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Why We Hate Each Other

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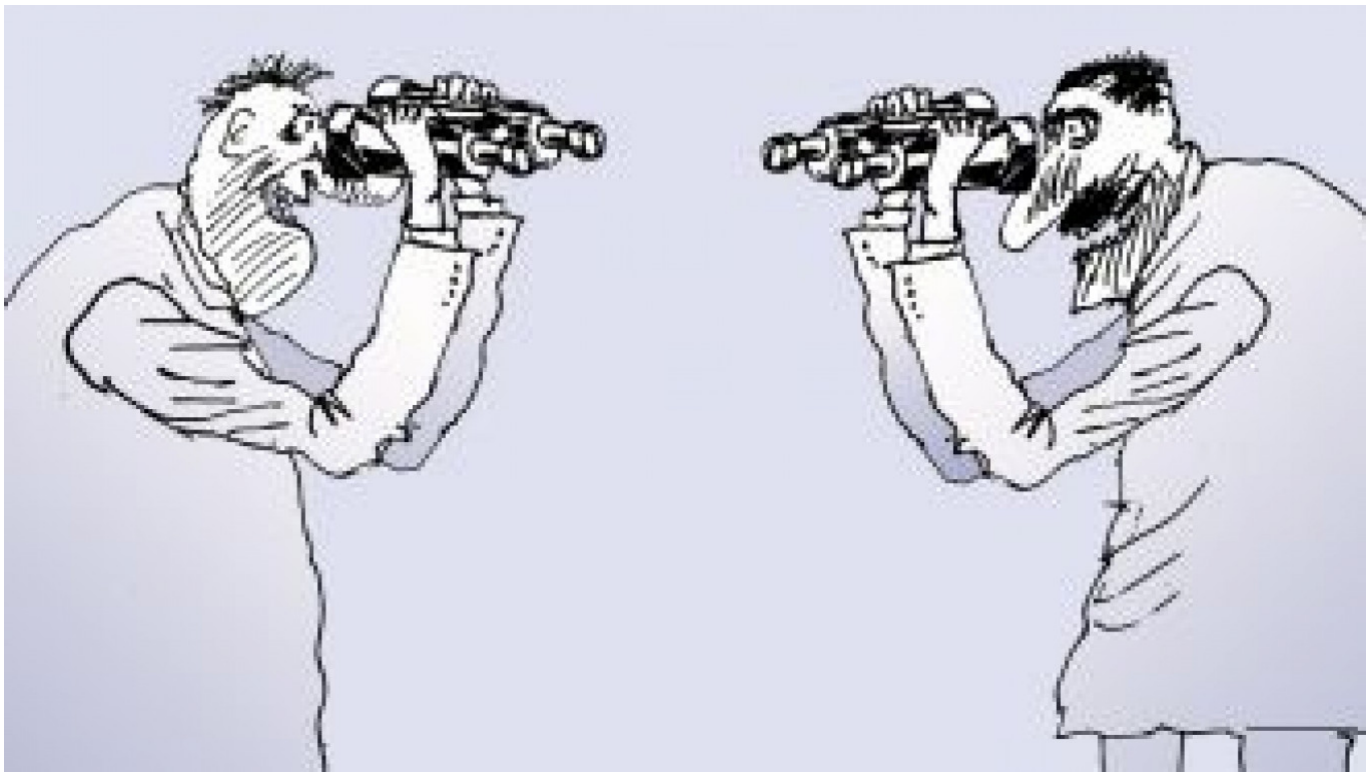

FROM THE PULPIT / Проповеди
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"Nine migrants from the▣ Caucasus ▣attacked a journalist in Yekaterinburg."

This was the first thing my car radio told me a few days ago. It upset me, and I spent the rest of my journey trying to pinpoint when I last heard about migrants, say, from the▣Vladimir▣region beating up somebody. I concluded I'd never heard anything like that. Could it be that migrants from the▣Vladimir▣region are not rowdy?

Investigative Committee head Alexander Bastrykin said recently that extremist rhetoric is on the rise. He also said extremists are often provoked into such rhetoric because of the outrageous number of scandalous crimes that immigrants commit.▣

In my native Krasnodar region, we once had a situation where an entire ethnic group, Meskhetian Turks, was thrown out. For years, they had not been allowed to register as residents and were denied jobs, denigrated and demonized on regional television. Local

authorities refused to renew their passports. In short, they were hated — so much that one day they packed their things and moved to the▣United States — all of them, making▣Russia▣look terrible in the eyes of the world.

But the point is, local residents often justified hatred of Meskhetian Turks by claiming they were all criminals. I asked police for official crime statistics while covering a story in the region, and it turned out that only 1 percent of all crime in the area was committed by Meskhetian Turks, though they represented 10 percent of the population. Moreover, they had not been responsible for any grave crimes for a number of years. Most offenses related to forged documents or altercations with police.

That's when it first occurred to me that it is not a matter of crime. What's more, it is not a matter of immigrants. It was not immigrants who killed Russian football fan Yegor Sviridov but Russian citizens who happen to be from the Caucasus.▣Moscow▣is their capital as much as it is for all Russians.

Immigrants are not the real problem. The real problem is much more serious: intolerance and hatred of indigenous ethnic groups. You can prohibit immigration, but what can you do about non-Russian ethnic groups living in their native territories in▣Russia? What are you going to do about Dagestan, Sakha, Tatarstan, Adygea and other regions that make up half of Russia? Allow these regions to secede and require that their residents obtain visas to enter the rest of Russia?

I recently attended a meeting with▣Russia's chief mufti, Ravil Gainutdin, and here's what I told him: The root cause of xenophobia in Russia is not religious differences between Muslims and Christians. Nor is it crime. The root cause is the terrible education that children acquire on the street, at school and at home.

Last weekend, I happened to be at the Kazansky Station where I witnessed a disgusting scene: Three young men from the▣Caucasus were taunting female train conductors standing on the platform. "Hey babes, are all women in▣Moscow▣as beautiful as you are?" they jeered. Then they joined hands and began yelling, "We are from the▣Caucasus!"

Not long ago, I watched a wedding cortege block traffic by stopping their cars in the middle of a busy highway. Revelers got out of their cars and started to dance, sing and shout. An Armenian flag was proudly displayed on the rear window of the most expensive black limo. I was disgusted and ashamed.

Why do some from the Caucasus behave this way in Moscow? Do they behave in the same way in their native regions? Of course not. They respect their countrymen. But they have no respect for Muscovites — or Russians in general. If those young men at the▣Moscow train station had dared to taunt "their own" in such a crude manner in the▣Caucasus, somebody certainly would have broken their jaws.

The disgusting truth is that some of the less-educated families in the Caucasus hate and despise Russians simply because they are Russian, just as some less-educated Russian families feel the same way about people from the Caucasus.

Many boys in the▣Caucasus▣are brought up to think that all Russian girls are easy

and trashy, and hence it is acceptable to treat them as such. They feel superior to Russians because that is how they have been educated at home. Likewise, some Russian boys are raised in homes where they are taught to believe that people from the Caucasus are backward and subhuman — "beasts" as they are dubbed in Russian hate speech. In many homes in the Caucasus, parents bad-mouth Russians over dinner while their children listen. Similarly, many Russian parents denigrate non-Russians in front of their children.

Caucasus children reared in such families see it as normal to treat Russians with open contempt, whereas Russians who grow up in similar circumstances see nothing wrong with airing their prejudice toward those from the Caucasus.

I do not mean to say every family in the Caucasus indulges in Russophobia, but far too many families do. Anyone who stems from the Caucasus knows such families or comes from one. Nor do I want to suggest that every Russian family is xenophobic or racist, but a great many are. Russian children typically hear racist and ethnic slurs against Caucasus natives at home before hearing it on the streets.

The problem has nothing to do with Russian Orthodoxy, Islam or crime. We have no objective reasons for such hatred and bigotry. It all springs from subjective perceptions and personal prejudice.

That said, we are indeed dramatically different. In one culture, bride abduction is a time-honored custom, whereas people of another culture may see it as barbaric. By the same token, one culture may be tolerant about marrying non-virgins, while it is absolutely taboo in another. Unfortunately, all too often we lack the wisdom to accept such diversity and move on. Instead, we obsess over ethnic differences, aversions and grudges. This will only lead us down a self-destructive path.

When our grandparents were children, they paid little or no attention to their classmates' ethnicity. Our parents, however, grew up at a time when hate speech against other ethnic groups became commonplace. Today, our brothers and sisters are using knives to settle scores with other ethnicities on Russian streets. Unless we prevent this trend now, we might see our own children resorting to Kalashnikovs.

Margarita Simonyan is editor-in-chief of the Russia Today television channel. This comment appeared on "From the Pulpit" ("Propovedy"), a joint television project between Dozhd TV and The Moscow Times. "Propovedy" can be seen on tvrain.ru

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