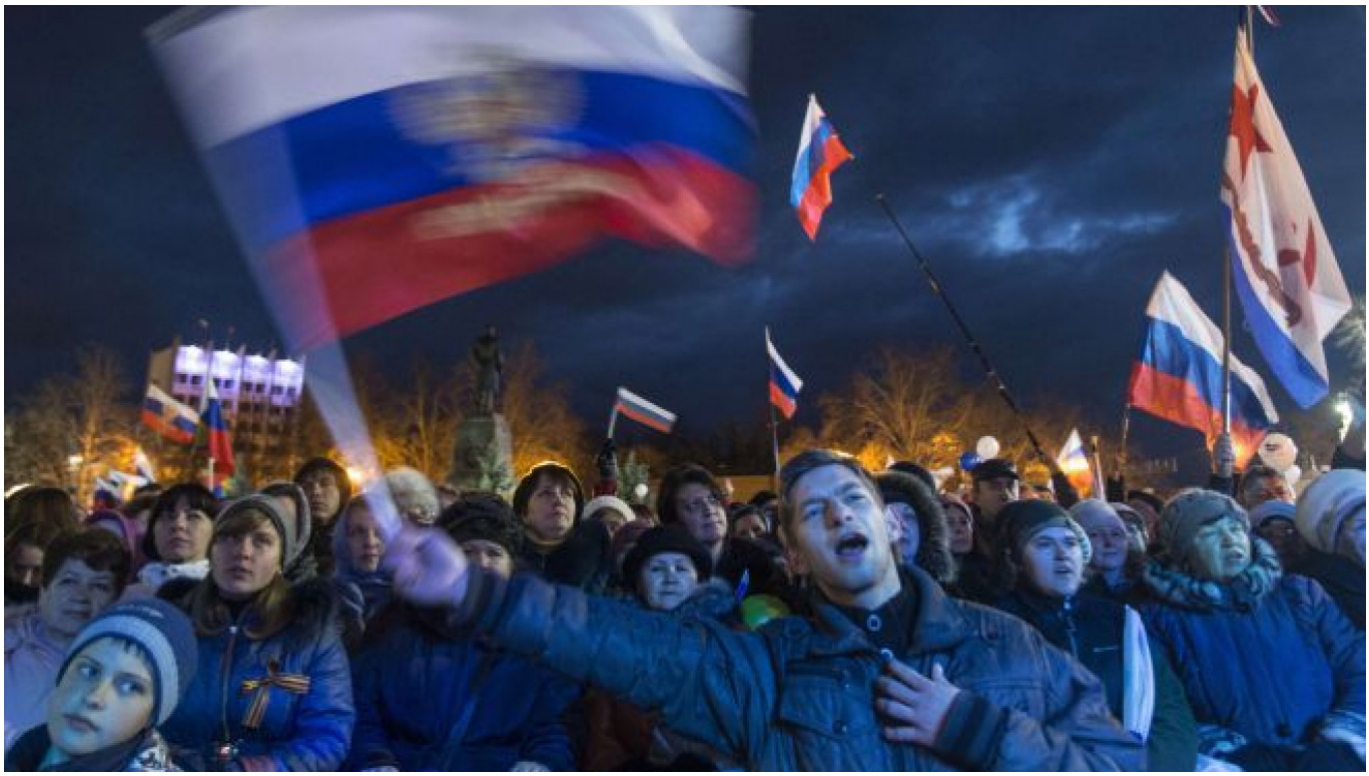
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We're Talking a Big Difference

By Michele A. Berdy

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Разжига́ние ро́зни: inciting discord

Рознь (discord, division) is my Russian Word of the Week. Not because it's a word with happy associations. On the contrary, it's related to all those раз- and роз- words like разделить (divide), разница (difference), and розница (retail — the act of dividing goods up to sell in small quantities to consumers). These are not uplifting concepts — well, with the exception of retail shopping, which is always a mood enhancer.

But what's cool about the word рознь is that it has two distinct meanings and usages.

First we start with the grim рознь, which means discord or enmity. This might be general: Направляющей воли не было и не может быть при общей розни среди исполнительной власти. (Given the discord among branches of executive power, there was no guiding purpose, nor could there be.) Or it might be specific: В стране запрещаются пропаганда войны, разжигание национальной, расовой и религиозной розни. (It's

illegal in the country to propagandize war or incite ethnic, racial or religious discord.)

There are three ways that рознь can appear, and the verb people choose may say something about their view of human nature. The first verb you can use is сеять (to sow): Всем попыткам сеять национальную, религиозную рознь должен быть дан адекватный и очень жёсткий ответ. (There must be an appropriate and very tough response to all attempts to sow ethnic and religious discord.) Use of this verb implies that people are basically good, but can have the seeds of discord sown in them.

The other two verbs suggest a less positive view of human nature. There is разжигать (literally, to ignite): Прокуратура подала иск о ликвидации данной газеты за разжигание национальной розни. (The prosecutor's office sued to close this newspaper for inciting ethnic hatred.) And возбуждать (literally, to awaken). Издание возбуждало социальную, расовую рознь. (The publication incited social and racial discord.) Using one of these verbs suggests that the propensity for discord is in everyone waiting to be ignited.

That's рознь-discord. There's also рознь-difference, which is unfortunately grammatically more confusing. You hear it in this construction: x (noun in the nominative case) x (the same noun in the dative case) рознь. For example, женщина женщине рознь. English speakers say: There are women and then there are women! To make it clearer, try saying it while doing a Groucho Marx imitation.

Sometimes this construction just means that there is a variety of whatever is under discussion. So цитата цитате рознь could mean that two quotes are very different from one another.

But in other contexts, this construction means that one example of something is good and the other is bad. So воздух воздуху рознь means: there's air, and then there's great-smelling fresh air.

This is torture-the-translator territory. Жена жене рознь in a specific context might be: Just because your wife goes along with it doesn't mean that every wife will!

As they say in Odessa about wives, husbands and just about everything else: Это две большие разницы. (We're talking a big difference here!)

Michele A. Berdy, a Moscow-based translator and interpreter, is author of "The Russian Word's Worth" (Glas), a collection of her columns.

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