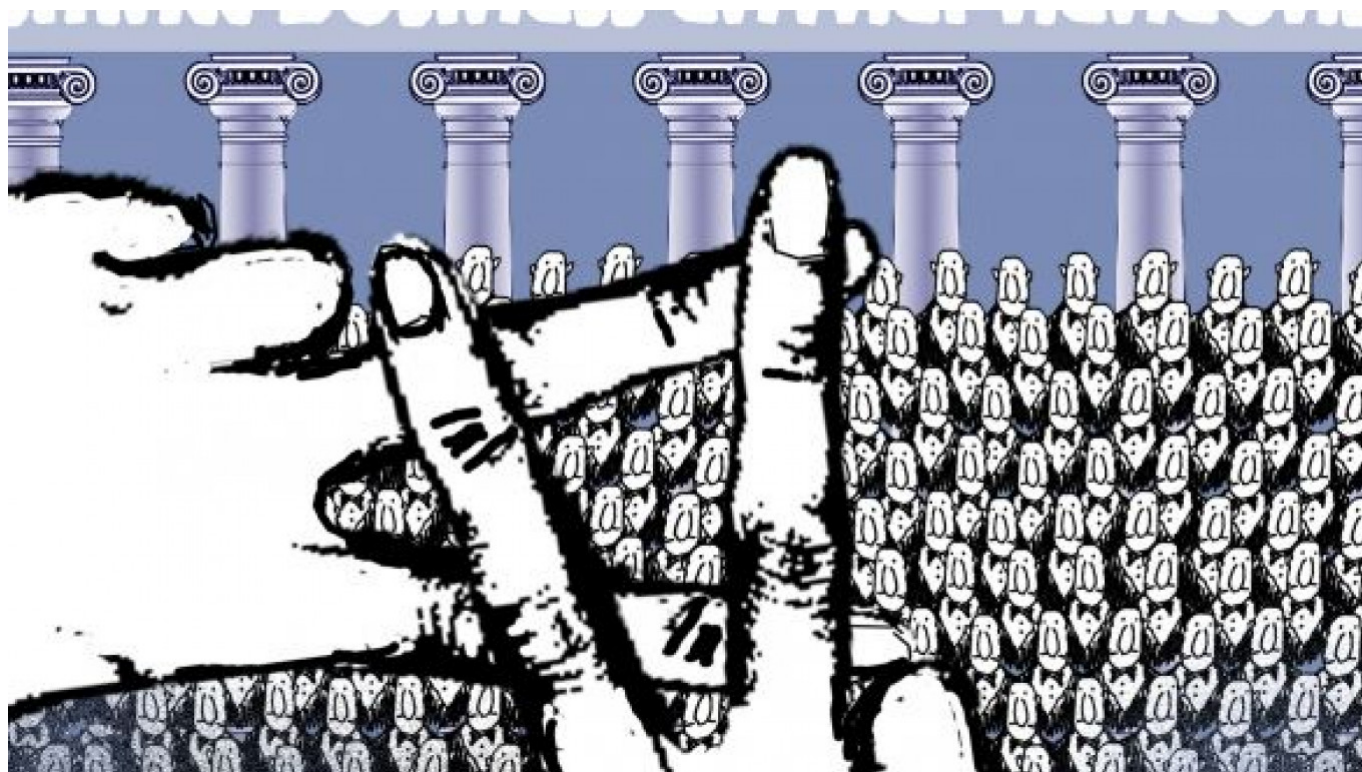


Another Day, Another Dismembered Body

By [Victor Davidoff](#)

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A dysfunctional family with spouses living separate lives but staying together only for the sake of the children. Huge debts from the couple's small business. A family of five crammed into a tiny, rented two-room apartment. No chance to start a new business or find well-paying jobs. Add to that serious drinking problems for both husband and wife and you get the perfect setup for a Dostoyevskian novel that inevitably leads to murder.

The murder took place Jan. 3 after a fight. The lawyer for former restaurateur Alexei Kabanov said Kabanov confessed to strangling his wife, journalist Irina Kabanova, and dismembering her body. Kabanov started hiding the body parts but was prevented from completing his task by investigators. They searched a car he was driving and found two bags filled with human remains in the trunk.

Kabanov made his name in the Moscow restaurant scene. In 2000, he was one of the originators of the innovative OGI Project, named after a publisher of art-house literature. A literary club and cafe hybrid, it was a place where people could have dinner as well as attend

exhibitions, book readings, literary festivals and poetry readings. It even had its own library.

The project was a success. The owners opened several other cafes under the brand PROgi and had plans to start another 18 cafes. But the company wasn't able to raise the money to expand, and after the oil boom crashed in 2008, the company began to nosedive. A number of cafes were closed, and others were sold. Kabanov and his wife opened their own cafe, called Cherska, in the center of Moscow. It was financed by the sale of Kabanova's apartment. But the cafe failed, and the couple lived on her income from a radio talk show.

Unfortunately, domestic murders are common in Russia. As psychologist Gennady [Chichkanov](#) said in an interview with Verchernyaya Moskva, "Someone's body is being dismembered every day." But the Kabanov case got a tremendous amount of attention because of one detail: Kabanov is a well-known opposition figure. He ran in the elections for the opposition's Coordinating Council. He was arrested several times during the Moscow demonstrations in 2012 and volunteered to help with clean-up operations after the flooding in Krymsk last summer. It is thus no wonder that as soon as the murder was reported, anti-opposition web sites erupted with joy.

Blogger [Dobryiviwer](#) wrote on his LiveJournal blog: "People who wear the opposition movement's white ribbon symbol are criminals. ... The white-ribboner Alexei Kabanov brutally murdered his own wife and cut her body into pieces. Another opposition leader, Leonid Razvozzhayev, was a mugger. Garry Kasparov is constantly giving speeches in the U.S., while Boris Nemtsov is seen embracing one of Russia's worst enemies, John McCain. What a lovely creative class Russia has: murderers, thieves, sadists and traitors."

A blogger on the [Ridus](#) agency site — financed by the Kremlin, according to former employees — wrote: "The Zavtra club that Kabanov co-owned is now the favorite hangout for white-ribboners. Maybe that would be a good place to show his art of dismembering a human body." A translator and anti-opposition writer who uses the pseudonym [Goblin](#) wrote: "The avid opposition activist Kabanov killed his wife and dismembered her body. Who else is among them? Necrophiliacs? Cannibals?"

Questions like these, which sound like they were taken from Stalinist-era newspapers during the Great Terror, are more puzzling than upsetting. Poet Vsevolod [Yemelin](#) wrote on his LiveJournal blog: "I don't wear a white ribbon myself. But what is there to cheer about? What's going on? One guy out of a demonstration of 100,000 people killed his wife. What does this have to do with the protest movement in general? One person was a murderer, while 99,999 people were not. It's not going to stop the movement. People will still demonstrate — perhaps not tomorrow, but at some time. Don't rush to bury the protest movement."

Of course, the Kabanov family tragedy has nothing to do with the protest movement. But it does have something to do with the economic situation in the country, particularly the crisis of small business development. Last year, income from individual businesses in Moscow was down 3 percent, according to an analysis published in [Kommersant](#). The number of entrepreneurs has been falling over the last four years; it fell 4 percent in 2012. More and more small business owners and entrepreneurs, whether they are engaged in computer programming or trade, are being forced to find full-time jobs and abandon their hopes of owning their own business.

The analytical Internet site [Tolkovatel](#) says "business activity in Moscow is slowing down, and white-collar labor is less in demand. Middle-aged, middle-class migrants to Moscow can't find work. They can either go back to the provinces or even abroad, or they have to change professions."

There were many factors that led to the murder in the Kabanov family. But there is a larger lesson that can be gleaned from this tragedy. A country that denies opportunities to its creative and entrepreneurial class is a country without prospects for economic development in the 21st century.

Victor Davidoff is a Moscow-based writer and journalist who follows the Russian blogosphere in his biweekly column.

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