SLIDE 1 (to show before talk starts) - **Main themes © Tony Kevin**

This talk, **The Russian National Character: The Motherland (Rodina) and National Cultural Identity**

started in my mind with a more casual title: **'A riff on Russianness'**. My native Russian-speaking friend Marina Iskhakova and I agreed the best Russian language equivalent is

Размышление о Русском народном духе – literally,

'Reflections on the spirit of the Russian people'.

So that is an alternative title.

I want to explore in this talk some important ideas on how and why Russia is different from what we loosely call 'the West'. I say clearly at the outset that I admire and honour these differences. I do not regard these differences, as so many Western writers on Russia consciously or subconsciously do, as 'deficiencies' or 'shortcomings'. So, for example, I would not suggest that Russia 'missed out' on the Reformation or the European Enlightenment. One might equally say that the West 'missed out' on 70 years of Soviet Communism. I would simply say that Russia's historical experience has been different from the West's, and enquire about the reasons for this.

I intend to 'riff around' some key ideas linked to my theme of 'Russianness', or the Russian national spirit.

These are my themes:

Russian landscape: forest and steppe

Elites' rediscovery of Russian identity after Napoleonic Wars

Russia becomes a multicultural space. The 'Русский мир'

Class and the role of the creative intelligentsia

Some key words about Russianness

Religious faith, stoicism and optimism

Family and community

Exile and return

War: invasion and remembrance

This talk draws on my personal lifetime experience and observation of Russia. Most of these ideas will be quite familiar to Russian members of this audience You might even think – 'of course, that's obvious'. I hope I can present some of this in a fresh way, at least to non-Russians here today.

Many of you will know my background: as an former Australian diplomat sent to the Soviet Union on his first posting in 1969-71: more recently as an independent scholar and occasional traveller to Russia; and my continued reading, writing and thinking about Russia over many years.

C19 and early C20 Russia was in many ways a young country like Australia, though also a very old country. The elite had rediscovered and learned to celebrate their own core Russian identity after over 100 years of trying to speak French at home and emulate French values and

social codes. There are remarkable commonalities with Australia: the tyranny of huge distances and harsh climate challenges; histories of convict transportation and exile; responding to the disdain of metropolitan Europe; curiosity at our exoticism - Russian bears and Australian kangaroos.

There were important differences: Russia has no natural frontiers, unlike the island nation-continent of Australia. In Russia, fluid borderlands butted up against a diversity of adjacent civilizations. Russia therefore had centuries of learning to live with multiculturalism. Its huge imperial lands were drawn together by a common geography and a common language of administration and commerce.

Australia in contrast was a white colony of a faraway white empire, and its settlers treated the indigenous people very cruelly. Until the 1970s, we were a sharply racist, narrow-minded and derivative white colonial culture.

Nevertheless, a few independent-minded Australians like Manning Clark saw and were interested in exploring Australia's affinities with Soviet Russia: what could we learn from them, he asked? It remains a very good question today.

This talk might help explain why I love Russia so much, and I hope contribute a little to Russian-Australian mutual respect and understanding. I am not going to talk about current political relations,

which are going through difficult times, and I ask that we not go there in Q and A either. Our recently formed Pushkin Club of Canberra has a different focus, on culture and literature.

Manning Clark and his wife Dymphna often went to Russia, and their daughter Professor Katerina Clark maintains this family tradition through her eminent scholarly work in Soviet historical-cultural studies at Yale University. The home library at Manning Clark House is well stocked with Russian classical and Soviet-era literature. So I feel privileged to be giving this talk in our MCH-affiliated Pushkin Club of Canberra, and here in the St John the Baptist Russian Orthodox Church Community Hall. My deepest thanks to our hosts.

Today is Russian Orthodox Easter Sunday. So I am happy to offer the traditional greeting: **Христос воскрес!** "Christ is risen". To which the answer is **Воистину воскресе!** "He is truly risen".

In some ways my and Manning's personal experiences of Soviet Russia were similar. Neither of us were academic scholars of Russia. We each had our professions - his as a brilliant sometimes controversial ANU academic historian, mine as a young Australian diplomat posted to Moscow. We both experienced Russia as gifted amateurs. We both came to love Russia more and more passionately, as we came to know her better.

Manning was always politically open-minded and tolerant towards the Soviet system. Never a communist, he was prepared to engage with Soviet reality as he found it, without prejudice or preconceptions; and to accept with goodwill the friendship and generous support of friends he made in the Soviet intelligentsia, who encouraged him to visit Russia and hosted him during his journeys.

I lived an artificial, constrained life in Moscow as part of the Western diplomatic enclave. I was a minor anonymous footsoldier in a titanic 40-year Cold War struggle. My personal life in Russia was bounded by entrenched hostile narratives on both sides of the East-West ideological and military divide. It was nearly impossible for me and my family to live a normal life in Moscow, though we did our best. That story is told in the first part of my Russia memoir, *Return to Moscow.*

I had to suppress my instinctive love for Russia out of professional career prudence. I experienced my two years living in Moscow as a silently sympathetic observer, looking out from behind an impenetrable glass wall of Cold War mindsets and prejudices on both sides. So my first experience of Russia was bitter-sweet. It left in me a deep sense of unfulfilment, a sadness at so many lost opportunities for real contact with Russian people. I felt the Cold War as a personal loss.

When I first went back as an independent Australian traveler in 2016, 47 years later and long retired from Australian government service, I was re-visiting an old dream. I was excited at last to experience Russia as a free agent and with fresh unprejudiced eyes. It is sad that my first

independent visit in 2016 coincided with a resurgence of a New Cold War: but I will not talk about this today.

I start with the **Russian landscape,** the most defining feature of Russianness.

SLIDE 2 - https://www.tretyakovgallery.ru/collection/doroga-vo-rzhi/ **Дорога во ржи,** (Shishkin 1866, 'Road in the Rye')

Most of Russia is made up of immensely long and broad climate and vegetation bands that run from east to west. Going South, one moves from arctic tundra or treeless cold desert; through taiga - cold arctic forest; then temperate forest; then steppe – open rolling plains; merging finally southwards into dry desert. Most Russian culture and history happens in the temperate forest zone and the steppe zone. The steppelands were broad easy highways for movement eastwards and westwards by successive waves of nomadic horse peoples who carried their homes and property with them. The forests offered shelter from the marauding nomads.

The steppelands were always contested ground with no natural frontiers. The only way to defend homeland territory was to go forward to occupy more territory, to create more strategic depth. In this way, enormous empires rose and fell.

Waves of nomads - the horse cultures of the Scythians, the Polovtsians, the Huns, the Mongols, the Tartars - came out of the East, invading and settling on the Russian heartland steppes, commingling with the Slavs who lived in temperate forest zones just to the north of the steppes. Over many centuries, the strategic tide turned – Slav Russia, led by a Viking-origin ruling caste, began to expand its frontiers towards the East and Southeast. In so doing, Slav Russia changed its character.

In Russia, different cultures, languages, religions and civilisations rubbed shoulders in trade contact and military conflict over thousands of years, learning ways to accommodate and coexist. It is an experience quite unlike that of Western Europe with its sharply distinct territorial and linguistic-cultural spaces.

Out of Russia's history and geography grew a distinctive multicultural Russian identity, united by imperial power, the Russian language and the values of the Russian Orthodox Church. The scornful Western saying, 'scratch a Russian and find a Tatar' has an element of truth in it. But - and this is the important point - it is a multicultural heritage of which all Russians are rightly proud. The faces and costumes of historical portraits in the Tretyakov Gallery of Russian Art in Moscow tell a story of a thriving multicultural Russian world, open to all.

SLIDE 3 –

Basilick tersk - Tersk horse - Wikipedia

The modern Russian song Конь, 'Horse', has become a folksong though it was composed and first performed in 1994. It appeared in the depths of the new Time of Troubles, when the peoples of the former Soviet Union were reeling under the miseries and fears of political dissolution of the Soviet state, privatization and market economics 'shock therapy'. This meant the ruthless destruction of the whole Soviet Communist political culture and the human relationships that had grown out of that culture. There was huge misery and fear for the future in these years.

In these hard times, the warm song Конь struck an amazing chord. In just a few years, it achieved a 'crazy popularity' across the length and breadth of Russia. By 2015, its lyrics came high in the list of the most popular lines of poetry in Russia. The song became an unofficial

national anthem of Russia. It speaks to the people's deepest feelings of love for their country. Конь is sung by monastery choirs, army choirs, street choirs, and in family gatherings. The composer said it was the most important song he had written in his life.

SLIDE 4 - Владимирка (tretyakovgallery.ru) (Levitan, 1894)

What are the key ideas in Конь? Why do its verses resonate across the Russian world, catching in the throat of Russians, Tatars, Cossacks, Kazakhs, Chechens? There are no well-worn patriotic phrases here – it was a time of disillusionment when all such words rang false. Love for Russia – being '*in love with Russia'*,

'я влюблён в тебя, Россия, влюблён'

- is expressed through a few familiar ideas: the special bond between a Russian rider and their horse; the beauty and peace of the endless Russian steppe; the comforting lights of faraway villages; the breaking dawn; the ripening rye and flax and berry crops; and the good harvests to come. I want first to read you the main lyrics of Конь in English, and then play the song – it is only four minutes. I would like you to try to feel the emotions as you listen to and watch this choir:

Выйду ночью в поле с конём	I will go out into the fields at night with my horse
Ночкой тёмной тихо пойдём	Quietly we'll go into the dark night
Мы пойдём с конём по́ полю вдвоём	Together my horse and I will go out into the fields.
Ночью в поле звёзд благодать	The grace of the stars fills the fields
В поле никого не видать	In the fields no one can be seen
Только мы с конём по́ полю идём	My horse and I are going out into the fields alone.
Сяду я верхом на коня	I will sit in the saddle of my horse
Ты неси по полю меня	You will carry me across the fields.
По бескрайнему полю моему	Over the endless fields you will carry me.

Дай-ка я разок посмотрю	Let me see just once
Где рождает поле зарю	where the fields give birth to the dawn
…	
Полюшко моё, родники	My dear fields, dear springs
Дальних деревень огоньки	The lights of faraway villages
Золотая рожь да кудрявый лён	Golden rye, yes, and curly flax
Я влюблён в тебя, Россия, влюблён	I'm in love with you, Russia, in love.
Будет добрым год хлебород	It will be a good harvest this year
Было всяко, всяко пройдёт	So it always has been and always will be
Пой, злотая рожь, пой, кудрявый лён	Sing, golden rye, sing curly flax
Пой о том, как я в Россию влюблён	Sing of how I am in love with you, Russia.

[PLAY SONG VIDEO]
https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=kon+russian+song+youtube+video&docid=608055450938932093&mid=71FE398DC9695D105A5271FE398DC9695D105A52&view=detail&FORM=VIRE

SLIDE 5 - Рожь (tretyakovgallery.ru) 'Ryefields' Savrasov, 1881

Russians cherished and loved their horses as friends and companions. Russia was so huge. Only with horses was it possible to shrink Russia's enormous distances, to travel by summer in the saddle or in carriages, and in winter in sleighs pulled by troikas of horses. Even so, Russia's cities and large town were separated by days or weeks of riding. Pushkin and Tolstoy, also Pasternak and Grossman, are full of this sense of huge distances.

It is no accident that two of Russia's most significant national statues are of men on horseback.

SLIDE 6 - Bronze Horseman

Here is Peter the Great in St Petersburg: Mednyy Vsadnik, the Bronze Horseman. A profoundly ambivalent figure, both in the statue and in Pushkin‘s poem.

SLIDE 7 - Marshal Georgy Zhukov. I will say more about this statue at the end of my talk.

The theme of going out riding in the fields is central to two of Pushkin’s most famous poems that celebrate Russia’s seasons, *Autumn* and *Winter Morning*.

SLIDE 8 - Pushkin

In some of Pushkin’s stories, like *Snowstorm* and *The Captain’s Daughter*, people get dangerously lost in blizzards on featureless snowy steppelands. Roads become completely invisible, and travellers lose their way.

Nineteenth century Russian novels and stories are often set vaguely, ‘in the village of N in the province of X’. Because it was all pretty much the same everywhere, once you get outside Moscow or St Petersburg.

SLIDE 9 - Winter Landscape, Suzdal (my photo).

This is Suzdal – but it could really be any old Russian or Siberian town: a frozen river, a town on the high far bank, church domes.

SLIDE 10 - Boldino https://eng.russia.travel/objects/271292/

Pushkin loved and brought to poetic life Russia’s huge steppe lands. At various times he lived in exile or escape from the imperial court in Boldino, a remote family estate 1300 km from the capital St Petersburg, at least two week’s ride using fast carriages. Boldino is in the steppes

south of Nizhny Novgorod, in the old Russian-Tatar borderlands. Some of Pushkin's most creative and significant work was written during his stays in Boldino.

SLIDE 11 –
Doctor Zhivago (1965) | Varykino's house was filmed in Soria… | Flickr

In Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, his love of the Russian winter landscape comes through so strongly – no wonder Pasternak could not bear the thought of exile from Russia … here are the first stanzas of his poem '*Meeting*', when Zhivago meets his lover Lara again for their last weeks together in the icebound Varykino dacha, where their daughter Tanya is conceived, before their final forced separation:

SLIDE 12 – Lara
https://1.bp.blogspot.com/-7rG1KFhgejc/Wf8nDPSBQ-I/AAAAAAAAAkE/GhqlglLKmRY_tYs6C7kAyAjuWgrrU6W8gCLcBGAs/s1600/JCZ6.jpg

When snow covers the roads
And lies heavily on the roofs,
I'll go out to stretch my legs, and see you
Standing at the door,

Alone, in an autumn coat,
Hatless, without snow-boots,
Chewing a handful of snow
And trying to be calm.

The trees and fences
Vanish into the dark distance.
Alone in the snowfall
You stand at the corner.

Water drips from your kerchief,
Trickles into your sleeves
And sparkles like dew
In your hair.

The Russian creative intelligentsia rediscovered and fell in love with their own country at around the same time Australians were discovering ours. We were both shedding derivative or colonial stereotypes. Since Peter The Great and the czarinas Catherine the Great and Elizabeth, the Russian elite had been indoctrinated into the Westernising project, a key element of imperial ambitions to reinvent old Russia as a powerful and modern European state.

Napoleon's invasion in 1812, his occupation and sack of Moscow, was the great national shock that forced Russia back into rediscovering and celebrating its authentic self. Pushkin, and later Tolstoy, both understood this well. Pushkin never felt more Russian than when he was away from the artificial imperial court, in his faraway estate at Boldino. He was profoundly ambivalent about Tsarist power, as his epic poem *The Bronze Horseman* shows.

As for Tolstoy, his sense of Russianness was central. In a host of wonderful moments in *War and Peace,* the pivotal scene of Natasha's dance perhaps best symbolises this.

SLIDE 13 – Natasha's dance
https://64.media.tumblr.com/eed26e8cccc55120c98cfac80c796e73/tumblr_o4gf22XWcz1rh07xwo1_1280.png

Natasha has gone visiting with her family to a middle-aged relative who lives near their country estate. He has given up on the ruthless social games of St Petersburg, retreating to live quietly as a bachelor with his mistress of peasant background. She, a warmhearted woman, teaches Natasha to dance Russian-folk style. Natasha, who has never danced anything but French style ballroom dancing, finds that the balalaika

music and Russian steps come naturally to her. It is a joyous discovery of her true identity.

And this was happening through every field of culture in the years following the Napoleonic Wars: in music, in art, in literature, in architecture. What was then called ‘Slavophilia’ was gaining ground over the receding imperial Westernising project. Russian national character and national pride were reaffirming themselves.

One can feel this most strongly in the Tretyakov Gallery of Russian historical art. We see as we pass through these wonderful galleries the emergence of a Russian shared pride in this great and complex land, its landscapes, its peoples, its epic and often tragic history and myths.

Turgenev was conflicted by all this, he could never quite work out where he stood. He hated the cruelty and primitiveness of Russian serfdom. Yet he missed Russia dreadfully when he was in Europe. His novels are revealing of his indecision – was he really a Slavophile, or a Westerniser? I recommend a wonderful little book on Turgenev by Robert Dessaix, *Travels with Turgenev.*

My book *Return to Moscow* discusses why I prefer the word ‘Russophilia’ to ‘Slavophilia’: because the Russian project in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was not limited to or dominated by ethnic Slavs. Nineteenth-century Russia was embracing a true multicultural identity, united by the diversity and mutual respect of its peoples; the link of the Russian language as the language of commerce, administration and culture; and the link of the social values associated with Orthodox Christianity. The word ‘Russophilia’ today conveys a sense of a unique Russian cultural world, the ‘Русский мир’**,** of a shared pride in and love for Russia in all of its historic complexity, tragedy and heroism.

This is not about race or religion. The sense of belonging within a wider Russian world could be experienced by a Slav, a Jew, a Russian-speaking Balt or Volga German, a Cossack, a Tatar or indigenous Siberian, a Belarussian, a Ukrainian.

SLIDE 14 – Cossacks
https://www.tretyakovgallery.ru/collection/zaporozhtsy-pishut-pismo-turetskomu-sultanu/

Here is a famous painting of a group of Cossacks: independent communities of Russians living outside the serf economy, who guarded Russia's Southern and Eastern borderlands and led wild and free lives there. They intermarried with local people to create quite distinctive frontier communities, usually but not always intensely loyal to the Tsar. Here, the Zaporozhy Cossacks are writing a defiant reply to a Turkish Sultan who has demanded they submit to his rule.

By this time, throughout the imperial lands, Russian Slavs were commingling in complex ways with Tatars, Finns, Balts, Germans, Poles, Jews, Chechens, Kazakhs, Georgians, Armenians, Mongols . Major religions – all supported by the Tsarist state – in addition to the majority Russian Orthodox religion, were Catholic, Islamic, Buddhist, Jewish and Animist. All of this came together in a unique "Russian world' of diversity and shared history, language and geography – the Russky Mir, **'Русский мир'.** Immigrants from the West with their special skills and resources were welcomed. Russia was a young, expanding multicultural country, pretty much open to anyone who wanted to live there under Russian laws and language. It offered new frontiers.

Class and the role of the Creative Intelligentsia

SLIDE 15- Tolstoy

https://www.tretyakovgallery.ru/collection/portret-pisatelya-lva-nikolaevicha-tolstogo/

I want to turn now to the subject of **class** in Russia, and how the emerging national identity gradually transcended and softened its harshest features. Initially, classes were very sharply distinct. There were just two main classes – landowners, and their serfs or former serfs. Most of the characters in Tolstoy's '*War and Peace'* are from the landowning class and from the intelligensia, but there are a few important working class characters too – notably, Platon Karataev the peasant, whose simple life-affirming philosophy teaches Pierre Bezukhov important lessons about his own country. We see the same dynamic in *Anna Karenina*, set 70 years later in Tolstoy's time. The young landowner Lyovin learns wisdom and humility from the peasants on his estate, as did Tolstoy himself at his estate Yasnaya Polyana.

SLIDE 16 – Chekhov
Портрет писателя Антона Павловича Чехова (tretyakovgallery.ru)

In Chekhov, writing a little later, medical doctors play significant roles in opening up real communication between classes. This reflected Chekhov's own life as a working doctor. By now, capitalism was eroding the old class certainties. In Chekhov's plays, impoverished gentryfolk are often tricked and exploited by rapacious, upwardly mobile business people.

Class in *Dr Zhivago* is quite complex. Again we have impoverished gentry, and ruthless opportunists like Komarovsky. We have clever idealistic young men of worker background, like Lara's husband Sasha Antipov, determined radically to change society. We have women exploited by predatory men. Pasternak's main character Dr Yuri Zhivago, an orphaned boy of troubled upper-class heritage, moves with ease and dignity through the turmoil of late Tsarist and early revolutionary Russia.

SLIDE 17 – Vassily Grossman

https://lareviewofbooks.org/_next/image?url=https%3A%2F%2Fimg.lareviewofbooks.org%2Funsafe%2F1280x0%2Fhttps%253A%252F%252Fdev.lareviewofbooks.org%252Fwp-content%252Fuploads%252F2019%252F11%252Fvasilygrossman.png&w=1200&q=75

Vassily Grossman was a secular Jewish intellectual who grew up in Berdichev, a largely Jewish town in Central Ukraine. He became a member of the new Soviet literary intelligentsia and in the GPW a leading Soviet war correspondent. His mother who refused to evacuate her home town in 1941`was killed there by the Nazis. In Grossman's wonderful novel *Stalingrad*, we see through the eyes of its huge cast of characters how complex ethnic and class identities were now interacting, in a mostly respectful and even loving way. The Soviet system with its free education open to all (except, tragically, for the families of former alleged class enemies) had by now indeed created a new more fluid and varied intelligentsia class with many different elements. Grossman sensitively and sympathetically introduces us to these new Russians, people we have not much encountered in nineteenth century Russian literature – industrial managers, scientists, professional military officers, doctors, party political workers, and surviving members of the old artistic and creative intelligentsia. We see these people behaving heroically at war and managing their complicated private lives. It is a more egalitarian world, but still a world of high intellectual and moral standards, and united by a strong sense of Russianness and love of motherland.

Obviously Grossman - justly called the Tolstoy of the Soviet era - is idealizing these fictional characters, but they are nonetheless real. Quite a few of them are of secular Jewish background, as Grossman himself was.

Grossman wrote under censorship: Stalinist excesses and crimes against humanity were wreaking havoc in his Soviet world, before, during and even after the Great Patriotic War 1941-45. Grossman elliptically touches on this in his novels, finally and most clearly in his last novel *Everything Flows.*

I see strong qualities of Russianness uniting Pushkin's, Turgenev's, Tolstoy's, Chekhov's, Pasternak's and Grossman's characters. These are for the most part decent, compassionate, even admirable people of great seriousness of purpose and high ideals. They have a different view of the individual's responsibilities to society than do characters in most classic Western novels.

I have to say in passing how well the film actors Julie Christie and Omar Sharif - neither of them Russian – convey these Russian qualities to Western viewers in David Lean's epic film of *Dr Zhivago*. As also does Michelle Pfeiffer as Katya Orlova, in the wonderful Fred Schepisi film of John Le Carre's perceptive book *The Russia House.* It is not impossible for Westerners to learn from an alert reading of Russian literature and cinema to see Russia as she really is.

What makes these Russian people different? Essentially, that they are trying to lead good moral lives. They are trying to find the right balance: to serve their societies at the same time as seeking personal happiness. Thus, Zhivago and Lara give everything they have as doctor and nurse during the doomed war against Germany. Then in the civil war, when they meet again by chance, Lara is working as a librarian and Zhivago has been attending as a doctor to both the Red Army and its adversaries. They fall desperately in love; they have really been in love for years. When Lara leaves Zhivago finally, it is out of a mother's love for her daughter Katya and her unborn child with Zhivago, Tanya: both Lara and Zhivago know that she and her children need the degree of security the predatory Komarovsky is offering her in an anarchic world. Zhivago pretends he will join her later, but they both know he won't.

Grossman's *Stalingrad* tells the story of the long controlled retreat of army and people – never a rout - over more than 1500 kilometers across Ukraine, from the Dneiper to the Don and finally to the city of Stalingrad on the Volga River. These Ukrainian Russian refugees were sad but resigned to fleeing their homes: they chose to make the long and dangerous journey eastwards even as far as Kazakhstan and Siberia, rather than risk staying on under German Nazi occupation. To defend Russia was to retreat from superior military force to more defensible battlelines. As in 1812. you carried your motherland, your rodina, in your backpacks and suitcases, in your family icons and photographs. Everything else was replaceable. These people wanted to stay Russian: they trusted the state to fight back for them at the right time and place. It turned out to be in Stalingrad, the last major Russian city before the Kazakh steppes begin on the eastern side of the Volga.

SLIDE 18 - Stalingrad monument
https://i.kinja-img.com/gawker-media/image/upload/c_fit,f_auto,g_center,pg_1,q_60,w_965/196xcgsver22xjpg.jpg

Historically, the Russian heartland - even the capital itself – has been moveable. Originally, the centre of Russia was Kiev. When Kiev fell to the Mongols, Old Novgorod became the capital, far to the north in the more secure forest zone, not far from modern St Petersburg. Then by historical accident or some would say destiny, the capital became Moscow. During the Polish invasion and occupation of Moscow in the first Time of Troubles, the Russian heartland retreated eastwards, to Vladimir-Suzdal and Nizhny Novgorod. Peter the Great moved the capital to St Petersburg, his 'window into Europe'. In 1941, with Nazi forces at the gates of Moscow, the Soviet state evacuated Russia's administrative, scientific and industrial key personnel to a temporary war capital Kuybyshev, now back to its old name Samara, on the east bank of the Volga River, 1000 km southeast of Moscow. The capital stayed there for nearly two years.

It is still the Russian world, across many thousands of kilometers – eleven time zones, in fact. It is still Russia whether you are in Minsk, Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, Yekaterinburg, Novosibirsk, Omsk, Krasnoyarsk, Irkutsk, or Vladivostok.

The terrible six-month battle of Stalingrad (August 1942 to February 1943) was where the Soviet Army made its final stand against the already weakened and over-extended Nazi and allied armies. The battle broke the back of the Nazi military advance into Russia. The tide of war turned in Russia's favour at last, but at immense human cost to both sides**.** The war went on for another two years and ended on 9 May 1945 with the Russian capture of Berlin and the Nazis' unconditional surrender.

After the war, Marshal Georgy Zhukov who commanded Russian armies, commented: 'It is a fact that under equal conditions, large-scale battles and whole wars are won by troops which have a strong will for victory, clear goals before them, high moral standards, and devotion to the banner under which they go into battle.'

These are the people – not just the troops and officers, but their loyal and loving families who supported them - about whom Grossman, like Tolstoy before him, writes. Which leads me into my next theme:

Some key words about Russianness

SLIDE 19 - **Богоматерь Умиление**, Our Lady of Tenderness, 1460s, Novgorod Icon Museum

There is no Russian direct translation for patriotism apart from the obvious French-root imported word **Патриотизм**. There are three Old Slavonic Russian root words for native land: **отечество, отчи́зна** and **ро́дина. Отечество** and **отчи́зна ,** both meaning fatherland, obviously stem from **otets**, father, and relate to matters of feudal patrimony and inheritance. But **Rodina,** motherland, a feminine gender word, is connected to the root word **rod,** which has many meanings: genus, race, kind, family, generation, clan, kin, bloodline.

Rodina is about your motherland, not what you have inherited or to which king or tsar you owe allegiance. If Russians think about what we call patriotism, they are more comfortable using the very Russian phrase **lyubov k rodine -** love of the motherland**.**

A Russian mother nurtures her children, as this 1460s icon in Novgorod **Богоматерь Умиление**, Our Lady of Tenderness, so beautifully conveys. A Russian father protects them against enemies. For Russians, WW2 was called The Great Patriotic War – Великая Отечественная война. It was the war above all others where much of their homeland west of the Urals - their Rodina - was occupied, laid waste and almost annihilated. Stalin got the words right.

Narod is another key word from the root word **rod** - **nash rod**, our people. **Russky narod** principally means 'the Russian people'.

Then there is the family of words around **dukh**: which can mean spirit, mind, ghost, soul, wind and esprit. The feminine word **dysha** has very similar meanings: soul, spirit, heart, mind, psyche. Both words have an important religious or spiritual connotation: the Holy Spirit is **svyatoy dukh.** The Russian word for breathing is **dykhaniye** is 'breathing'. The Holy Spirit breathes on people of faith.

So **Russkii narodny dukh**, my title, has a strong Orthodox religious background meaning, even for people who are agnostic or atheistic.

Religious faith, stoicism and optimism

SLIDE 20 - [храм Христа Спасителя Google - Bing images]

The immense Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, Храм Христа́ Спаси́теля, is an easy walk from the Kremlin in central Moscow. In 1931, Stalin demolished its predecessor, a cathedral built in the nineteenth century to honour Russia's victory over Napoleon, as part of

his war on religion. He planned to build an immense skyscraper here with a statue of Lenin on top. With great courage – Stalin's war on the kulaks had begin in 1929, and his Great Terror began in 1934 - Russian cultural workers got permission to pack away and conserve all the icons and other moveable religious objects in the old cathedral, as claimed cultural historical artefacts. A huge hole was excavated for foundations but construction was abandoned in 1941 and never resumed. In Khrushchev's time, in 1958, a huge heated outdoor swimming pool was built in the hole. I remember swimming there in 1969-71. Then, miraculously, in 1994, President Yeltsin ordered the original cathedral to be rebuilt exactly as it had been. This was completed in record time by 2000. All the original icons and frescoes and furnishings were meticulously put back in their original places. It is now the largest and most important Orthodox church in Moscow and it is packed every Sunday with devout worshippers.

SLIDE 21
https://planetofhotels.com/sites/default/files/hram_hrista_spasitelya-6.jpg

Sunday Mass here with the warm golden light from high above, the scent of incense, the magnificent choir, the chanting of the priests and the devout worshippers, is an enthralling experience.

Russia today is a state that sees itself as having a moral or ethical duty in the world. This grows out of an unbroken Christian narrative going back over 1200 years to the first conversion of the Kievan Slavs in 988 by Prince Vladimir the Great, Prince of Novgorod and Grand Prince of Kiev. So began a special bond between Church and State which was never broken as in the West by a Protestant Reformation or by the

triumph of the Enlightenment: not even by the Soviet Communists' hostility towards religion.

In nineteenth century Russia, agnosticism and atheism certainly became fashionable in the elites under French enlightenment influence – think of old Count Bolkonsky in *War and Peace,* a fierce atheist - but the Tsarist State always paid lip service to religion, and at least some of the Tsars, perhaps all, were genuinely devout Orthodox Christians. Certainly the people were. The tsars were generous in financial support of not only the majority Orthodox Church but also the other churches. Even Stalin discovered during the Great Patriotic War that he needed to work with the churches in mobilizing patriotism. The Russian Orthodox Church never actually closed down under Russian communism – it just went more or less underground.

Russia, though it has a secular constitution that guarantees freedom of religion or freedom to have no religion, is a country based on spiritual values. Here is a recent expression of a Russian mainstream view on how religion influences the state's values:

'Without the values embedded in Christianity and other world religions, without the standards of morality that have taken shape over millennia, people will inevitably lose their human dignity. We consider it natural and right to defend these values. One must respect every minority's right to be different, but the rights of the majority must not be put into question.'

Such embedded values support compassion for others, courage and stoicism – not, I would stress, passivity or docility - in the face of

misfortune. For Platon in *War and Peace*, there is the calm certainty that in the next life, the wrongs of this world will be righted.

For many of Chekhov's characters, such religious faith is replaced by an equally fervent but naive faith in the future. Dr Astrov in *Uncle Vanya* says that in 100 years, people will look back on their time as a primitive period. Actually, 120 years later, many of us might think Russian society around 1900 stands up pretty well culturally, compared to our own times.

But today in Russia, one generally finds good public values: compassion for others, love and respect for the elderly, love of and care for children, public optimism, love of motherland, a sense of a society that functions under an implicit agreed social contract. More than a few Russians would feel that the triumph of individualism in the West has come at a price they would not wish to emulate in their society. And who is to say they are wrong?

Family and community

In Russia, as in Spain, I found familiarity and ease with three-generation extended families often living together under the same roof. Maybe it is the product of past suffering and losses of so many husbands and fathers in war and civil war – grandparents, uncles and aunts were actually needed, to help mothers take care of children, as so many war-widowed or divorced single mothers had to go out to work to live. There is also a Russian tradition that many children were brought up by quite distant relatives or by close family friends, on a basis of need. Yuri Zhivago is an obvious example. There seems to continue in Russia to be an instinctive love and respect for the elderly, and an appreciation of what

they do to contribute to family welfare and security after their retirement from paid work.

People mostly live in housing complexes in cities these days, not in villages – but there still seems a sense of caring for one another. Apartment complex courtyards become quasi-villages. There is maybe a degree of inquisitiveness, the eagle-eyed babushkas on the doorstep, that Westerners might find intrusive - but there is comfort in this too. Belatedly, under the pressure of COVID, we in the West are rediscovering the importance of looking out for one another. I can only say from my observation that as of now, this seems to come quite instinctively to many Russians. It is a real difference, and one to admire.

Exile and return

SLIDE 22 – URL 'We weren't expecting you' – Repin, 1884.

https://www.russianartandculture.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Screenshot-2019-07-25-at-13.11.07-1024x986.png

One cannot ignore – it is too big to ignore - how terribly families at all levels of society and in all classes suffered under not only the war, but also Stalin's savage suppression of human rights under the Great Hunger and the Great Terror. Over 12 years, from around 1929 to 1941, millions of Russian citizens from all ethnic groups and social classes were executed or starved to death, or imprisoned and sent to the Gulag, or exiled to Siberia, by the Soviet State. No families were unaffected by this terrible state violence. The best and wisest book in English that I know on this – it is short, by Professor Stephen Cohen – is '*The Victims Return: Survivors of the Gulag After Stalin*' (2010).

These were terrible, morally stressed years, and we get a picture of them from the best of Soviet Russian literature. Despite the censorship, writers had vital things to say. And, I warn, this is difficult material to talk about without offending somebody.

It is beyond question that Lenin and Stalin were building a stronger Russia out of the huge destruction of the Civil War; that education and science spread rapidly, to people who in previous generations could never have had such opportunities; that vital infrastructure was being built; that public health and living standards were steadily improving. But at what human cost, especially under Stalin.

The horror of the Gulag years which began in 1929, the year Stalin became Communist Party and state leader, and really continued even until his death in 1953 - taught Russians to be intensely private, to be fearful and suspicious of others. So many people from all classes and ethnic groups and regions were being unjustly arrested for political crimes. People felt confusion, shame and fear at the arrest of their close relatives. They wanted to believe in the goodness of the Communist Party and Soviet state. At one level, they knew their purged friends and relatives were innocent. At another level, they could not risk saying this, or even admitting it to themselves. Similarly the jailers and torturers could not bear to admit that what they were doing to their fellow citizens was evil. So a pattern of doublethink became entrenched.

Only in the Khrushchev years did the psychological cost of all this begin to come to light. Khrushchev actually relied on two former Gulag inmates as close advisers. There was then a conservative reaction after Khrushchev's dismissal, a wish not to speak of the recent past. Coming to terms with the past was thereafter a slow process, not completed until well after the fall of the Soviet state in 1989. The Gulag History

Museum in Moscow – 'a Centre for studying, comprehending , and openly discussing the history of mass repression in the USSR' – opened only in 2004 and moved to an adequate new building only in 2015. The Moscow Monument to the Victims of Political Repression was unveiled in 2017.

How have Russian people come out of all this, 68 years after Stalin's death (1953) and 30 years after the end of the Soviet Communist state? I would say, amazingly well. Their resilience draws on the spiritual strength of a tradition of coping with autocratic rule and unjust disgrace, imprisonment, and exile going back to the tsarist era. Ever since the doomed Decembrist Revolt in 1825 - I saw an excellent film on this at last year's Russian Film Festival – families have had to deal with the awful consequences of individuals falling foul of the autocratic government. That is why this 1884 painting by Repin of a returning Decembrist exile from Siberia is so evocative: 'We weren't expecting you'. Most of the Decembrist exiles to Siberia never returned.

Pushkin himself who had associated with Decembrist rebels narrowly escaped imprisonment and permanent exile to Siberia. Tsar Nicholas played with him for years, alternating between periods of imperial favour and banishment to Boldino.

Dostoevsky was once arrested and expected to be executed, being reprieved at literally the last minute. Pasternak experienced both state favour and state repression – his lover Olga Ivinskaya was cruelly imprisoned, twice. All that lived cruelty and uncertainty is expressed in *Dr Zhivago.* Lara – who disappears into the Gulag and is never seen again – is Olga.

At the end of the book, Zhivago's old friends Misha Gordon and Nicky Dudorov, both officers in the Red Army fighting in World

War II, both loyal Russian patriots, look back philosophically on their lives (p 404, Folio). Both had been unjustly imprisoned in the gulag for political crimes before the war, and then released to fight. In a famous passage, they agree that the war came 'as a breath of fresh air, an omen of deliverance, a purifying storm.' 'When the war broke out, its real horrors, its real dangers, its menace of real death, were a blessing compared with the inhuman power of the lie':

'Everyone without exception, at home and at the front, all took a deep breath and flung themselves into the furnace of this deadly liberating struggle with real joy, with rapture'.

For Zhivago and Lara's daughter Tanya the laundry girl, who has had a terrible childhood as an bereft orphan when everything went wrong in Siberia, reprieve comes in the form of her uncle, Zhivago's half-brother Yevgraf, a KGB Major-General, who discovers her identity by accident at the front and pledges to support her properly after the war. Tanya symbolises, in Pasternak's words, 'the moral flowering of this generation' – her character 'tempered by misfortune, unspoilt, and heroic'.

In his famous final paragraph, Pasternak predicts that Russia's future will bring – Misha and Nicky can already feel it coming – 'the silent music of happiness' and a 'freedom of the spirit'. (page 413). This is the vision I tried to capture in the cover of my book *'Return to Moscow'*.

Some final words on

War: Invasion and Remembrance

SLIDE 23 – URL
https://www.rbth.com/blogs/Letter_home_from_Russia/2016/05/12/of-victory-and-immortality_592417

Participants of the "Immortal Regiment" parade in Moscow on May 9 2016.

Russia's most important wars – against Sweden in the 18th century, against Napoleon, against Britain France and Turkey in Crimea in 1853-56, against Germany twice in C20 – have been defensive wars fought mostly on Russian territory. War for Russian people is a deeply serious thing. It is not controversial at all. Pushkin was no pacifist. Although Tolstoy became a pacifist, most Russians today would have no patience with pacifism. They understand what happens to people who do not resist foreign invaders.

To question Russian military courage and integrity is to trample on the Russian people's most sacred memories of the bravery and self-sacrifice of their forebears. As the GPW recedes from living memory, it becomes more important to Russians to honour the memories, through medals and photographs, of those who fought in it. There is a strong social consensus that the GPW was a just war that Russia had to fight, that its immense human sacrifice was not in vain. The Bessmertny Polk or 'Immortal Regiment' parades held in most Russian cities on 9 May, is a new evolving tradition that has clearly evoked a warm public welcome. It is totally genuine, and now perhaps even more important than the military victory parades on the same day, 9 May.

SLIDE 24 – Marshal Georgy Zhukov (my photo)

I said I would finish with Marshal Zhukov, and here he is again. This is a huge bronze statue in Manezhnaya Square in front of the Kremlin, unveiled in 1995.

He sits proudly in the saddle of the stallion Kumir, or Idol. There is a story here. Of course Zhukov did not fight WW2 on horseback, But he was a good rider, and at the end of that terrible war, Stalin who could not ride instructed Zhukov to ride a white horse into Red Square to take the salute in the first Victory Parade on 9 May 1945. A search took place across Russia to find the best horse. Kumir was chosen: a light grey riding horse of top Russian Arab bloodlines, four years old and in his prime, from the Tersky stud farm in the North Caucasus. Kumir was already an experienced military parade horse.

Zhukov and Kumir practiced together for a month before the parade. They were determined to put on a good show for the nation. Thus it was that in Russia's most solemn military parade at the end of the unbearable ordeal of the Great Patriotic War, a man and his horse rode out proudly together into Red Square to take the victorious Red Army's salute.

'Мы пойдём с конём пó полю вдвоём
Together my horse and I will go out into the field.'

Thank you all for your patience in listening to this long talk.