to stop the repatriation program by bringing to the attention of the US government the reality that Stalin was mass murdering returned citizens who had been forced into slave labour.*