COMMUNICATION IN EASTERN EUROPE
The Role of History, Culture, and Media in Contemporary Conflicts

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This book is dedicated to decades of memories, both sad and happy, and to the students with whom I tried to share what they meant.
Africa, the Kremlin, and the Press: The Russian Soul Comprehending and Communicating the African Spirit

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Contemporary Russia is riddled with ethnic, racial, linguistic, and territorial conflicts. Although much is known about ethnic and territorial cleavages, our knowledge of racial attitudes—especially in relationship to Black peoples—is extremely limited. This chapter traces the historical and cultural background of racial attitudes and prejudices in Russia with Africa as the point of reference, and the role of the press in communicating, shaping, reinforcing or perpetuating these attitudes and prejudices, and argues that ethnocentrism rather than ideology informed the nature of intercultural communication in Russia before and after Communism. Two hypotheses form the basis of our discussion:

1. The ethnocentric “blood” is thicker than the ideological “water,” in other words, the more ethnocentric a culture is the more it will dismiss, trivialize, and marginalize Africans.
2. “There are no permanent friends; only permanent interests in politics.”

The chapter also explores the extent to which the changes in the former Soviet Union that led to the end of the Cold War and the subsequent demise of Communism influenced intercultural communication during and after the rule of the architect of the changes, Mikhail Gorbachev. The

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1This hypothesis is borrowed from Lord Palmerston’s famous dictum.
research covers the periods between the immediate Gorbachev era and the post-Gorbachev era (i.e., the Yeltsin post-Communist era 1985–1993).

THE "BLIND" FORCES OF HISTORY AND CULTURE IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION:
AN ATTEMPT AT A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

The scientific-technological revolution has led to an information boom and also turned our planet into what Marshall McLuhan called the global village. Although the global village has made us more interdependent than ever before, the information boom has created difficulties of mutual comprehension. In a single day, we are literally assailed by a hurricane of events. Even in one single country the number of events are so overwhelming that its citizens are hard-pressed to keep track of all of them. The problem is complicated when it comes to the international arena, where the simultaneous and successive flow of happenings in all parts of the globe makes it humanly impossible to follow every single event.

We are handicapped by time, distance, and other factors. We are compelled to depend on the mass media for our global information. But ethnic and racial stereotypes and prejudices become new stumbling blocks to complete comprehension of the information we receive, as we have no time for personal inquiry and verification, not forgetting, of course, that media people too are themselves constrained in their work by their own stereotypes and prejudices. As I argue, the media do not necessarily create these stereotypes, but they play no small part in shaping, reinforcing, and entrenching stereotypes and attitudes.

It is in this light, therefore, that the role of the international communication media in shaping intercultural attitudes and feelings assumes enormous importance. Their role in molding, educating, and mobilizing people for good or bad ends remains unchallenged. The role of the mass media in influencing the feelings and perceptions of the people on international issues becomes even greater, considering the diverse cultural norms, beliefs, and practices of peoples in different parts of the world.

Successful communication between people of different cultures hinges on the mutual understanding between partners. Mutual understanding is a two-sided phenomenon: the understanding of the aims, motives, and attitudes of the partners which, can help in coordinating actions and lead to the acceptance of these aims, motives, and attitudes. Mutual sympathy, respect, and friendship may then become possible. The development of mutual understanding is, of course, an intricate process that presupposes the perception of external features of the individual, their correlation to personal traits, and the resulting interpretation, on the basis of acts and assumed aims (Sherkovich, 1985).

The content of intercultural perception depends, to a large extent, on the subject of perception. Each of the partners strives to interpret the other's behavior, including his or her motives. Because in real life people are often unable to correctly perceive the motives of behavior of others, or because they possess inadequate knowledge of them, interpretations are based either on the strength of previous experiences or the analysis of their own motives that would have guided them in a similar situation. A series of experimental studies (Adorno, 1950; Kon, 1967) have shown that attitude plays a significant role in the process of interpersonal perception. It is especially so in the formation of the first impressions about an unknown person based on previously acquired information (Sherkovich, 1985).

Whereas prejudices often are the result of first impressions and may be transient, stereotypes are formed over a longer period of passive interaction or incomplete socialization. Stereotypes—oversimplified and stable images of people—are based on limited previous experience and the desire or need to draw conclusions on the basis of such limited experience. Stereotyping has as its consequences two phenomena, on the one hand, an oversimplified process of mutual cognition, and on the other, the emergence of prejudices. If impressions are based on previous negative experiences, then they are inevitably negative.

Racial and ethnic stereotypes, like ethnocentrism, are universal phenomena. Limited information about individual representatives of a certain ethnic community gives rise to prejudiced opinions about an entire community, group, or nation. Adequate understanding by people of each other is hampered by stereotypes and prejudices. On the other hand, communication in groups united by their activities over a long period of time can contribute to a better mutual understanding, drawing people closer because of their similar "emotional background" (Kon, 1967).

A considerable amount of research has been devoted to assessing the influence of mass media on attitudes and opinions. Results have tended to show that social attitudes, including prejudice, are relatively resistant to influence by the media. It appears that people select what they read and what they view, and they tend to avoid communications that they consider to be unacceptable. Individuals are selective in what they perceive as well as what they remember.

According to Klapper (1960), the mass media are much more likely to reinforce existing attitudes (whatever the attitude and whatever the "message") than to change them. Attitudes may be expected to be particularly resistant to change when they are supported by strong group norms or the prevailing cultural milieu. In particular, the mass media play a major part in defining for people what the important issues are and the terms in which they should be discussed. This is the agenda-setting role of the mass media (McCombs & Shaw, 1981). Lang and Lang (1966), specifically focusing on
the agenda-setting function of the media observe: “The mass media, forced attention to certain issues. They build up public images of political figures. They are constantly presenting objects suggesting what individuals should think about, have feelings about” (p. 466). Cohen (1963), for his part, noted that the press “may be successful much of the time in telling people to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about” (p. 120). Although the mass media may have little influence on the direction or the intensity of attitudes, it is hypothesized that the mass media set the agenda for political campaigns, influencing the salience of attitudes toward political issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1981).

Soviet media coverage of the release of Nelson Mandela offers a good insight into the agenda-setting function of the media. When Nelson Mandela in 1990 was freed after 27 years of incarceration by the South African apartheid regime in February 1990, Soviet television ran a mere 30-second report on that historic event at the very end of its major evening news program. The sports news of the day was considered more newsworthy than the release of one of the world’s most famous prisoners.

Izvestiya, the mouthpiece of the Soviet/Russian parliament, did not carry a single story on Mandela’s release. Instead, it ran a story by its Southern African correspondent about threats by white South African nationalists to kill Mandela if he were freed. Pravda, the chief organ of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) did carry the story, but it was a four-paragraph, long dry, noncommittal political profile, on page four buried below a commentary on the new Soviet-U.S. relationship.

Meanwhile, Mandela’s release had made the media in the West and the Third World going into a frenzy. Television programs included several hours of profiles, interviews and background features, whereas newspapers ran full-page spreads dealing with the ANC (African National Congress) leader. Why did the Soviet press largely ignore the news of the release of the man, head of the ANC whom the Soviet press had for years touted as a friend of the Soviet Union and the ANC as a most progressive liberation movement?

COURTING AND “PLATONIC” FRIENDSHIP IN THE PRISM OF TIME: THE NASHI IDEOLOGY

Over the years, Marxist-Leninist propagandists set the agenda for the mass media in the Soviet Union. Africa, and the Third World in general, were projected as allies in the “struggle against Western domination.” The apartheid issue fit well into the propaganda pattern as long as the West was seen as providing the props for the South African racist regime. However, since the mid 1980s, when Mikhail Gorbachev began his per-

estroika/glasnost reforms, the old-time Marxist-Leninist state ideology gave way to “new thinking” which saw a new rapprochement with the Western “imperialists.” The favorable press, the ANC, and indeed many so-called progressive movements in the Third World that were around in the preglasnost Soviet Union did have a positive influence on Soviet public opinion, even if it was superficial and short-lived.

There is no extent serious research in the Soviet Union to determine Soviet public opinion as regards the ANC and other Soviet-supported Third World liberation movements, owing principally to the prohibition by the Communist Party of opinion surveys of this kind. However, stories by Third World students about their various encounters with Soviet citizens during the pre-Gorbachev era reveal that the Soviet public was at least tolerant of these movements and countries with a so-called socialist orientation (Adade, 1985). A number of African students have recounted incidents when they had to introduce themselves as Black Cubans, in order to win the favor or friendship of Soviet acquaintances. Those who came from the so-called capitalist Africa were treated like other foreigners from the West; that is, they were seen as spies or potential enemies of the USSR. Thus some of them had to introduce themselves to Soviet citizens as coming from friendly “socialist-oriented” countries, in order to either gain favorable reception or avoid hostile reactions.

A Ghanaian student who was confronted by a hostile Soviet youth gang had to identify himself as coming from Mozambique, which caused the gang leader to simply say: “Nashi,” meaning “he is one of us.” The student was left unharmed. But luck did not smile on him the next time when he was confronted by another gang. This time the student introduced himself as coming from Cuba, but when he was asked to speak Spanish, he began to stammer. The response was immediate: He was beaten and his clothes were stolen from him.

Even in the lecture halls and classrooms, Third World students from “fraternal” countries, or who belonged to “progressive” organizations and liberation movements, were treated differently from those from “reactionary, capitalist-oriented” states. It was common knowledge among Third World students that lecturers tended to be more friendly to students considered to be nashi, that is, coming from satellite states of the Soviet Union.

There is little doubt that the nashi perception, contrasted with the enemy or spy identification of African and other Third World students in the minds of the Soviet citizenry, was largely the result of mass media messages. The use of various descriptive terms and stereotypes, as well as the tone employed and the significance attached to specific events and stories emanating from various countries by the mass media, determined how the Soviet people related to different countries and different citizens.
Agenda setting by the mass media in the Soviet Union was fairly easy due to the party-controlled, monolithic press system. Because there were practically no alternative sources of information or media channels, it was relatively easy for the media gatekeepers in the Soviet Union to control the flow, quality, and quantity of information, and also to decide when and how news stories were made available to the public. For example, news stories about “socialist-oriented” African countries painted a picture of absolute harmony of the leaders of such countries with all policies of the Soviet Union. As a rule, most stories included a quotation from an African statesman heaping praises on this or that Soviet policy (Asoyan, 1987). This friendly image of the “African socialist” did not fail to register in the perception of the Soviet citizenry, even if the results were only momentary. At the same time, a different image, based on stereotypes recycled by the media, was that of Africans who did not fit the nashi description; it was the image of real or potential enemies.

CARVING INTERCULTURAL IMAGES: THE ROLE OF THE MASS MEDIA IN COMMUNICATING AND REINFORCING STEREOTYPICAL IMAGES

Any discussion of the roles of and relationships of the mass media and intercultural communication is inextricably linked with peoples’ attitudes and public opinion. If the media do influence events, they rarely do so directly, but rather through the way people are encouraged to think (McQuail, 1972).

Communication can take place successfully between people who share common frameworks of interpretation. Individuals in society or culture need to have similar meanings for the same symbols, and a common way of thinking about things before they can effectively communicate. Our perceptions are structured by the mental categories which are made available to us for making sense of our world. As a result, the sense we make of our world depends largely on our cultural environment. Each national culture expresses itself in a way that asserts normativeness, gives vent to expression, encourages thought, and permits action. As McQuail pointed out, individuals are consumers of culture as well as of information. Culture is thus both cognized and communicated (Gerbner & Sievert, 1989).

Attitudes, on the other hand, are a state of mind, behavior or conduct regarding some matter as indicating opinion or purpose. The terms attitude and orientation are often used interchangeably. Attitudes help individuals relate to and understand their environment without necessarily having much empirical knowledge about it. We can define attitudes as a predisposition to react to a given thing, situation, or idea in a given way.

Hartman and Husband (1974) pointed out that past research into attitudes commonly concentrated on differences in attitudes between people and groups; the interpretive frameworks within which such differences occur were either taken for granted or glossed over. Whenever racial or ethnic prejudice is involved, this emphasis is likely to produce a tendency to seek the origins of prejudice in the personality of the individual, or in the immediate social situation rather than in the cultural or social framework (Hartman & Husband, 1974). Such an approach is evident in the so-called Colour and Citizenship survey (Rose, 1969), which led to the misleading conclusion that intense prejudice is a phenomenon rooted in the personality of the individual, a type of solution to the inadequacies of undetermined personality (Deakin, 1970).

But prejudice is often not merely the result of personal pathology or social strain; it may be built into a given culture. Hartman and Husband (1974) argued that British thinking about people of color, which was influenced by that country’s colonial past, constitutes a built-in predisposition to accept unfavorable beliefs about such individuals. The beliefs and values that serve to define this thinking are related to a particular social and industrial history and are well embedded in British culture. Only when such an underlying cultural predisposition to prejudice has been taken into account do variations in prejudice and how they relate to other factors make sense (Hartman & Husband, 1974).

THE RUSSIAN VERSION OF AFRICA'S "TARZAN" IMAGE: FROM CZARISM TO COMMUNISM

It is tempting to say that because Russia has no colonial history in Africa, Russian thinking about Africans may be different from British thinking, because it is not influenced by a colonial past. It is equally tempting to draw the conclusion that Russian Orthodox religious ethics, as opposed to British Protestantism, may produce different thinking about people of color. Although it is true that Czarist Russia’s imperial quest did not extend beyond its backyards in the Caucasus and Central Asia, and that Imperial Russia did not take part in the scramble for and partition of Africa by its Western counterparts, Russian culture has many factors in common with British and European culture. In fact, as Likhachev (1991) noted, Russian culture has been greatly influenced by the West:

From the beginning in the history of the three peoples possessing a common origin—Russians, Ukrainians and Belorussians—their neighbors have played an enormous role... In the north it was the Scandinavian peoples, the Varangians (an entire conglomerate of peoples that included the future...
Peter the Great is quoted as having said that Russia was a kind of undeveloped Europe, "therefore I order us to be regarded as Europeans" (Pleshakov, 1992, p. 14).

Russian culture is a White culture. As is true of British culture, there is a built-in predisposition to accept unfavorable beliefs about people of color. In the case of Russia they are its dark-skinned former subjects living south of the Russians in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Included are also a small number of African slaves brought to Abkhazia, on the Black Sea coast, by Arab slave traders, along with individual Blacks including Abraham Han-ribal, the grandfather of Russia's greatest poet, Alexander Pushkin, actor Aina Oldridge, and various sailors and ship captains who lived in Imperial Russia at one time or another (see Khanga, 1993). Some Soviet scholars have attempted to explain the Russian attitude toward Africans and people of African origin as more of a benevolent paternalism than racial prejudice (Davidson, Olderogge, & Solodonikov, 1966). But what these apologists for Russian racism tend to forget is that paternalism is merely the reverse side of the same racist coin. Racism is racism, no matter the name or guise it takes. Although anti-Black sentiments did not reach the height of anti-Semitism, which resulted in various pogroms in Imperial Russia, the seeds of current anti-Black hatred were sown long ago. Not even the Soviet-style Communist attempt to build a multiracial society after the demise of the Czarist empire could wipe out racism among Russians. Russification of the southern subjects began during the times of the Czars and continued during the Communist era under the guise of sovietization and the "politics of internationalism" (Khabullin, 1989), were the products of Russian racist thinking. It is the "Great Russian nation's" chauvinistic attitude toward the Azeris, Armenians, Chechens, Ingush, Tartars, Tajiks, Georgians, Uzbeks, and others, that resulted in a reverse racism (Russophobia) from the former, which since 1986 has led to seemingly inexorable interethnic vendettas plaguing the former Soviet empire.

Although Russia's links with Africa date back to the 18th century-Czarist empire, the links were limited to Abyssinia (modern-day Ethiopia), and parts of North and South Africa (Davidson et al., 1966; see also Tains, 1992). Broader interaction with Africa began only after the World War II. Although in the 1930s the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) had invited some members of the South African Communist Party (SACP) to study at the Lenin Institute for the Peoples of the Orient, it was only after the death of Stalin that the largest number of Africans began to arrive in the Soviet Union. These were mostly students, and diplomats and their families, who under Nikita Khrushchev's Third World policy came to the Soviet Union during the "thaw" years. It must also be mentioned that a small group of African Americans, who fled racism and the Great Depression in the 1930s, made homes in the Soviet Union. However, many of them were compelled to leave their new-found "safe haven," when they became victims of the Stalinist purge during the late 1930s and the early 1940s (Khanga, 1993).

Competition generated by large-scale immigration into an area leads to more negative attitudes. Competition (real or imagined) may serve to activate or intensify the existing cultural tendency to view people of color negatively (Hartman & Husband, 1974). Here again it is tempting to say that because Russia has never been known as a home for large numbers of African immigrants, attitudes toward Africans among the average Russian Soviet citizen may be less prejudiced than in the West. There has not been any serious extant research work on the level of Hartman and Husband (1974) into Russian Soviet attitudes towards Africans and people in general. The data we do have are the results of opinion surveys conducted mainly during the first 5 years of Gorbachev's glasnost policy.

One such survey, conducted in 1989 among Moscow schoolchildren, revealed a high degree of prejudice toward Africans. Only 16% of the children believed that "Africans are human beings like we are." Moreover, only one schoolboy said that Africans are good and kind. A year earlier, a similar poll conducted among 860 Moscow residents by the Moscow-based All-Union Centre for Public Opinion Studies showed the following: Only 37% of Muscovites believed Africans are hard-working; as few as 23% of the respondents considered Africans to be attractive; 65% said Africans are poorly developed; only 15% believed Africans are intelligent; 65% said they would never approve of wedlock between their close relatives or friends and Africans; 55% responded negatively to the question, Would you like to get acquainted with and befriend a "dark-skinned African"?; 59% of the Muscovites said they are indifferent to Africans, whereas only 25% said they have any kind of sympathy for Africans; 12% harbored antipathy against Africans, yet only 7% of the respondents had ever had any interaction or contact with Africans. Nearly the same scores applied to perceptions of African Americans. The corresponding figures for the perception of Europeans were as follows: hard-working,

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1The largest number of Africans to have emigrated to Russia are the African Abkhazians numbering about 50 families. Other sources put their number before the World War I at 500. They are believed to be African slaves who were brought to the Black Sea Coast in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries by the Arabs. When Abkhazia became part of Russia in 1918, some of them fled to Turkey. The rest remained in Russia.
people, perceive the African continent based on a narrow set of stereotypical ideas that have been built up over a long period of time through photographic and other visual presentations in the media. A film shot in the 1930s, called Circus, although meant to demonstrate the superiority of socialism over capitalism, also highlighted Soviet feelings of paternalism toward Africans. A section of the film includes the statement "In our country we love all kids. Give birth to children of all shades of color. They can be Black, White, red, even blue, pink..." However, another segment includes the following: "Intermarriage between the Black and White races is a racial crime." Significantly enough, the latter message did not fail to have an impact on the Soviet audience. In a 1992 Russian television talkshow, a participant repeated that phrase. To show that the message was a result of seeing the film Circus, the show's producer used archival footage, specifying the segment of the film that the woman participant was parroting. Textbooks, used in lower grades, were written to infuse compasion for Blacks in students, yet the racist undertones were clear. A textbook published in 1967 uses stories of racial abuse of African Americans, claiming that a Soviet young pioneer saved a young Black slave. She was said to have bought the slave for a mere 5 rubles from capitalist "sharks" at a slave auction in the United States. The paternalism is difficult to disguise. A White (Russian) girl infused with "Communist compassion," and fired by the ideals of a Soviet civilizing mission, rescues a helpless Black victim. A familiar picture is thus drawn: Blacks are the objects of infinite white benevolence, which is "the White man's burden.

Other messages were even more explicit. A poem by popular Soviet poet Chukovsky is one of the many examples that can be cited. One stanza reads, "Kids, never on earth must you go to Africa/In Africa, there are gorillas/In Africa, there're huge crocodiles/They'll bite you." A television cartoon portrays the Black man as being on the level of beasts of the jungle. Such truncated and stereotypical presentations of Africa have led to widespread prejudice. African students have complained that Soviet citizens often asked them questions or made comments like: "Do you have houses in Africa?"; "You must be brave to cohabit with snakes and lions." The students claimed that some who questioned them thought that they arrived in Russia half-naked in loin cloths, only to be provided with clothing at Moscow's Sheremetyevo International Airport by compassionate Communist party officials.

Even more telling is the Russian attitude toward African-Russians. Several cases of racial stereotyping, abuse, and threats were reported in an interview I conducted with African-Russians and their mothers for a video documentary film. Here is an excerpt of the interview: Lelia (a

3African Russians are the children of mainly African students and Soviet Russian mothers who, for various reasons, their departing fathers left behind in the former Soviet Union.
mother): "To my neighbors, I'm a prostitute because the child is Black and a Black man comes here. They don't want to clean the bathroom because they say I have AIDS. Once a Black man comes here I have AIDS. Morally, it is difficult when every day they tell you that you are a prostitute just because you love someone with a different skin color. On the streets, they point fingers at my child, they call her names baby negro. . . ." (see also Simmons, 1991).

THE RUSSIAN ETHNOCENTRIC "BLOOD" TURNS OUT TO BE THICKER THAN THE SOVIET COMMUNIST I DEOLOGICAL "WATER"

Experiments carried out by Hartman and Husband (1974) in selected British schools showed that fear of being deprived of jobs, housing, and other social amenities by immigrants of color made school children see Blacks in negative terms. According to Hartman and Husband, children who lived in areas of low immigration relied perforce more heavily on the media for their information about people of color than others did. Media-supplied information carried the inference of conflict more than that received from other sources. As a result these children were more prone to think about race relations in terms of conflict than were those from "high"-contact areas, even though they (those in low-immigration areas) live in places where the objective conditions for intergroup competition or conflict are absent. It would seem, Hartman and Husband contend that whereas attitudes are responsive to the characteristics of the local situation—that is, the extent of immigration—interpretive frameworks or ways of thinking, are heavily structured in areas where there are few immigrants.

It is not difficult to see a similar pattern in the Soviet Union, an area of low immigration, even though one may be tempted to see the seemingly innocuous and predominantly paternalistic and friendly tone of the Soviet media vis-à-vis Africa in the preglasnost era as devoid of references to conflict. Glasnost era conflicts between Soviet youths and African students in several Soviet cities (Asoyan, 1987) were explained by the Soviet media on the basis of competition for scarce resources. However, Soviet reports about Africa were predominantly about the seamy side of the African reality. Africa was painted as a continent in permanent crisis and Africans as desperately in need of Soviet assistance. The media and politicians never tired of portraying the ex-USSR as a big-hearted "Big Brother" lavishing besovsemzhdnaya pomosh ("free or disinterested assistance") in line with Marxist-Leninist humanitarianism on "poor and defenceless peoples of the developing world struggling against capitalist subjugation and neocolonialist blackmail" (Zevin & Telerman, 1991, p. 66).

Historically, the Soviet media have painted a rather simplistic, idealistic, and exotic picture of Africa. A well-known poster, popular among Soviets before perestroika, summarized it all: It depicted a muscular African man inside a map of Africa who had broken a hefty chain that had been fastened around his hands and feet. The inscription on the famous poster read: "Sloboda Afrike" ("Freedom to Africa"). Ostensibly, this was meant to elicit the sympathy of Soviet citizens for the African freedom cause. But this mercy eliciting and paternalistic propaganda was carried out hand-in-hand with hate mongering. For instance, although kids were taught to have compassion for Africans, poetry and cartoons directed at young people painted the Soviet version of Tarzan images of Africa, as noted earlier.

The Soviet political bureaucracy, during the immediate preindependence era in Africa in the late 1950s and early 1960s, preached that Africans would be better off by breaking the chains of colonial subjugation and Western dependence. But they would be even better off if they chose the Soviet road to socialism (Asoyan, 1987). Images and propaganda replaced reality, and the media told Russians that with Soviet moral and material assistance Africans were breaking the fetters of imperialist domination and capitalist exploitation.

However, it was not the destiny of the "exploited" and "subjugated" in Africa, but the scoring of ideological points in the Cold War that was of primary concern of the Kremlin's propagandists. The net effect of this propaganda was the identification of Africans as part of today's problems in Russia and other member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (C.I.S.) today. The speed with which the new Kremlin leaders have called for the payment of what the Moscow News (1991) termed "Africa's secret debts" ("Sekretnije dolgi Afriki bivshemy Sovetskomu soyuizu," p. 15) following the demise of Communism in the former Soviet Union is indicative of the spuriousness and shallowness of Moscow's commitment to the African cause. The result—a boomerang effect of Moscow's paternalistic propaganda—is a backlash against Africans. It is easy to under-

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4Conflict between African students and Soviet youths were in most cases generated by the "envy factor" over Soviet girls. Before the end of Communism, a good number of Soviet women befriended African students, in spite of hostile public reaction. But that shrouds the real raison d'être. African students, like their counterparts from other Third World countries, enjoyed a higher living standard compared to the average Soviet citizen, thanks to the roaring shadow market in imported foreign goods. They returned from vacations in the West with fashion goods and electronic gadgets; bought in most cases from accumulated meager supplementary allowances from their governments and earnings from vacation jobs, for sale on shadow market. Many Soviet youths, and indeed a good portion of the adult population, were made to believe through media propaganda that the Soviet government also gave African students hard cash besides rouble stipends.

5Recent research (see New African 1992, p. 35) revealed that over 98% of the 13.9 billion rubles debt owed by various African countries to the former Soviet Union was in the form of arms deliveries "to defend socialist gains."
stand why, as Russia now finds itself in economic turmoil, Africans have become the convenient scapegoats.

The End of the Honeymoon: From Platonic Friendship to Progressive Disengagement

Many Russians, upset and threatened by the apparent economic dislocation in their country, began to find scapegoats in the Kremlin's African policy. As the media and the apparatchiks continued to attack Soviet policy in Africa, ordinary Russians began to repeat a question the Deputy Director of the Moscow-based Africa Institute, Alexei Vasilyev (1990) posed in an article in Izvestiya entitled: “Why Do We Need Africa?” The main grievance, mainly carried by mainstream media with either left or right political trappings, as well as the neo-Communist press, is that scarce Soviet resources were “generously” thrown away in Africa and other parts of the developing world in the frenzied chase for ideological fraternity and spheres of influence during the Cold War era. One critic said: “We gave to Africa without receiving anything in return.” To him, Africa had nothing to offer Russia, continued relations was therefore unprofitable: “We have nothing to lose by cutting our ties with these backward countries but our chains of implacable aid” (Tarutin, 1991, p. 4). In an Izvestiya article entitled “Africans Want to Work With Us But We Do Not Need the Dark Continent,” the author summed up these sentiments thus: “Enough is enough. After all we saved them from starvation, we healed them, we educated their military officers, bureaucrats, doctors, engineers and agronomists” (Tarutin, 1991, p. 4).

Vasilyev’s (1990) article was an attempt to answer the glassnost era critics, and ostensibly to diffuse the current anti-African mood in the country. “We have something to give to Africa and Africans have something to give us in return” (p. 5), he argued. In a passionate appeal for Russia’s continued cooperation with African countries, Vasilyev enumerates a number of achievements by Africans in science, culture and economics. In the absence of such information, he contended, it is not surprising that Soviet citizens should regard Africans as having nothing at all to offer their country. “It is ridiculous to underrate the contribution of Africa to human civilization,” he stressed and offered a word of advice to his fellow countrymen and women: “Many of our compatriots must overcome the psychological barrier in their relations with Africans banish from our minds the racist and confusing official slogans we learned at childhood” (p. 5).

In the late 1950s and 1960s, the USSR projected itself as a magnanimous do-gooder and godfather for newly liberated countries in the developing world. It offered liberal scholarships to thousands of Third World youths to enroll for higher education in Soviet universities and colleges. Soviet propaganda proclaimed that the USSR was offering humanitarian and “fraternal” assistance to eliminate the dire consequences of colonial rule and save the peoples of the newly liberated countries from neocolonialism. In reality, however the Soviet Union was busily recruiting future Communists. The Patrice Lumumba Friendship University in Moscow was built for the express purpose of training third World technocrats, but the Kremlin knew it was also possible to groom in it the future agents of socialism.⁶

A West African journalism student once wrote in Leningrad’s Smena newspaper that he had arrived in the Soviet Union with a rather naive conception of Soviet people and their society. As an aspiring Marxist-Leninist, Tarun (1989) had “swallowed every nice thing” he ever heard about the “friendly and compassionate Soviet people, their flourishing culture and their progressive, racism-free country” (p. 3). Back home in Africa, he had rejected out of hand any allusions to racism or xenophobia in the USSR as Western-orchestrated anti-Communist propaganda. However, it did not take long for his illusions to be totally destroyed: “During my early days, when I had yet to understand the Russian language, I mistook the invectives and cat-calls shouted at me in the trams and other public transport as ‘slogans of solidarity’ in support of the oppressed peoples of South Africa, since in most cases their gestures were accompanied by a raised fist, something that looked like the victory salute of the African National Congress (ANC)” (p. 3). However, soon it dawned on him that, “[h]e was an object of ridicule and racial slurs and not that of sympathy” (p. 3). In the heady years of revolutionary messianism, when Soviet propaganda told Russians that they were performing a humanitarian duty by extending assistance to Africans in their just struggle against neocolonialism and imperialism (Brezhnev, 1972), solidarity slogans could indeed be heard from ordinary Russians. The first batch of African students were met with cheers and slogans of solidarity on the streets of Moscow. The initial reaction of Soviet people to what Leningrad University lecturer Valentine Vydren termed “the Black wave” was that of benevolent amazement (see Umar, 1989). A West African minister of state, himself a former student in the USSR in the mid-1960s, said elderly women who had read Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin openly wept when they first saw the first Black students in Moscow’s trams and subways (Adade, 1985).

⁶It is estimated that nearly 500,000 African specialists received their training in the Soviet Union during the past 30 years (Sukov, 1991). In 1968 there were as many as 13,000 African students in various parts of the Soviet Union. By 1992, the number had whittled down to 8,000 as the government slashed scholarships.
The collapse of Communism in the former Soviet Union has changed the landscape of world politics. The former Soviet bloc countries, which were once united under the banner of Communism, are now facing new challenges and opportunities. The process of transition from state socialism to market economy has been uneven, with some countries progress faster than others.

In the former Soviet Union, the collapse of Communism has led to a democratization of politics. The former Communist parties have been replaced by a variety of political movements, ranging from right-wing populists to social democrats. The transition to democracy has been accompanied by a rise in corruption and organized crime, as well as by economic hardship for many ordinary citizens.

The former Soviet Union has also become a more open society, with greater freedom of speech and the press. However, this openness has also led to a rise in nationalism and xenophobia, particularly in the Baltic states and Georgia.

The former Soviet Union has also become a more competitive geopolitical player, with countries like Russia and Ukraine competing for influence in the region. The collapse of Communism has also led to a greater emphasis on economic cooperation, with countries like Belarus and Moldova seeking closer ties with the European Union.

The legacy of Communism remains a major challenge for the former Soviet Union. The destructive effects of state socialism are still evident in many areas, from economic stagnation to environmental degradation. The full impact of the collapse of Communism is still being felt, and it will be many years before the region, and the world, has fully adjusted to this new reality.
is growing. In the former Soviet Union (FSU), the ideas of the national chauvinists and fascists have been aired in mass media and in parliament. They consistently fail the FSU’s policies in the Third World in general and in Africa in particular. In several articles in the mainstream press, conservative politicians and journalists (on the left-wing/right-wing political and ideological spectrum) have found a scapegoat in the Kremlin’s Africa policy. For example, a member of the Russian Parliament complained in the Literaturn newspaper that the former Communist leadership “wasted precious Soviet resources on peoples who have only begun to call themselves a people, who have just descended from the palm trees, and have only managed to pronounce the word ‘socialism’” (Travkin, 1990, p. 1). Of course, the current mood could easily be explained away as a result of the economic crisis in the FSU, but as I have demonstrated, there are currents that run far below the surface of economic distress and the resultant scapegoating. We may have to dig deeper to find the real causes. For instance, what explains the Soviet/Russian media’s propensity, during the Cold War era, to paint a picture of Africans as obratnie redostranki, “poor cousins,” exploited and submerged by the imperialist and neo-colonialist West, who have to be salvaged by a magnanimous and compassionate USSR? What lies behind the Soviet/Russian version of the “white man’s burden”? The media’s portrayal of Africa as the (Russian) Communist man’s burden was informed more by ethnocentric, paternalistic, and even racist urges than a Marxist-Leninist ideological inclination.

Even during the Cold War years, the Soviet media were saturated with negative images of Africa. Pictures emanating from the continent were predominantly those that reflected the seamy side of African life. The blame for Africa’s osalost (“backwardness”) was, as a rule, squarely put on Western imperialist and neo-colonialist plunder. Where something positive was shown, it was almost always to show the positive and modernizing effects of the Soviet “civilizing mission,” such as the construction of Soviet-assisted projects in a “socialist-oriented” country.

During the preglasnost years, whenever the Soviet media painted a picture of continent of permanent crisis, it was done to show the negative influence of Western presence in Africa. Africans were often shown as “innocent” victims of Western capitalist exploitation and imperialist “blackmail,” who needed the express and “selfless” assistance of the “socialist-internationalist” Soviet Union. The USSR, it was proclaimed, has always been on the side of the oppressed nations, giving moral and

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1 The December 12, 1993 parliamentary elections in which Vladimir Zhironovsky’s neo-fascist Liberal Democratic Party won the majority of the seats in Russia’s new legislature (the Duma) is an indication of the growing influence of right-wing extremists.

material aid to the national liberation movements (Gromyko, 1985). Yet, despite several decades of Marxist-Leninist internationalist education, which was based on racial harmony and the brotherhood of humanity, a large number of Russians harbor racial antipathy against Africans.

In his article “About the Black Colour Without Exaggeration,” Asoyan (1990), who was for a long time a Soviet journalist specializing in Africa and is currently Russia’s ambassador in Botswana recounted numerous incidents involving African students in the Soviet Union to illustrate the abiding, antiquated stereotypes the average Soviet holds about Africans, their race, skin color and geographical origin. He wrote: In our age of cosmic means of information transmission and moreover, when we have a correspondent in every African country, when we lead many countries in the volume of books and films about Africa, our internationalist education has practically not done away with our racist stereotypes (p. 4). Asoyan blamed the media for weaving a web of stereotypes around Africa. The mass media, even under perestroika and glasnost, he charged, continue to portray Africa as no more than an “exotic, undeveloped continent, which is struggling with superhuman strength against the forces of neocolonialism, with our help” (p. 4). Asoyan (1990) contended that, “Under the conditions of our difficult existence, this generates anger and indignation” (p. 4) from the Soviet citizenry, who see Africans as lazy hangers-on. According to Asoyan, a medical doctor wrote to him complaining, “It turns out that we continue to help build their countries, teach and clothe them. What compensation shall we get from them?” (p. 4).

Asoyan (1990) also quoted letters by African students to Moscow newspapers, a majority of which were not published, to demonstrate the psychological trauma these students, especially those from sub-Saharan Africa, undergo while pursuing their studies. The letters complain of constant taunting, ridicule, humiliation, and stigmatization. In cafeterias, on the streets, in public transport, in dormitories they are jeered at, fingers are pointed at them, and racist slurs like obeziana (“monkey”) and of late SPID (AIDS) are hurled at them. One letter quoted an African student as saying he had to play a curious psychological game to save his skin when he was confronted by a group of hostile Russian youngsters. During the encounter, he pretended he was an African American. This resulted in more positive reaction by members of the youth gang, who soon began to ask questions about Stevie Wonder, Michael Jackson, and other African Americans. Asoyan also quoted the famous South African trumpeter Hugh Masekela, who during a tour happened to visit the Patrice Lumumba Peoples’ Friendship University in the Soviet capital: “The chaps live under horrible conditions. They told me they are called ‘monkeys’” (p. 5).

Soviet anti-African prejudice and dislike are attributed by Asoyan (1990) to “low levels of culture and deficit of truthful information about
the people of other nations” (p. 5). The result is a clash of reality with distorted and idealistic views of Africa. “Africans, after all, are not what we took them for; with all their drawbacks and stereotyped manners… This also reflects our traditional relationship with foreigners. For those who are ahead of us, we use one yardstick. For those who are poor, another” (p. 5).

In a more recent article, entitled “Red and Black,” a Russian journalist agreed with the assertion that Russia is a country of racists. She recalled several incidents in Moscow during which her compatriots cast aspersions on Africans for the simple reason that they have dark skin color. She recounted one such incident: “Recently, I saw in the metro [underground train] a woman with her five-year old child. The kid was crying. The woman was trying to calm him down. Then she set eyes on a ‘dark-skinned uncle.’ Pointing at the African at the other end of the train, she told the child: ‘You see, if you continue to cry this Black man will take you away’” (Deeva, 1992, p. 3). Continued, she wrote: “Several scenes like this one add some pleasant varieties to our lives. But behind the jokes and laughter, we think and forget that ‘the Black uncle’ is by no means the cardboard placard depicting the typical [personalities/races], the chocolate-white-yellow trio. They [Africans, the subjects of the jokes and laughter] also think about us. Their opinion about us is: ‘The USSR is a country of racists’” (Deeva, 1992, p. 3).

These examples are not of particular importance in themselves, but they serve as “an index of widespread familiarity with” (Hartman & Husband, 1970, p. 435), if not acceptance of the images of Africans Russians carry. It does become disturbing to find this kind of image intruding itself into the media’s handling of current events concerning Africans. As a result, elements of cultural legacy that are “at best ethnocentric and at worst racist” (Hartman & Husband, 1970, p. 435, emphasis in original) come to influence reactions to and interpretations of events in Africa.

Hartman and Husband (1974) pointed out that such a tendency may most clearly be seen in newspaper-headlines and in editorial cartoons, “where the use of phrases or images will evoke a similar set of associations and meanings in virtually all members of the society to whom it is directed. Such usage makes it possible for a complex point to be crystallized unambiguously and memorably in a few words or a single picture” (Hartman & Husband, 1970, p. 435, emphasis in original). For a long time Russian journalists have used the expression “the Dark Continent” to describe the African continent. In fact, hardly any article is written about Africa without the use of this favorite term. Journalists accompanying former Soviet Foreign Affairs Minister Eduard Shevardnadze during his first visit to Africa, filed reports without accompanying pictures. Moscow’s Central TV coverage did not include a single shot of visits that took him to countries like Nigeria, Angola, and Namibia. Instead of photographs, a blank map of Africa appeared on the screen, as though to reaffirm the familiar picture of a “backward” Africa exemplified by sunshine and crocodiles. Pictures would have shown the Foreign Minister being welcomed at modern airports by African officials in limousines or attending state banquets in high-rise buildings that match or even exceed similar ones in Soviet cities in modernity and architectural beauty (see Kossowan, 1990).

“AFTER ALL, WE’RE RACISTS…”

Coverage of African news by the Russian mass media, like that of their western counterparts, has included more than its share of negativity, neglect, and omission. Glasnost era self-critical articles have thrown light on the sloppy and stereotypical character of Soviet journalism dealing with Africa. An article that appeared in the Moscow News in 1986 by Davidson, Russian expert on Africa, noted, “Our journalist, more often than not, presented a one-sided picture of Africa. According to them, once Africa throws off the chains of colonialism, then everything will be fine. And should they decide on building socialism, then all problems will be well-nigh automatically solved” (p. 6). Davidson further wrote: “We know about the Flemings, the Welsh. The Scots number five million. We know about their epics, music, their dress. Very few [Soviet] people know what ethnic groups live in Nigeria, a great African power with a population of nearly 100 million” (p. 6).

Another article published by Literaturnaya Gazeta, stated that for most Soviet writers and journalists, writing about Africa “is as easy and simple now as it was 25 years ago” (Asoyan, 1987, p. 14). A common recipe exists for them:

Mix a little bit of exoticism with the struggle against imperialism; add a few fine words by any African in praise of socialist countries and presto! an article is ready. For those who have never visited Africa, there was a different recipe: “Describe the stormy continent from your Moscow office. Cut to the required size an article from a Western newspaper. Dilute the texture of a more successful article written by your compatriot. Add a quote from a mythical dark-skinned friend and an article is born.” (Asoyan, 1987, p. 14)

Asoyan added, “To the overwhelming majority of Soviet journalists and writers, Africa today is still the Africa of the pre-independence era: the same myth-ridden, exotic Africa with its awesome jungles populated by prowling, man-eating lions and crocodiles” (p. 14). During the Cold War
era, Russian journalists, he continued, described such “maniacal and
demagogic” African leaders as Idi Amin of Uganda, Macias Nguema of
Equatorial Guinea, and Jean Bokassa of the Central African Republic as
“military men with patriotic feelings” (p. 14) when in fact they were
murderers who butchered thousands of their own people.

It is pertinent to mention here that at a particular point in the Soviet-
African relationship during the 1970s, the Kremlin’s Africa policy came
to be swayed by the school of thought within the Soviet hierarchy that
the USSR should devote its energies in Africa largely to military regimes—
particular those controlled by radical leaders. The continent, it was
noted, had a high percentage of governments under military rule or at
least dominated by military elements. Moreover, a substantial number of
these governments evinced a resolve to introduce major social transforma-
tions in their countries and a willingness to establish strong ties with
the USSR (Albright, 1987).

Self-criticism by glasnost and postglasnost era journalists does not
mean an improved coverage of Africa. What has changed, though, is the
old Communist-style ideological “packaging” of the news. Some Soviet
commentators have faulted Stalinism and its latter-day manifestation—
neo-Stalinism or Brezhnevism—as the cause of the poor Soviet coverage
of Africa in the preglasnost years (Tains, 1992). Nothing can be further
from the truth. The root of the problem lies elsewhere: in the culture.
Neither Stalinist nor Marxist-Leninist ideology can be blamed for the
stereotypical and one-dimensional presentation of the African reality. As
we show later on in this chapter, news from Africa came to be interpreted
within the “old” familiar framework, or in terms of the existing images,
stereotypes, and expectations of the prerevolutionary and preglasnost
years. The framework and expectations either originated in the Russian
culture or they originated in the news and passed from there into the
culture. This situation is one of a “continuous inter-play between events,
cultural meanings and news framework” (Hartman & Husband, 1970, p.
436), despite the radical changes in ideological orientation and expecta-
tions in Russia.

THE MORE GLASNOST, THE MORE
“GLOSS-OVER-NOST” OF AFRICA

The poor coverage given to Mandela’s release mentioned earlier was not
an isolated case. It is a common trend in glasnost-style and post-Cold
War era journalism in the former Soviet Union, now called the Common-
wealth of Independent States. This was evident in a 1991 survey of some
former Soviet publications (Adade, 1993). The survey showed that mar-
ginalization of Africa during the past 8 years had reached grotesque
proportions. Perestroika and glasnost in international news coverage
applied only to Europe, North America, and some parts of Asia. In
addition, the survey revealed that marginalization of Africa increased
with the pace of glasnost. The main stereotypes employed by Soviet
journalists to describe issues involving Africans in the world context
underwent drastic changes. In 1985, Africa’s problems were attributed
to factors such as “birthmarks of capitalism,” “imperialist intrigues,” “hostile
bourgeois propaganda,” “U.S. expansionist policies,” “a plot against Af-
rica,” and similar concepts. In 1990, these stereotypes disappeared from
the lexicon of Soviet journalists. Terms like “solidarity,” “disinterested
aid,” “proletarian internationalism,” and “socialist fraternity” (Popov,
1990, p. 36), which were still employed in 1987 to describe Soviet-African
relations, understandably, disappeared in later years. In their place, new
terms such as “universal human values,” “global cooperation,” and
“deideologization of inter-state relations” came to be used. Yet another
remarkable change during the period under review was the gradual
toning down of paternalism in Russian writing on Africa. In addition,
the “Soviet socialist experience” is no longer recommended as a recipe
for good governance in Africa.

It was clear from the survey (Adade, 1993) that the loss of interest in
Africa by the Soviet/Russian press coincided with the period of the
Kremlin’s progressive disengagement from the continent.6 Not surpris-
ingly, this was also the period of East-West rapprochement and the event-
tual ending of the Cold War. Ironically, however, the furher the Soviet/
Russian press trudged on the road to full-blown democracy, the less
interest it showed in Africa.

All this is logical, if one considers it from the point of view of the
Gorbachev reforms that were inaugurated in the spring of 1985 to “give
socialism a human face,” but that turned out to be an anti-Communist
revolution. As the Soviet state ideology fell asunder under the new
thinking ideology, Soviet journalists, like the rest of the intelligentsia,
appeared to be groping for a different vision of the world as a whole.
Thus the old image of Africans had to be recast to suit the “nonideologi-
cal” new Russian vision.

6My survey of the glasnost press showed that coverage of foreign news did not decrease
during the 6 Gorbachev perestroika years. On the contrary, more countries and regions left
out of the orbit of Soviet press coverage suddenly came to be covered regularly. Coverage
of the countries of Southeast Asia, the so-called tigers, has more than trebled. It must be
noted here that foreign news in general was very much restricted in the preglasnost era.
The study also showed that whereas Newsweek’s coverage of Africa and Latin America
remained more or less stable in 1985 and 1990, Novoe Vremya’s coverage of the two contin-
ents dropped to less than half for the same period.
Coverage of Africa now does no more than merely catalogue ad infinitum the familiar banes and woes of the continent: the world’s highest infant mortality and adult morbidity rates, the lowest life expectancy, the threats of population explosion, AIDS, and famine. Although in the past such reports would surely have been spiced with accusations of Western complicity or international financial capital pillage (Gromyko, 1985), recent reports do not look for external culprits. Most articles now pin the blame on Africans themselves. For instance, Tarutin (1991) in an article in Pravda entitled “We Are Africans in a European Home,” wrote that Africans wasted the “solid” amounts of Western credits through bad management and corruption, and that tiny Belgium produces more goods than the whole of Africa taken together. Characteristically, other objective factors, like the lopsided international economic order that is so skewed against most developing countries or the fact that the Belgian farmers receive more than the African farmer for the same amount of work, are glossed over.

But the new marginalization (Africa, of course, has always been marginalized and trivialized by the Soviet media, as indicated earlier) has also something to do with the new Eurocentrism engendered by Gorbachev’s so-called new-thinking. New-thinking, which claims to have its roots in “universal human values” (Gorbachev, 1988, pp. 3–4) has turned out to be rabid Eurocentrism and even racism, for the political bureaucracy and the “new” media. For journalists and politicians, new-thinking and universal human values do not extend beyond the “common European home” and North America.

When Gorbachev, the ex-Soviet leader, commenced his reforms, his team set out to fashion a brand new foreign policy, which became increasingly Western oriented and pragmatic. The new planners of Soviet policy in Africa announced that they were shedding the ideological ballast of their policy in Africa (Popov, 1990). Soviet-African relations, like relations with other parts of the developing world, were now to be based on Lenin’s injunction: “More economics, less political/ideological trivialities” (emphasis mine).

During the 6-year Gorbachev rule, this injunction was followed to the letter as the Kremlin gradually cut aid and support for its allies. The argument, started by Gorbachev himself, was that the Soviet Union got itself bogged down in useless ventures in Africa, always gave and received nothing in return for its ideological investments. Politicians and the media, both right-wing and left-wing, have made capital of “generous” and “disinterested” aid given to African and other Third World countries ever since Gorbachev raised the issue in a speech in Minsk, the Belorussian capital, during the early years of his reforms.

10. AFRICA, THE KREMLIN, AND THE PRESS

POST-COMMUNIST GLASNOST AND AFRICA

But the issue was raised to a crescendo after the botched August 1991 coup, when the so-called democrats led by Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin took the reins of power. Events in the wake of the demise of Communism have proven that if the Communists and their media were friendly but patronizing, and even solicitous in their approach to Africa, the democrats and the new press appear largely disinterested, condescending, and even racist. Communists had prided themselves on offering “free” and “generous” aid to Africa, and never got tired of drumming home to the Soviet citizenry how the Soviet Union was performing its “Marxist” internationalist duty by assisting poor, Africa countries in their “just struggle against western blackmail and exploitation.” The democrats, on the other hand, chose a less pompous, yet infamous role. They lost no time after taking over from the Soviet Communists, in giving full rein to their suppressed racist sentiments. They have used the mass media to air not only their loss of interest in Africa, but also their anger at and disdain for Africans in the fullest expression of glasnost.

Before and after the failed coup in August 1991, Boris Yeltsin was on record as having said that socialism should have been experimented with in a small African country and not in the huge Soviet Union.11 By his statement, the Russian leader implied that Africans are nothing but guinea pigs who could be experimented on. To go as far as Africa to find a subject for Yeltsin’s analogy, when there are as many small countries in Europe or in his own Russian Federation (which is made up of over 80 tiny tribal and ethnic groups), points not only to the condescending and dismissive attitude towards Africans, but also to the blind chauvinism and racial bigotry of Russia’s new leaders.

For Russia’s new political bureaucracy and the media, using Africa as a metaphor for poverty, backwardness, and hopelessness, has become a fad. Lambasting the former Communist leadership for “wasting” Soviet resources in Africa became a vote getter and applause drawer at political gatherings and in parliament. In 1991, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, founder of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, returned from a visit to the United States to tell Russians that he was appalled by the huge presence of Blacks and Asians in New York. According to him, America’s current problems were rooted in the large concentration of people of color in that country.

11Yeltsin made the statement for the first time during his presidential election campaign in the Urals in June 1991. His speech was reported unedited by the Magok radio station. The print media and television editorialized “Africa.” He repeated the same statement during an interview soon after the August Communist revanchist coup was foiled.
Today's bread and butter come from weigh more than anything else: its business is with the White minority that will bring much-needed assistance. Tomorrow will take care of itself. A Moscow entrepreneur summed it all up when he told an Izvestiya reporter: "Good white guys came from South Africa with excellent and lucrative proposals. Later they offered goods. Should I refuse them because the ANC or the U.N. is against apartheid?" (Gemini News Service Bulletin, 1991, p. 4).

If under Communism the media and politicians singled out the White minority for castigation for perpetrating atrocities against the innocent Black majority, now the blame is shifting to the Black majority for unleashing "Black" terror against whites and "senseless" Black-on-Black violence. If in the past compassion was expressed about the miserable living conditions of the Black majority, now that sympathy is shifting to the White minority. An article in Izvestiya captured this shift in sympathy: "In the past 20 years, the wages of black miners went up by 67 per cent, while those of their white counterparts fell by 24 per cent. For black education, the South African government earmarked 3.3 billion Rands and in 1992, 4.5 billion Rands. Each day 11 classes are built. Education for black children will be free while that for white kids will be paid by their parents" (Chaplin, 1992, p. 12). The Znamya Yunoslt also portrayed the White minority as the victims of the transition process: "Life is becoming increasingly difficult for the whites as more and more blacks take on jobs which were reserved exclusively for them [whites]" (Dubrovskiy, 1991, p. 3).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter explored the roles of, and relationships between intercultural communication and the media in the shaping of Russian-African relationships before, during, and after Soviet-style Communism by analyzing the cultural-historical and political-ideological factors behind the formation, reinforcement, and dissemination of specific images of Africans in the Russian media. The following conclusions were drawn:

1. The physics and the dynamics of superpower relations determined Soviet press interest in African events. So did the dictum: "In politics there are no permanent friends, only permanent interests."

2. The ethnocentric blood proved to be thicker than the ideological water.

3. The Russian media lost interest in Africa as soon as there were no longer ideological points to score against the West. Had Mandela been

Several participants in the popular Russian TV program "Tema" (Theme) did not shy away from their racist sentiments. One said in reply to a question, that he would emigrate to South Africa should the future president of Russia be a Black man. According to him it is easier to fight Blacks in South Africa. Russians he claimed are too soft. Taking a cue from the mainstream media are the fledgling fascist alternative media. The St. Petersburg Otechestvo wrote in its February 1992 edition: "American blacks, who earn five dollars per hour wages could come to our country and pose as millionaires and take liberties with our girls and contaminate the Russian blood" (p. 4).
released even 2 years earlier, the Soviet press would have given his release an entirely different coverage. It would have been yet another victory for Communism.

4. Africa became increasingly marginalized as the political and economic reforms advanced in Russia.

5. The paternalistic nature of former Soviet propaganda concerning USSR-African relationships that led to an anti-African backlash, which sought to wrongly scapegoat Africans as “part of the problem,” now seems to undergird news coverage of the continent, with the exception of South Africa.

6. With the Communist Party no longer setting the agenda for the press in the wake of the demise of Communism, previously subdued anti-African prejudice has been given more transparency. In today’s Russian media, words such as solidarity, antifascism, antiracism and internationalism have fallen into disrepute. These “virtues,” formerly dictated by the Communist Party but never wholeheartedly accepted by the people, have now become vices.

The stereotyped, one-sided, and oversimplified presentation of African problems distorts the African reality and hence the perception of Russians about Africans. Russians see the continent of Africa as an embodiment of eternal chaos, political instability, primitive culture, civil disorder, corruption, and exotic and barbarous customs. Paternalistic propaganda of the Soviet era has made Russians see Africans as lazy hangers-on and parasites.

One of the ways to attempt to temper this negative perception with a more benign image is through intercultural interaction, and a more responsible use of the mass media. However, with the new Russian leaders eager to cut all links with Africa (several embassies have been closed and scholarships have been virtually eliminated), Russians are likely to continue to wallow in ignorance and will likely be further removed from the African reality. The danger is that if there should develop another opportunity for broader interactions, it would require starting from point zero. When the first opportunity presented itself for broader interaction with Africans during Soviet rule, Russians were largely discouraged from doing so. That problem continues and has increased.

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