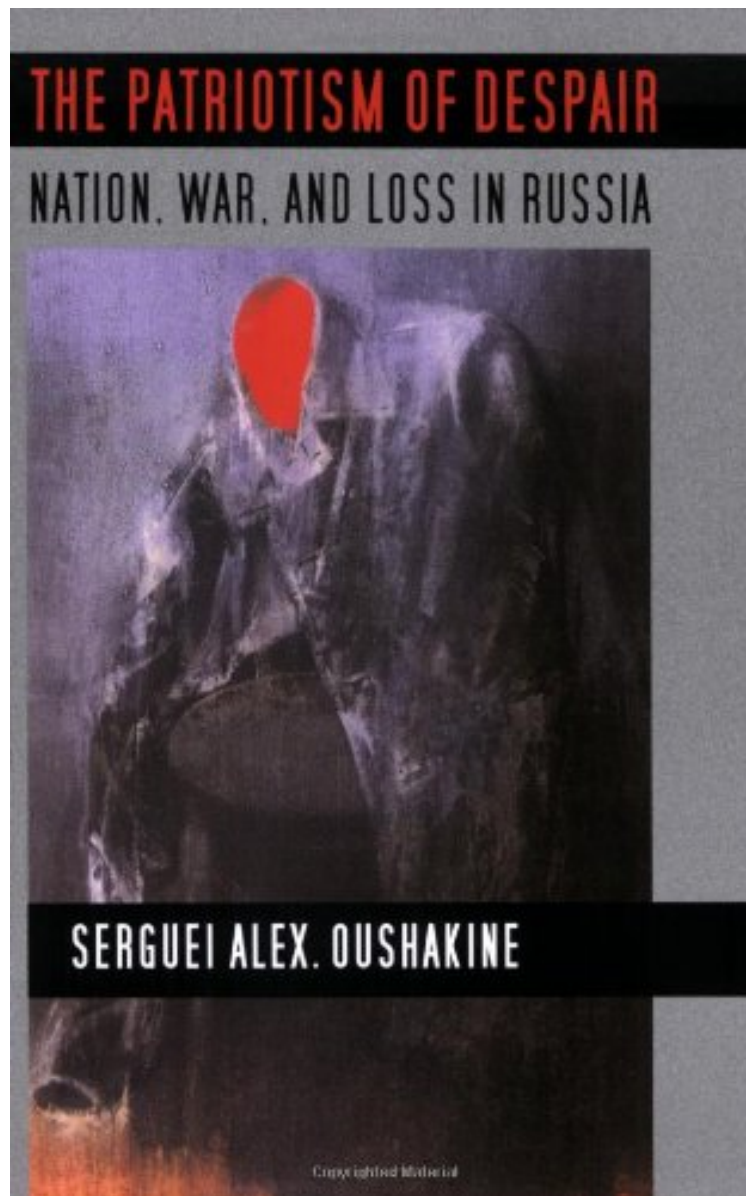


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## The Patriotism of Despair: Nation, War, and Loss in Russia (Culture and Society after Socialism)

*Serguei Alex. Oushakine*

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**Serguei Alex. Oushakine : The Patriotism of Despair: Nation, War, and Loss in Russia (Culture and Society after Socialism)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Patriotism of Despair: Nation, War, and Loss in Russia (Culture and Society after Socialism):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Seeing Red By John Feeseey A passionate retelling of the criminal Communist past and present state of chaos in social life in Putin's Russia. Its not pretty, but from all the other accounts I have read it is honest..... Serguei fires his subject with a characteristic almost Tolstoy like Russian attitude which while disarmingly forthright, can occasionally veer into diatribe and repetitive rather tiring bombast, at least to this westerner's ear. Has something been lost in translating into English? Who knows?. An forthright story from the trenches honestly told, no more no less.

The sudden dissolution of the Soviet Union altered the routines, norms, celebrations, and shared understandings that had shaped the lives of Russians for generations. It also meant an end to the state-sponsored, nonmonetary support that most residents had lived with all their lives. How did Russians make sense of these historic transformations? Serguei Alex. Oushakine offers a compelling look at postsocialist life in Russia. In Barnaul, a major industrial city in southwestern Siberia that has lost 25 percent of its population since 1991, many Russians are finding that what binds them together is loss and despair. *The Patriotism of Despair* examines the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, graphically described in spray paint by a graffiti artist in Barnaul: "We have no Motherland." Once socialism disappeared as a way of understanding the world, what replaced it in people's minds? Once socialism stopped orienting politics and economics, how did capitalism insinuate itself into routine practices? Oushakine offers a compelling look at postsocialist life in noncosmopolitan Russia. He introduces readers to the "neocoms": people who mourn the loss of the Soviet economy and the remonetization of transactions that had not involved the exchange of cash during the Soviet era. Moving from economics into military conflict and personal loss, Oushakine also describes the ways in which veterans of the Chechen war and mothers of soldiers who died there have connected their immediate experiences with the country's historical disruptions. The country, the nation, and traumatized individuals, Oushakine finds, are united by their vocabulary of shared pain.

"*The Patriotism of Despair* brilliantly demonstrates that 'culture matters more than ever' during periods of societal transformation. Serguei Oushakine investigates a range of groups—nationalist activists and intellectuals, war veterans and soldiers' mothers—that form communities of loss around symbolic representations and ritual enactments of shared trauma in Russia. Based on fieldwork from 2001–2003 in the city of Barnaul in Southwestern Siberia, the book provides a rare glimpse of culture in a Russian province (most other ethnographies are based in Moscow or St. Petersburg). . . . *The Patriotism of Despair* is one of the most significant works on post-Soviet culture to date, showing how trauma is not simply limiting, but generative—of communities and of understandings of what happened, what it means, and what to do. This ambitious undertaking . . . engages an impressive array of evidence: analyzing interviews, recounting rituals, excavating archives, and interpreting photographs."—Jane Zavisca, *Contemporary Sociology*

"Drawing on return visits to Barnaul, his boyhood city, near the Chinese and Kazakh borders, he paints a profound psychological tableau of coping. His groupings are diverse: disgruntled leftists, whom he labels 'neocoms'; Chechen war veterans; and the mothers of dead soldiers. All, however, find meaning and community in narratives of tragedy . . . . From Oushakine's keen reading, one gets a sense of how, for a still wider circle of Russians, collapse and disorder led to alienation from the Western values that Russian reforms had tried to sell them, which then for some shaded into anti-Semitism and a crude nationalism."—*Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2009

"*The Patriotism of Despair* is a detailed presentation of aspects of provincial Russian life—military, patriotic, psychological, interpersonal, academic, economic, and others—that could only have been revealed by the author's focus on discourses and practices of trauma, sacrifice, tragedy, and loss. Serguei Alex. Oushakine shows a number of ways in which Soviet imagery and idioms come into play in the post-Soviet symbolic negotiation of value and gives thoughtful historical backgrounds of and ethnographic details on nationalist movements of various sorts and on the Chechen and Afghan wars from within the communities they affected."—Dale Pesmen, author of *Russia and Soul: An Exploration*

"Serguei Oushakine's *The Patriotism of Despair* is a revolutionary book, the true subject of which is the collapse of the democratic revolution in Russia. It reveals the cultural and psychological, rather than merely political, reasons for the post-Soviet rejection of Western liberal ideologies and even the mass popularity of aggressively nationalist, racist, pro-Soviet and neotraditionalist discourses and narratives. Oushakine's work encompasses the meticulous analysis of various social groups located in Altai, the Siberian region on the border with China and Kazakhstan, and interviews with neocommunists, leftists, nationalists, and Chechnya veterans and their mothers. This book is especially valuable as it goes beyond worn binary oppositions, instead presenting a coherent—albeit quite unsettling—vision of post-Soviet society that is simultaneously fragmented and united by the trauma caused by the collapse of the Soviet world and seeking various imaginary and real forms of community and solidarity that inevitably turn out to be based upon loss, grief, and absence. This approach undermines both Western stereotypes about Russia and post-Soviet political self-imaging. It offers little optimism, but Oushakine's genuine interest in his personages represents the post-Soviet experience as an exuberantly rich and important facet of contemporary modernity."—Mark Lipovetsky, University of Colorado—Boulder

From the Back Cover "The Patriotism of Despair is a detailed presentation of aspects of provincial Russian life—military, patriotic, psychological, interpersonal, academic, economic, and others—that could only have

been revealed by the author's focus on discourses and practices of trauma, sacrifice, tragedy, and loss. Serguei Alex. Oushakine shows a number of ways in which Soviet imagery and idioms come into play in the post-Soviet symbolic negotiation of value and gives thoughtful historical backgrounds of and ethnographic details on nationalist movements of various sorts and on the Chechen and Afghan wars from within the communities they affected."-Dale Pesmen, author of *Russia and Soul: An Exploration* About the Author Serguei Alex. Oushakine is Assistant Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures at Princeton University.