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RUSSOPHOBIA AND THE WEST: A STUDY ON EUROPE ANTI RUSSIAN SENTIMENTS

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Summary

Russophobia or Anti Russian Sentiments means the diverse spectrums of hatred, dislike, negative feelings towards Russia or the Russians and their culture as a whole. This was one of the political tools used during the Cold War to establish hatred towards the Soviets. A wide variety of mass cultural clichés still exists in the Western world towards the Russians. Negative representations of Russia and Russians in the popular culture is described as functional, thus stereotypes about Russia may be used for framing reality. This article will be an attempt to understand the rise in Russophobia in relation to the West with the focus being created towards Europe, this paper will be an attempt to understand whether Russophobia has been incorporated by the West as a propaganda tool or is it the Russians who misuse the term Russophobia.

Key Words: Russia, Negative, Anti- Russia, West.

Introduction

Phobia according to Oxford Dictionary means an extreme or irrational fear or aversion to something. It can include an object, and place or even in recent times a community or religion. In the globalised world era, the era of interconnectedness and interdependence there has been a contradiction from this definition with the rise in various forms of phobias ranging from the phobia of a certain community or religion like Islamophobia to a state like Francophobia or Russophobia. These various phobias are inherent in almost every society around the world, it has been at times

implemented through the use of popular culture and with the rise in social media influence has further provided space for these different phobias to rise.

Russophobia or Anti Russian Sentiment can be understood as diverse range of negative feelings towards the Russian State. It would constitute the dislikes, fears, aversion, derision or prejudice about Russia and the people of Russia including their lifestyle and culture. This form of phobia is highly common in the Western world, where there have been various stereotypes which have been established including a wide variety of mass culture clichés about the country. Russia is seen as the ‘villain de jour’ of international opinion.

These stereotypes were highly developed during the time of the cold war when there was the ideological divide between the United States of America and the Soviet Union. The negative representation of the Russian in the popular culture is also used to frame reality to shape a stereotype about Russia like the creation of an image of the enemy in a movie as a Russian or an excuse or an explanation for compensatory reasons (Mertelsmann, 2012).

There are various reasons for Russophobia, ranging from its strength as a military power, its past during the period of the Soviet Union, a sovereign and independent regime in Russia, its role as the leader of the Orthodox Christians in Eurasia and Eastern Europe and finally the Western military-industrial requires a plausible enemy which it sees Russia as one. All these factors act as an obstacle for the West and its regimes to establish any control over Russia and its resources. Russophobia has numerous independent vectors which all contribute to form one grand vector which is openly expressed in the West policies towards Russia.

Russia involvement in the West Asian region especially in Syria has further cemented his re-emergence as a player in the region as well as the international arena which has further led Russia to act a challenger to the Western legitimacy in the international arena.

Origins of Russophobia

Russophobia and its origins vary with change in the region or country, what Russophobia is defined as in France is different from the Russophobia in America or even in Germany or the United Kingdom.

French Russophobia is said to be more of a philosophical form of Russophobia where there is a sense of self justification or the sense of superiority over the Russians. German Russophobia is seen as more of an invasion form of it where there is mention of Charlemagne or Kaiser William or even Hitler desire to conquer the region based on the desire to occupy Slavic lands. British Russophobia is basically the conflict of interest when it came to the Russian empire challenging British desire for colonisation. The American Russophobia the most common of all ranging from its involvement with the Soviet Union during the Cold War and its constant conflicts with Russia whether it was Georgia, Ukraine and Syria. America has also been known to use popular culture to spread Russophobia (Mettan, 2017).

Russophobia origin can be traced to the French, when in 1797; the French Directory had received a document from a Polish general by the name of Michal Sokolnicki called the Testament of Peter the Great. This testament was later on published during the Napoleonic wars at the behest of Napoleon Bonaparte where he wanted to present Russia as a conqueror and a threat to Europe and that Europe would eventually become the loot for Russia (Neumann, 2002).

It was a common phenomenon among Napoleonic writers to show that Russia was a power only grasping for hegemony but the manner of doing it was barbaric in nature. There was also a prediction of Napoleon after his fall that European was predominantly going to be established as a

Cossack state (Neumann, 2002).

England on the other hand supported the Russians against Napoleon terming France the common enemy, this alliance however lasted for a small period with Napoleon defeated the expansionist British changed its focus towards the Russians. The fear of the British was that the Russians could spoil their expansionist missions towards the East; within the 1820's onwards the British complaining that the Russians were conservative towards various reforms in the west (Gleason, 1950). Britain had used its anti Russian ideology to further its expansion in the East, with the Mediterranean and the other regions like India, Egypt and China, this also led to the invention of the British strategy called the Great Game in order to prevent Russian involvement in the Central Asia region and South Asia (Afghanistan and India) (Jelavich, 1974).

In 1843, *The Marquis De Custine* was published which was a travelogue on Russia, where there was the depiction of Russia in the narrative which were clichés where there is the depiction of Russia as a place where the surface of the European Civilisation was too thin to be credible (Fisher, 1851).

Russophobia and the World Wars

At the end of the 19th Century crisis struck the international arena especially the Europeans, with the First World War occurring, therefore this compelled the French and the British to cooperate and form an alliance with the Russians in order to tackle the German war machinery. Anatole Leroy Beaulieu one of the Russophobic authors, came up with a thesis: “Russia was despotic, certainly but she was subject to amendment. Her potential for progress was all the greater as she was backward. Therefore, she could be treated as an acceptable ally for the two torchbearers of civilization and liberty Republican France and the constitutional Empire of Her British Majesty.” (Mettan, 2017)

One of the most influential British economists John Maynard Keynes wrote his views on Russia “the oppression in the country rooted in the Red Revolution perhaps was ‘the fruits of some beastliness in the Russian nature’ also attributing ‘cruelty and stupidity ‘to tyranny in both the ‘Old Russia’ (Tsarist Monarchy) and ‘New Russia’ (Soviet Union) (Keynes, 1931).

In Germany Russophobia, there was the discussion on race and the expansion of the colonisation process with the Germans wanting to further its expansion towards the East, with the Germans attempts in the First World War and Hitler Nazi army invasion towards the Soviet Union.

During the Second World War, Hitler used the excuse of Jewish Bolshevism as one of the reasons for his attack on the Jews and even said that the Soviet Union was under the influence of Jewish Bolsheviks (Ueberschär, 1997) .

There was a sense of hatred towards the Slavs including the Russians emerging from the Nazis leading to a sense of Russophobia and the need for conquering the Russians, a secret Nazi plan, the Generalplan Ost which had called for the enslavement, expulsion and the extermination of the Slavs. In this plan about 2.8 million Soviet prisoners of war had died of the starvation, mistreatment and executions in a short period between 1941 and 1942 (Jones, 2006) .

There have been famous statements by major Nazis leaders in regard to the Soviet Union with two important leaders Joseph Goebbels and Heinrich Himmler also providing important statements in regard to the Soviet Union.

Joseph Goebbels the famous propagandist during the Nazi regime stating in his weekly write up in the *Das Reich* “Russian resistance is a stubborn and bestial soul” they were described as Asiatic and the Red Army as the Asiatic Hordes (Overy, 2005)

Heinrich Himmler the leader of the Nazi SS during a speech to the Nazis SS after the attack on the Soviet Union stated: “This is an ideological battle and a struggle of races. Here in this struggle stands National Socialism: an ideology based on the value of our Germanic, Nordic blood. On the other side stands a population of 180 million, a mixture of races, whose very names are unpronounceable, and whose physique is such that one can shoot them down without pity and compassion. These animals, that torture and ill-treat every prisoner from our side, every wounded man that they come across and do not treat them the way decent soldiers would, you will see for yourself. These people have been welded by the Jews into one religion, one ideology that is called Bolshevism. When you, my men, fight over there in the East, you are carrying on the same struggle, against the same sub humanity, the same inferior races, that at one time appeared under the name of Huns, another time— 1000 years ago at the time of King Henry and Otto I— under the name of Magyars, another time under the name of Tartars, and still another time under the name of Genghis Khan and the Mongols. Today they appear as Russians under the political banner of Bolshevism” (Stein, 1984).

There has also been the concept of revisionism with the Soviet contributions towards the Second World War not being highlighted and the over estimation of the British and American involvement in the war. During this period there was also the rise of the rivalry between the Soviets and the Americans which would bring about the rise of the Cold War and the mainstay of American Russophobia.

Russophobia and the Cold War

The Cold War, the ideological conflict between the United States of America’s Democracy and the Soviet Union’s Communism and the economic conflicts between the United States of America’s Capitalism and the Soviet Union’s Socialism. Though this was a conflict which was viewed purely in the form of a political and economic conflict but in the bigger picture there was also the battle of soft power where both the nations had the conflict of culture, this period can also be identified as the period of American Russophobia.

During this period the Russophobia has a strong link with ideology with the hatred amounting indirectly from the ideological conflict. The United States of America during this period used the help of popular culture to paint an image of the Russians for the majority of the public in order to create a sense of hatred and to ensure that a good amount of the public would end up despising the Russians. This idea of popular culture as an instrument for Russophobia not only brought about a hatred for the ideology but it became the tool for hatred of Russian society and the people.

James Chapman a Professor in the Film Studies Centre at University of Leicester states that the stereotyping of the Russia as villains has a long history, due to Russia representing a geopolitical threat to the West. During the cold war this however took a particular ideological inflection when the association was not just Russia but also the Soviet form of communism (Brook, 2014).

The main stereotypes for Russians which continued well after the fall of the Soviet Union was that they were all plotting for the downfall of the United States of America, they were portrayed as alcoholics and chain smokers and bad tourists. Much of the opinion of the masses was manipulated by the use of cinema, televisions and over the advancement of the world there was the use of video games.

An individual who at this period, would view a movie concerned with government and threats to it or the famous spy movies during this period or even movies on terrorism would realise that the main villain or the enemy was portrayed to be a Russian.

Famed Espionage movie series like James Bond which was one of the trending movies during the period of the cold war in the United States of America and the west depicted the villain as a Russian who posed a threat to the world. Another famous movie of the Cold War era was Rocky a story of an American boxer who in the fourth part of the movie series end up fighting Drago a Soviet boxer who trains in the state-of-the-art facilities where as Rocky trains in the mountains and eventually in order to show the success of the Americans Rocky wins.

Movies such as Invasion USA where a Soviet operative as a villain or Red Dawn another movie used for propaganda during this period where they show the Soviet Union invading the United States of America depicting a scenario of World War III.

Another use of cultural propaganda was seen in a miniseries by the name of Amerika where it is depicted that the Soviet Union has occupied the United States of America but the main aim of the movie was to spread the propaganda of American values, they depicted certain scenarios of American values of self reliance, preparation and resourcefulness faltering in order to create a more nationalistic generation of Americans who would protect these values from the Soviet enemies.

Movies or miniseries weren't the only source for propaganda against the Russians there was also the choice of cartoons in order to train the future generations, cartoons such as "The Rocky and Bullwinkle Show" depicts two villains with the name of Natasha and Boris two famously common Russian names.

The Soviets on the other hand though did use their own form of propaganda during the Cold war had limited influence in the sphere of cinema they never had an answer to Hollywood propaganda and the closest they had was the movies of Mikhail Tumanishvilli which were amateurish imitations of the American action flicks, full of comically based unconvincing fights. For the Soviet the worthy enemy was never the Americans it was the Nazis, the victory during the Second World War was seen as a matter of national pride.

This sort of depiction which was supposed to end after the collapse of the Soviet Union continued on till the present era along with the rivalry between the Russian Federation and the United States of America.

Russophobia after the Cold War

Though after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the depiction of Russians as villains had reduced and the mantle was given to the Arabs and Muslims specially after the Gulf war and 9/11 attack, there has however been occasional appearances of the Russian villains.

After the formation of the Russian Federation in 1991, the new era of Western Russophobia, which Russia has viewed as being framed by the idea in the theory of Social Contract political philosopher Thomas Hobbes most basically the call for an absolutist government as the alternative to the anarchy of the state of nature (Hobbes, 1982). Russia feels that the west aim for total dominance of the international arena includes a hegemony over Russia, either by converting Russia to one of its neo-liberal colony like the former socialist European countries or to ensure that the become occupied of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation *(NATO) military machine like the Baltic States (Sotirovic, 2018).

The era of Russophobia after the cold war is not one rooted in ideology but this Russophobia is based on hatred of a kind. In this form of phobia, there is the idea of selecting or reinventing certain facts historical in nature about the nation, the culture, racial nature which would be taken out of context and then finally arranged into the intellectual structures to bring about the unchanging wickedness of the other side whereas any counterarguments or memories of crimes of one's own is

forgotten or ignored (Lieven, 2001).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the focus on Russia by the west had reduced over the period of time, it came into the limelight only after the 2008 Russo-Georgian War and this took a strong turn only after the Ukraine Crisis of 2014 where the west was involved in the Euromaidan movement. Sergei Lavrov the Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation stated in 2018, that the Russophobia in the West has been at its peak since the Cold War era. He states that during the cold war there was at least a sense of decorum which now the present day west has lost (RFE/RL, 2018). He also states that the sanctions made by the West (United States of America and European Union) were baseless especially after 2014.

In Europe the Russophobia, has been seen in countries that are known to have developed a strong hatred towards the Russian society and state. Certain countries who share strong historical linkages with Russia tend to share a strong sentiment against the country. Russophobia is seen quite clearly in the former Soviet states of the Baltic or Ukraine 's neighbours Poland there is other countries also who focus on the use of hatred of Russia for its propaganda purposes like the United Kingdom.

Poland is one such European country who shares certain hatred towards the Russians, this hatred stems from the past relations between the two nations. In 2005, there was a report by the New York Times which stated that the Poles and the Russians have been at its worst since the fall of the Soviet bloc (Bernstein, 2005). In 2013, two Polish experts termed Russophobia as a weapon of mass destruction where they warned that Russia would lead to its own destruction, this further lead to escalation between the two nations (Jolanta Darczewska, 2015). In 2017, Poland was accused by Russia for attempting to impose its own version of history a common phenomenon among Russophobes, this occurred after Moscow was not allowed to join an international effort to renovate a World War II Museum in Poland, this was further escalated with the destruction of monuments honouring Soviet soldiers who died in the Great Patriotic War (Today, 2017).

Latvia has been accused of having strong anti Russian sentiments with regard to the Russian community living in the nation especially with the passing of the Latvian language law and nationality law; they have been repeatedly being accused of having Russophobic nature towards the Russian minority and blamed for ethnic discrimination (Aven, 2017).

Estonia another nation known to have certain Russophobic intentions, with certain Estonian academics believing that the kid show Masha and the Bear has a subversive hidden agenda with a professor in University of Tallinn Pritt Hobemagi branding the cartoon as a part of a new hybrid war against the Estonian children. He further stresses that the symbolisation of the strong protective bear metaphorically illustrates Russian soft power by the Russian troops in the event of an invasion in the near future (Bain, 2018).

Lithuania has also expressed certain tinges of Russophobia with them also expressing concerns on the cartoon of Masha and the Bear. Politician Laurynas Kasinas stressed that the cartoon is a weapon from the Russian soft power toolkit, there has been statements from the Lithuanian state security department chief Darius Jauniskis and even the country president who have also claimed that the cartoon is a coded political message (Bain, 2018).

British Hostility towards the Russians has evolved over the years it can be said to be at its peak since the involvement of two concerned nations in the Crimean War. This new found hostility towards the Russians has become part of the British politics. One such reason for the rise of the British hostility has been the fact the country is currently in a crisis with the entire Brexit scenario and changing the focus towards the Russians would help unite the country to a different and common enemy (Mercouris, 2018).

There was the use of Russia as an election tool which was openly seen when it was used against Jeremy Corbyn who favoured talks with Russia with an ugly media campaign being launched against him. One such individual was the former head of the MI6 (British Intelligence Agency) Sir Richard Dearlove with him stating the Corbyn who ideologically left has some communist past (sympathiser of communism) and who sympathised with the Eastern Bloc during the Cold War (Soviet Bloc) thus he supports the various anti Western groups further stating that Corbyn becoming Prime Minister is a threat to the nation (Dearlove, 2017). This criticism of Jeremy Corbyn came during the period of the Salisbury case over the alleged poisoning of the former Russian agent Sergey Skripal and his daughter Yulia. This further shows how much the British internal politics uses its hatred for Russia as its own soft power propaganda to further their benefits.

An article in the Guardian by Will Hutton and Andrew Adonis, where there was to be a discussion on Brexit, and how Britain was connected to Europe the article mentioned the help for the British by the Americans during the Second World War, it however ignores the important role played by the Soviet Union who was one of the major contributors of the Allied forces victory during the war. It further goes on to state that the Soviet Union and Russia as enemies and compares Putin to fascists regime of Europe in the 1930's (Adonis, 2018).

Another article on Brexit in the Telegraph by Janet Daley states that Russia has revived the cold war, even bringing about Russia involvement in Syria and the fight against ISIS is all based on Russian interest, when Russia itself both in word and action has mentioned that its main aim in Syria is to prevent the nation from becoming a terrorist haven and a failed state. This article again tries to draw similarities of Putin Russia with Hitler Germany, stating that Russia is now behaving like Nazi Germany (Daley, 2018).

Another article by the British newspaper the Times, the iconic broadsheet newspaper published an article calling the hit Russian Kids series 'Masha and the Bear' as soft power propaganda tool and further drew up similarities between the show character Masha and the Russian President Vladimir Putin (Sputnik, 2018). But what makes Masha a kid show sudden propaganda; this is clearly a sign of modern-day hatred towards the Russian society and its culture.

There has been a talk of banning of the cartoon not only in Britain but also in other countries like Poland, Ukraine and Azerbaijan with all of them terming the cartoon as a sign of a sort of the Kremlin Trojan Horse.

Russophobia can impact even the life of celebrities with famous British pop star Robin Williams being criticised for performing during the FIFA World Cup in Russia in 2018, he was accused to selling his soul to the dictator Vladimir Putin (Busby, 2018).

Even though the British have tended to drift towards the Russophobia, other European Nations like Germany though maintaining a sense of suspicion towards the Russians signed an important deal with them the Nord Stream 2 Pipeline though the European Union and NATO have seen this deal as a problematic deal in all aspects.

Serbia another nation close to Russia given its Slavic identity has also with the visit of the Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic in 2017 being considered as the revival of the relationship between the two Slavic brothers. Russia stands towards Kosovo further improved relations between the two with Russia declaring Kosovo independence illegal and immoral.

Therefore, it can be concluded that Russophobia has become a part of the international arena, though it has become more prominent in the United States of America, it has also re-emerged in the British political scenario, who were at one point the foundation stone of Russophobia in European history. Russophobia in Europe is still limited to certain countries however the spread of this form of hatred will continue in the future period if not handled with care. Countries can take

inspiration from Germany an important player in the European scenario how to handle Russia and how to ignore the spread of Russophobia and to maintain relations with Russia in order to establish its own national interest without the use of anti Russian sentiments.

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