

Racism and Xenophobia in Virtual Russia

Stella Rock*

Introduction

Two questions are immediately begged by the title of this paper, and should be answered by way of an introduction. The first question is, why look at racism and xenophobia in 'virtual' Russia? Why not explore racism and xenophobia in the 'real' Russian Federation? The answer to this is two-fold: much valuable and detailed research and monitoring has already been done on antisemitism, xenophobia and racism within the real territory of the Russian Federation,¹

* Research Fellow, Centre for German-Jewish Studies, University of Sussex.

Research for this article was supported by a Fellowship at the University of Sussex Centre for German-Jewish Studies, funded by grants from Marks & Spencer and the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany. Fieldwork in Russia was facilitated by the Open Orthodox University of Father Alexander Menn.

1. Some of the most detailed research on xenophobia and political extremism in the Russian Federation has been conducted and published by the Moscow-based NGO 'Panorama'. Many of their reports are available online at <http://www.panorama.org:8100/index.html>. Other monitoring agencies include the Union of Councils of Soviet Jews, Institute for Jewish Policy Research, the Anti-Defamation League Moscow.

but precious little on the phenomenon of Russian online hate.² Secondly, since the mid-eighties, an increasing number of commentators have identified the Internet as a dangerous tool in the hands of fanatics, although recently some notable contributors to the debate have concluded that the medium should be viewed with less alarm than initial predications suggested.³ Nevertheless, Governments, NGOs and international organisations remain fearful of this virtual world, and a veritable litany of reasons for this has been suggested. The Internet brings hate straight to our homes—which while providing a useful means for researchers and journalists to access extremist material, means that we feel ‘invaded’, exposed to propaganda we would doubtless have to work hard to find in the ‘real’ world. Others have perceived it as a distorting mirror—deceptively aggrandising lonely individuals or tiny splinter groups into powerful movements;⁴ clothing Holocaust denial sites in pseudo-academic, respectable dress; offering a ‘virtual mask’ that racists can don and remove at will.⁵ Some have seen in it an art form for propagandists,⁶ a magical, creative, interactive medium that neo-Nazis can exploit as their predecessors exploited celluloid, or a superbly swift and flexible communication tool, a sophisticated means by which racists of the world can unite despite geographical dispersion.⁷ Finally, the Internet evades all attempts at censorship, is no

-
2. ADL Moscow now monitors online hate and dedicated their August 2000 monthly bulletin to the subject. Western monitoring agencies have generally failed to keep abreast of developments in virtual Russia—HateWatch’s former country report for Russia listed only the Pamyat website for example.
 3. See for example ‘HateWatch Says Goodbye...’: <http://www.hatewatch.org/> (last accessed May 2001). There seems to be increasing consensus amongst academics that random terrorist acts (in reality and in cyberspace) are the most likely result of Internet influence/provocation.
 4. Michael Whine ‘Far Right Extremists on the Internet’ in *Cybercrime: Law enforcement, security and surveillance in the information age* edited by Douglas Thomas & Brian D. Loader (Routledge, London and New York 2000).
 5. Les Back ‘Aryans reading Adorno: Cyberculture and 21st Century Racism’ forthcoming, *Journal of Ethnic and Racial Studies*.
 6. See for example Anti-Defamation League Of B’nai B’rith ‘Hate Group Recruitment on the Internet’ (Anti-Defamation League, New York 1995): <http://www.nizkor.org/hweb/orgs/american/adl/recruitment/internet-1995.html> (last accessed May 2001).
 7. See for example David Capitanchik and Michael Whine ‘The Governance of Cyberspace: Racism on the Internet’ *JPR* No. 2, July 1996 online (last accessed April 2001); Les Back ‘Aryans reading Adorno’; Beverley Ray & George E. Marsh II

respector of national boundaries or national legislation, is uncontrollable by its very size and nature.

The second question that should be answered before continuing is, why virtual Russia and not 'the global village'? Why look at the global phenomenon of racism within the confines of one nation (or more accurately, within one language group), especially when it is propagated on what is recognised as an international forum, the World Wide Web? The advantages of working within distinct language groups in a comparative way were identified during the Sussex University research project 'Racism on the Internet', which looked at English, Russian and German language material over the course of 18 months. The project identified that shared prejudices (such as the global conspiracy theory or the belief in Jewish ritual murder) were being revitalised and re-created in the global forum of the Internet, often by groups who develop and maintain international links via the Internet. However, the project also found that specific political, historical and cultural variables remain of paramount importance in influencing the presentation and propagation of prejudices, despite the global nature of the medium. As Dimitrina Petrova has observed,⁸ the Soviet experience of WWII and the Holocaust accounts for significant differences between post-Soviet racism (antisemitism in particular) and Western racism. The enormous number of Soviet dead, and the suffering experienced by the population during the war, is engraved on the consciousness of those Russians who were educated during the Soviet period, partly as a result of the massive propaganda surrounding the 'Great Patriotic War'. Russian 'revisionists' have to tailor their material for an audience that is less likely than, say, an American audience, to be persuaded that Hitler was not so bad after all. They are, however, able to distort and minimize the Holocaust by relativism with ease. If over 20 million Soviet citizens died, why all the fuss about 6 million Jews? Soviet historiography also failed to educate the population about the

'Recruitment by Extremist Groups on the Internet,' in *First Monday: Peer Review Journal on the Internet* Vol. 6, No. 2 (February 2001): http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue6_2/ray/index.html (last accessed May 2001).

8. Dimitrina Petrova 'Confronting Racism in Europe: Is there a strategy in Europe?' in *Racism in Central and Eastern Europe and Beyond: Origins, Responses, Strategies. Part II, Presentations and Selected Discussions* Budapest, Hungary 19th July 2000 p. 65, available online at the website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights: <http://www.unhchr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/> (last accessed May 2001).

Holocaust, leaving most Russians ignorant of the true nature of Hitler's genocidal policies.⁹

Of far more importance to Russian antisemites and extreme nationalist groups is the experience of the Bolshevik revolution, the Soviet system and the subsequent slide into chaos, which hugely influence the nature of Russian racism and xenophobia. A paper exploring the wide variety of racism on the Internet would never be able to do more than touch upon a fraction of the material—the Internet is as diverse as the humans who create it.

How Significant is Virtual Russia?

The first point that should be made is that 'virtual Russia' is not limited by national boundaries. The research conducted for this paper covered over 60 sites created by Russian citizens and hosted both abroad (mainly on US-based ISPs) and within the domain .ru, sites created by citizens of other states offering a Russian language option or with pages specially designed for the Russian viewer, and sites created by Russians living abroad. Virtual Russia in this context refers to Russian language pages.

Despite the very real obstacles to expansion of the Internet in the Russian Federation, virtual Russia is growing, geographically and demographically, at a fast rate. The biggest problem faced by providers and potential users is the inherited Soviet telecommunications system, which seriously hampers growth of networks. In 1996 only 49 per cent of urban families and 20 per cent of rural families had access to a private telephone, and this places immediate limits on the maximum number of potential users. Potential regional users (who generally survive on much lower wages than those in Moscow and Petersburg) are also excluded by the relatively high cost of Internet access in the Russian Federation,¹⁰ and lack of access to the necessary hardware.

Despite these clear obstacles to expansion, Boston Consulting Group's Moscow office reported in March 2001 that Internet use is growing faster in Russia than anywhere else. Of Russia's 148 million inhabitants, there were 2 million users in 1999, 3 million in March 2001 and a projected 7 million users

9. See Stella Rock, 'Russian Revisionism: Holocaust Denial and the New Nationalist Historiography' *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 35, no.4, 2001.

10. Rafal Rohozinski 'How the Internet Did Not Transform Russia' *Current History* Vol. 99, No. 639 October 2000, pp.334-8.

are expected to be online in 2003. They have identified two major shifts in internet use: the first a significant growth in regional use. Currently 45 per cent of users are Moscow-based, with the remaining 55 per cent from the regions—including St Petersburg. In three years they predict that 75 per cent of users will be regional and 25 per cent Muscovites. The second major change they anticipate is a significant growth of home-based users—from 19 per cent in 1999 to 40 per cent projected for 2005. BCG believe that currently 55 per cent of users access the internet through business, and 26 per cent from government, scientific or educational institutions.¹¹ Other observers are even more optimistic: IDC, formerly International Data Corporation, forecasts there will be a total of 9.4 million Internet users in Russia by 2004.¹² In the year 2000 there were 45,000 web servers registered in Russia, more than three times the 1998 total (Interfax),¹³ 83 Internet Service Providers (ISPs) were operating in Russia and Kazakhstan in 1999,¹⁴ and 200 in March 2001.¹⁵

The other potential access point for Internet users (other than home, educational institution or work) is the Internet cafe, which has also flourished in major Russian cities. The ratings agency Expert RA reported early in 2001 that the average monthly income of Russia's leading Internet-shops gained 90 per cent during the second half of the year 2000.¹⁶ Unfortunately there are no statistics readily available on the clientele of Internet cafes in Russia, although the director of Timeonline, the largest Moscow based Internet cafe, observes that approximately 50 per cent of his clientele are students.¹⁷ It is probably safe to conclude that the groups with greatest access to the Internet are students, academics and white collar workers, with those in the regions who do not fall into these categories being the least likely to have access to the Internet.

11. *The Russia Journal* March 3-9, 2001, *The Moscow Times Business Review* May 2001 vol. 9, No. 4, p. 27

12. *The Moscow Times*, Wed January 31st 2001

13. *The Moscow Times*, Wed January 31st 2001

14. CIA World Factbook Russia 2000 report <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/rs.html> (accessed March 2001)

15. *The Moscow Times Business Review* May 2001 vol. 9, No. 4, p. 27

16. *The Russia Journal* 2001-03-12 Email News Service

17. *The Moscow Times Business Review* May 2001 vol. 9, No. 4, p. 7

How Racist is Virtual Russia?

*It seems only a matter of time before the wave of internet racism which has afflicted a number of Western European countries moves eastward with the increasing technological capabilities of post-Communist states.*¹⁸

For racists of all nationalities, the Internet provides an alternative to what they perceive as ‘Jewish-controlled media’. Many commentators have noted the enthusiasm with which racists have embraced the new technologies, publicly welcoming the opportunities the Internet offers them to promote their cause. Recent estimates of the number of racist sites in cyberspace puts them at around 600,¹⁹ but different monitoring agencies may well have different criteria—for example they may focus on sites that are dedicated to racist themes rather than simply containing racist material, or vice versa. Compared to the conservative figure of 600, the Simon Wiesenthal Center’s ‘Digital Hate 2001’ CD-ROM offers to expose “more than 2,200 insidious websites that sometimes pose as high-tech fun for kids, but in fact promote hatred, anti-Semitism and terrorist violence”. The racist content of a site may also vary over a period of time—sites which are not ‘dedicated’ to racist ideas may contain xenophobic or antisemitic material periodically, in response to public events (in the Russian context, during NATO bombing campaigns or government prosecution of the ‘oligarchs’ for example). An added difficulty in estimating site numbers is confusion over what constitutes a website, and the frequency with which sites move and disappear.

The only monitoring agency focusing on Russian language sites, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) in Moscow, identified in December 2000 the existence of 64 racist websites and 3 large portals distributing racist material.²⁰ Only two of Simon Wiesenthal’s 2,200 websites are Russian: the Pamyat website and The New Resistance.²¹ A significant proportion of these sites are hosted and registered abroad. Front 14, a US portal dedicated to free hosting and email provision to ‘racialists’, which hosts over 300 racist sites, includes

18. *Racism in Central and Eastern Europe and Beyond: Origins, Responses, Strategies. Rapporteur’s Notes*, Budapest, Hungary 19th July 2000 p. 20, available online at <http://www.unhcr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/> (last accessed May 2001).

19. See for example Les Back ‘Aryans reading Adorno’.

20. *Anti-Semitism in Russia 2000* (ADL Moscow Report).

21. Rick Eaton (SWC Research), e-mail correspondence 10th May 2001.

at least eight Russian language sites amongst its clientele. Rus-sky,²² a major Russian Orthodox site which carries antisemitic and revisionist material, is registered to a Russian living in South Dakota, USA.

The popularity of these sites is also open to question. Site rating engines cannot distinguish between academics, researchers or monitoring agencies, and dedicated racists or sympathetic surfers for example, although they do allow one to make basic assumptions about which sites are most 'visible'. Results gleaned from the sites of Top.list²³ and Rambler suggest that the better known an organisation or publication is in the 'real world', the more visible it is in cyberspace. The popular nationalist newspaper *Zavtra*, for example, which frequently propagates antisemitic material, ranked in first place on Top.list in the category Russian Government>Politics on May 8th 2001, with over 7,000 visitors.

The ADL's recent report *Poisoning the Web: Hatred Online. Internet Bigotry, Extremism and Violence* suggests that

While deeply disturbing, the growth of hate and extremism on the Internet simply mirrors the expansion of Internet use. What began as a small computer network used primarily by scientists and academic researchers has become a mass medium. Over 147 million people worldwide now use the Internet, 79 million of whom are in the United States.

As Internet use expands in the Russian Federation, we should expect the number of racist and xenophobic sites to increase. One could also add that the extent of hate and extremism on the Internet mirrors the extent of hate and extremism in society, although as previously observed, the Internet can act as a distorting mirror which portrays numerically insignificant groups as professional organisations. In the Russian case, I suggest that while individual sites may inaccurately reflect the strength and organisational capabilities of marginal groups, the volume of xenophobic and antisemitic material is not at odds with the current climate in the Russian Federation.²⁴ If anything, it is less

22. <http://www.rus-sky.com> (last accessed May 2001)

23. <http://top.list.ru> (last accessed May 2001)

24. See for example the IJPR report on *Antisemitism and Xenophobia in the Russian Federation* at <http://www.axt.org.uk/antisem/countries/russia/index.html> to which the author contributed, and *Vek* No. 17, April 2001 on the increasing popularity of extreme right-wing groups amongst young Russians.

than might be expected, as political parties whose members include notable antisemites and extreme nationalists (The Communist Party of the Russian Federation, the inaptly-named Liberal Democratic Party of Russia) tend to maintain relatively 'clean' websites.

The Territory

Most of the websites that I surveyed during the course of my research are the creations of marginal nationalist parties and movements, and of religious organisations. A significant number of racist and antisemitic newspapers and journals are also available online, some (such as the National-Socialist *Shturmovik*) after having been closed down in print, but most easily available in hard copy at least in Moscow. It is not possible in this paper (and would be repetitive and unenlightening) to map the terrain in detail, and I have left the issue of Usenet newsgroups aside altogether as they require a different type of research, and are already being abandoned for different technologies by dedicated racists in the West. What follows is a survey of some of the more significant websites in virtual Russia, from which I draw general conclusions.

Michael Whine has already observed that one function of the Internet is the establishment of common networks around a shared enemy,²⁵ despite significant ideological differences. The primary shared enemy in virtual Russia (as in the global community of racists) is the Jew, with NATO, the USA (sometimes simply 'the West') and non-Slavic ethnic minorities—Chechens or people from the Caucasus, blacks and Asians as runners-up in the hate parade. This use of xenophobia and racism to bind disparate individuals and groups together is not exclusive to the Internet, nor is it a new phenomenon. It was intrinsic to the behaviour of various groups in the Russian Empire of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,²⁶ who found in antisemitism (as do their modern-day counterparts) a unifying programme for those whose politi-

25. Michael Whine 'Cyberspace: A New Medium for Communication, Command and Control by Extremists' April 1999. Available online at <http://www.ict.org.il/articles/cyberspace.htm> (last accessed April 2001).

26. See for example Andras Kovacs 'Xenophobia, Anti-Semitism and the Extreme Right in Europe' in *Racism in Central and Eastern Europe and Beyond: Origins, Responses, Strategies. Part II Presentations and Selected Discussions* p. 55, available online at <http://www.unhcr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/>

cal ideology is thin, illogical or non-existent. Antisemitism is common to virtual (and real) communities of skinheads, neo-pagans, Orthodox Christians, monarchists, neo-Nazis, National-Bolsheviks and Eurasianists. 'Scapegoating' Jews for the failings of post-Soviet society and for the brutalities of the Soviet regime, for the collapse of the Soviet Union or the Russian Empire, for the murder of the Tsar and destruction of a 'golden' past, provides these diverse groups with an easy explanation for Russia's sorrows.

This politically diverse, racist community uses the Internet primarily for propaganda. This propaganda can serve a three-fold purpose: to recruit new members or attract sympathisers, to educate/indoctrinate the sympathetic, and to publicise the organisation. Notwithstanding the intention, there is little evidence to suggest that Internet propaganda is effective as a means of recruitment.²⁷ In Russia, where the most ready audience for extremist propaganda—the impoverished residents of the provinces, urban youth with low level education and bitter resentment for the New Russia—has almost no access to the Internet, it seems even less likely that the websites play a significant role in attracting new members. Some observers of Russian National Unity (RNE), which until the split in September 1999 was the most successful of the neo-Nazi groups (membership figures have been estimated at between 7,000 and 15,000, with a much larger support base of sympathisers) have identified RNE's appeal to 'deprived and neglected youth' as initially a material and psychological one (the prospect of free uniforms, sports, military training, of 'belonging' to a strong group), with ideological indoctrination following recruitment.²⁸

Internet propaganda which is not necessarily primarily directed at recruitment is viewed by some observers as a PR exercise, aimed at journalists and researchers. Slava Likhachev of the Moscow-based Panorama agency, which monitors racism, xenophobia and political extremism in the Russian Federation, comments that the Russian National Unity website as it existed before the split was written mostly by journalists (much of the information on the site being taken directly from newspaper articles) for journalists. An organisation needs to have a visible web presence 'to be taken seriously',²⁹

27. David Capitanchik and Michael Whine 'The Governance of Cyberspace: Racism on the Internet' *JPR* No. 2, July 1996.

28. See Stephen Shenfield *Russian Fascism: Traditions, Tendencies, Movements* (M.E. Sharpe, New York 2001) pp. 132-136.

29. Interview with Slava Likhachev (Panorama, Moscow), September 2000.

that is, to be discussed in mainstream media. The fragmented nature of the extreme nationalist movement is evidenced by the competing websites—RNE now has three websites each proclaiming their own version of the organisation's 'truth'.³⁰ Despite the potentially unifying nature of the Internet, fragmentation and fratricidal competition for members and political significance remain a problem for Russian extremist groups.

One example of an umbrella site (established in May 2000) which attempts to provide a unifying forum for nationalists of various colours (some racist to an extreme degree) is nationalism.org, 'Norg'. At the time of writing (May 2001), Norg rates on Top.list in the category Russian Government>Politics at number four (101 on Rambler's 'Top 100'), in comparison to *Zavtra*, the extremist newspaper which comes in at number 1, Dugin's antisemitic site Arctogeia which is number 2 on Top.list and 55 on Rambler, the liberal political party Yabloko (number 3) and Russian Skinheads at number 5 on Top.list. Norg hosts 16 sites, several of which are personal pages expounding the authors' views on various topics, but most of which are organisational.

Norg manages to unify in cyberspace religious fundamentalists, neo-Nazis, would-be philosophers, pro-Serbian activists, anti-Eurasianists, and pan-Slavicists. Kasimovsky's revamped movement Russian Action³¹ (he formerly led the Russian National-Socialist Party) and the Brotherhood of St Joseph Volotsky—which states its 'active collaboration' with Kasimovsky's movement—are two of the most xenophobic sites, after Russian Skins, which in honour of Hitler's birthday carries a series of pictures showing the Führer with suitably Aryan babies. One cannot conclude from this unity in cyberspace that any mutual, organisational support (other than advertising each other's propaganda) exists however, despite online declarations. The collaboration between Kasimovsky's organisation and the Brotherhood of St Joseph Volotsky (who declare their main aims to be the unification of the Russian Orthodox Church and the education of the intelligentsia³²) apparently consists of a per-

30. <http://www.barkashov-rne.nm.ru/> 'Barkashov's Guards' (last accessed May 2001).

<http://www.rne.org/vopd/index3.shtml> (last accessed May 2001).

<http://www.rne.faihtweb.com/> 'Russian Revival' (last accessed May 2001).

31. Kasimovsky's website <http://nationalism.org/rusaction/> (last accessed May 2001) shows the tendency in evidence within the national-patriot movement towards 'respectability'—created in the 'David Duke' style rather than the 'Russian Skins' style of his old RNSP pages.

32. Interview with Andrei Zhukov, Brotherhood of St Joseph Volotsky, Moscow 30th April 2001.

sonal relationship between Anatoli Makeev, the 'elder' of the brotherhood, and Kasimovsky, and Makeev's membership on the editorial board of Kasimovsky's newspaper *Right Resistance*.³³

Joint public actions do occur however—a march planned for Victory Day (May 9th) which united 'national-patriotic' organisations was advertised on the web pages of the Union of Orthodox Banner Bearers, advising would-be participants when and where to meet, and what to bring with them (icons, flags etc.). Potential attendees were advised that the group would be carrying a banner declaring 'Freedom for Colonel Budanov', a Russian army officer who allegedly raped and strangled an eighteen year old Chechen girl.³⁴ A similar 'krestnyi khod' (an Orthodox march with icons) advertised on the same website for the 19th May was attended by members of Pamyat, the Black Hundreds, the People's Nationalist Party and the Union of Orthodox Banner Bearers. It is not clear that Internet advertising significantly influences the numbers attending such events however.

A second problem faced by any organisation which has aspirations to be Russia-wide (and any party hoping to enter candidates in elections must, according to the Federal Law on public associations, be a federal-wide political association with branches in a minimum of 45 regions or provinces³⁵) is geographical distance. Again, using Barkashov's RNE website³⁶ as an example, it would appear that the Internet has proved a useful tool in maintaining links between regional branches. Contact details and times of meetings for the numerous regional branches are available, plus news of various events, and in the case of unruly regions the expulsion 'orders' of Barkashov appear when that region's button is clicked on. Despite this, one of the apparent reasons for the split was Moscow's inability to control the strong regional bases,³⁷ so information technology has had limited success in this area too.

33. Interview with Anatoli Mikhailovich Makeev, Brotherhood of St Joseph Volotsky, Moscow 30th April 2001. This may be a disingenuous reply to a question posed by a Western researcher, but as yet I have found no evidence of organisational collaborative activity.

34. <http://www.rus-sky.com/horugvenosec/info/090501.htm> (last accessed May 2001).

35. The European Union's Project for Capacity Development in Election Monitoring, *Briefing Document 13: Spas Profile*, 08/12/99.

36. <http://www.barkashov-rne.nm.ru/> (Barkashov's Guards).

37. Interview with Slava Likhachev (Panorama, Moscow), September 2000.

In addition to bringing dispersed members together in cyberspace, the Internet has been helpful in forging at least virtual collaboration between Russian nationalists and their like-minded brethren abroad. Most extremist sites offer an English language, and sometimes a German language option, and host links to other racist and extremist organisations abroad. Lev Krichevsky, director of the Moscow office of the Anti-Defamation League, claims that extreme Russian nationalists are stepping up contacts with their counterparts in the West, including the sharing of Internet resources. 'It is amazing to see how fast these guys, with all their anti-Western rhetoric, find common language and organize multi-language Web sites together with their colleagues from the West'.³⁸ This remark was prompted by the visit to Moscow of the most prominent Western racist to make the transition from virtual Russia to real Russia, David Duke, whose involvement with Russian extremists is well documented. Duke, who appears to have visited Russia three times in two years, refers to Moscow as 'the Whitest' of Europe's capital cities in a Summer 2000 article entitled 'Is Russia the Key to White Survival?'. Duke writes that

The Russian people also have a much greater knowledge of the power of International Zionism and the dominant Jewish role in orchestrating the immigration and multiculturalism that is undermining the West... I think Russia is so important to the worldwide efforts for our people that the new book will actually have its first printing in Russia a few weeks before the English edition will appear... We cannot win this struggle unless we stand indivisible against an implacable enemy whose hatred for us has grown and deepened for two millennia.³⁹

A Yandex 'link to' search⁴⁰ shows that Duke's site is linked to by Rus-sky and a Ukrainian skinhead site, and Duke's visit was covered by various nationalist websites, including Kasimovsky's Russian Action. It is also available on the English language pages of one of the three RNE websites.⁴¹

While many of the websites of racist organisations appear to use the Internet to organise and influence real world activities—carrying notices of forthcoming events, encouraging surfers to vote for particular candidates etc.—limited

38. Lev Gorodetsky "Duke's message to Russians: Anti-Semites of the world, unite" *JTA* 4th September 2000: <http://www.jta.org/story.asp?story=6184>.

39. <http://www.duke.org/dukereport/10-00.html> (last accessed February 2001).

40. Yandex—<http://www.yandex.ru>—is one of the most popular Russian search engines. A 'link to' search identifies sites which link to the URL specified.

41. <http://www.rne.org/vopd/english/duke.html>.

use is, as yet, made of the interactive potential of the medium. Technical proficiency is increasing however. For example, the old People's Socialist Worker's Party site⁴² ran a primitive, propaganda-driven online survey from October to December 1999 which asked: 'Who, in your opinion governs the country?' Respondents were invited to choose between 'An invalid' (a reference to Yeltsin's failing health, which allegedly attracted a 5 per cent response), 'The ethnic oligarchy' (aka the Jewish oligarchy—44 per cent), 'CIA and MOSSAD' (34 per cent), Patriots of Russia (4 per cent), or to simply respond 'I spit on this country!', which 13 per cent of respondents chose to do. This can hardly have provided helpful information for the Party organisers. In May 2001 however, the redesigned website offered a more complex survey which allowed respondents more than one choice in answer to the question 'Who would you like to see in an All-Russia union of patriots?' (the options given are 'Nationalists', 'Monarchists', 'Communists', 'Orthodox', 'Pagans', 'Other religious confessions', 'Liberal-Democrat patriots').⁴³ This at least indicates some desire to use information gained via the Internet for strategic planning. This website also now offers an e-mail news service to subscribers, and a discussion board.

A few sites directly advocate acts of violence, or offer lessons on warfare techniques. A personal website⁴⁴—which offers a detailed list of Russian nationalist groups, including manifestos, membership statistics and web addresses for the undecided—includes a list of prominent Russian Jews (with names, addresses, and telephone numbers) identified as partly responsible for the 'genocide' against the Russian people,⁴⁵ with the suggestion that the surfer find and punish these offenders. Project Rodina ('Homeland'), which maintains the appearance of a respectable online journal with articles by Dostoevsky ('On the Jewish Question', naturally) for example, offers a 'tactics of partisan warfare' section under the heading 'To Arms' which insists that:

Materials, published in this section, are not a call to some sort of illegal action, nor the propaganda of violence. Simply we consider that this information may prepare any person for the defence of the Homeland.⁴⁶

42. <http://www.chat.ru/~nsrp/> (last accessed December 2000).

43. <http://nsrp.nm.ru/> (last accessed May 2001).

44. <http://front14.org/russian/> (last accessed May 2001). This site has now been reported to the FSB, via ADL Moscow.

45. <http://www.front14.org/russian/spisok.htm> (last accessed December 2000).

46. <http://nationalism.org/rodina/> (last accessed May 2001); my translation.

Several of the most extremist sites⁴⁷ offer photographs of their members ‘in training’—firing guns, dressed in combat gear—photos which are clearly designed to impress potential recruits and intimidate ‘enemies’. One of the most visually intimidating sites belongs to the antisemitic neo-pagan Church of Nav, which portrays its members in white robes with pointed black hoods, in Ku Klux Klan style.⁴⁸

Perhaps the most startling racist community in virtual Russia is that of the Russian Orthodox. Their significant—even disproportionate—presence mirrors a depressing post-Soviet reality. The search for national identity that attended the collapse of the Soviet Union and the attendant State-sponsored ideology of proletarian internationalism and ‘the Soviet citizen’ (however hypocritical and flawed) has attracted to the Russian Orthodox Church a great number of individuals whose ‘spirituality’ rests in ethnic pride and resentment of Western (often synonymous with ‘Jewish’) civilization. Many of the most extreme nationalists gravitate toward the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, the True Orthodox Church (also known as the Catacomb Church) and Old Belief, viewing the Moscow Patriarchate as somehow contaminated by its prior collaboration with the ‘satanic’ Communist regime and public fraternisation with Jews and other infidels. This view of the Church is not exclusive to those who reject the Moscow Patriarchate though. Leonid Simonov, head of the Union of Orthodox Brotherhoods and of the Union of Orthodox Banner Bearers, declares online that:

Really, it has long ceased to be a secret that in our contemporary Church there is as it were two parallel churches—the church of Hellenes, that is the Russians, and the Church of the Jews...

...The prophet monk Avel said, that on Rus there were [imposed] two yokes—the Tartar-Mongol and the Polish-Lithuanian, and there will be one more—the most terrible—the YIDDISH. And we, brothers and sisters, are suffering it now with you. But one should never remain indifferent, one must never sleep, never simply pray—one must fight, brothers and sisters, we need to fight for the freeing of our homeland from the yiddish yoke!⁴⁹

47. See Pamyat’s <http://www.geocities.com/Colosseum/Loge/8461/phototek.html> for example (last accessed May 2001).

48. <http://i.am/navi1/> (last accessed May 2001).

49. <http://www.rus-sky.com/horugvenosec/simonovich/heresy.htm> (last accessed April 2001); my translation.

Those who remain within the Moscow Patriarchate wield disproportionate influence through their successful exploitation of mass media—both liberals and Orthodox patriots recognise that the weakness of official Church publications and the massive output of the fundamentalist nationalists are the key to their success.⁵⁰ Online, the nature of the message (which is often extremely antisemitic, propagating the myth of Jewish ritual murder and the infamous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* for example) is ‘legitimised’ by the Orthodox ‘dressing’ given it by the website creators. Rus-sky,⁵¹ a deceptively respectable-looking website which hosts the above cited web pages of the Union of Orthodox Banner Bearers, also archives articles such as ‘About Jewish Fascism’ by Boris Mironov, a former Minister of the Press under Yeltsin.⁵² In this article, Mironov states that:

The myth of antisemitism—the persecution and oppression of Jews in Russia, like the myth of the holocaust—the destruction by the Germans of six million Jews—is fantastical, lucrative Jewish trickery, built up lovingly by the yids in masterly fashion, from which, out of nothing, out of mere noise, by the wagging of tongues, colossal amounts of money are created.⁵³

This large virtual community maintains links with the Russian émigré community in America, and it is probable that their successful presence on the Internet is supported financially and technically by their American-based brethren. That said, the Russia-based Russkaia Linia,⁵⁴ an ‘Orthodox Information Agency’ with close links to the antisemitic ‘disciples’ of the late Metropolitan Ioann of St Petersburg, is as technologically proficient and prolific as its American-based rival.

50. Interviews with Sergei Chapnin, a journalist from the liberal-leaning online magazine *Sobornost* (Moscow, 18th January 2001) and Anatoli Stepanov, editor of the extreme nationalist *Russian Orthodox Patriot* and political editor of the online Orthodox Information Agency ‘Russkaia Linia’ (St. Petersburg, 20th February 2001).

51. <http://www.rus-sky.com>

52. See <http://www.vii.org/monroe/issue09/portrait.htm> (last accessed February 2001).

53. Boris Mironov ‘About Jewish Fascism’ first published in *Kolokol* Nos. 107 & 108 dated 5th & 12th June 1998; available online at <http://www.rus-sky.org/history/library/articles/mironov1.htm> (last accessed October 2000).

54. <http://www.rusk.ru/>

What Is to Be Done?

Recommendation 24: ‘Governments should monitor the abuse of technology, especially the Internet, as a vector for hate speech and incitement to hate crime and violence. They should involve the Internet community in seeking judicial, technical and moral measures.’⁵⁵

Judicial measures

It has been suggested that ‘the Internet should not be regarded differently from other means of publishing and disseminating speech and ideas. The same laws and controls which already apply to other means of publishing, whether electronic or printed, should be applied to the Internet.’⁵⁶

The Russian Federation’s current Constitution and Criminal Code would appear to provide adequate grounds to prosecute those propagating racism and antisemitism by any means:

Article 13, par. 5 of the RF Constitution prohibits creation and activities of the public associations, whose aims and actions are targeted... at ‘exciting social, racial, national and religious hostility’; Article 29 which proclaims freedom of thought and speech, also contains a prohibition on ‘propaganda or agitation inciting social, racial, national or religious hatred and enmity’⁵⁷

Article No. 282 of the Criminal Code clearly defines the offence of arousing national, racial or religious hatred, and the appropriate sentence for perpetrators. It states:

1. Efforts to arouse national, racial or religious hatred, to demean national worth, or to propagate the exclusivity, superiority or inferiority of citizens on the basis of their attitude to religion, nationality or race shall, if

55. *UN Report of the Central and Eastern European regional seminar of experts on the protection of minorities and other vulnerable groups and strengthening human rights capacity at the national level (Warsaw, 5-7 July 2000)* available online at <http://www.unhcr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/>

56. David Capitanchik and Michael Whine ‘The Governance of Cyberspace: Racism on the Internet’.

57. *Compliance of the Russian Federation with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* Report By The Memorial Human Rights Centre, Moscow, November 2000 (addressed to the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance); available online: <http://www.memo.ru/hr/discrim/ethnic/disce00.htm> (last accessed May 2001).

- committed in public or through the mass media, be punishable by a fine of between 500 and 800 times the minimum wage, or of the wages or other income of the perpetrator for a period of between five and eight months, or by restrictions on the perpetrator's freedom for a period of up to three years, or by imprisonment of between two and four years.
2. The same offence, when:
 - a. accompanied by violence or the threat of violence,
 - b. committed by an individual taking advantage of his official position, or
 - c. committed by an organized group
 shall be punishable by imprisonment of between three and five years.⁵⁸

The Law 'On Mass Media', Article 4, also prohibits 'the abuse of freedom of speech' which covers the propagation of violence and incitement of racial hatred. Despite the various legislative options available, it is widely acknowledged that the judicial system and the law-enforcement bodies are unable or unwilling to adequately address the issue.⁵⁹ Vast amounts of defamatory and inflammatory xenophobic material are available in print and online, and anti-semitism has been propagated even in the mainstream media.⁶⁰ Antisemitic public statements by politicians have also failed to draw censure from the Duma. In a speech to rallies in Moscow in October 1998 (later shown repeatedly on television) for example, General Makashov of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation announced 'I will round up all the Yids and send them to the next world!' A Duma motion censuring him for his 'harsh, abusive statements' and for inciting racial hatred was defeated by 121 votes to 107.⁶¹ It

58. UN Committee On The Elimination Of Racial Discrimination *Reports Submitted By States Parties Under Article 9 Of The Convention: Fourteenth periodic reports of States parties due in 1994, Addendum, Russian Federation* (CERD/C/299/Add.15) 28 July 1998; available online: <http://www.hri.ca/fortherecord1998/documentation/tbodies/cerd-c-299-add15.htm> (last accessed May 2001).

59. See the Memorial 2000 report to the World Conference, the conclusions of which are supported by other NGOs including ADL Moscow.

60. A recent example which appeared in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 7th September 2000 is an article by the General Director of the Information Analytical Agency of the Department of Affairs, part of the Presidential Administration, about the global Jewish-Masonic plot to control world government.

61. <http://www.axt.org.uk/antisem/countries/russia/index.html>

is hardly surprising that 'there has been no indication...that law enforcement forces tend to take hate-related Web activities with due seriousness.'⁶²

The government of the Russian Federation is already well placed to monitor the spread of racist propaganda on the Internet should it choose to do so, since Russian ISPs are required by law to link their computers to the FSB, the successor to the KGB. Under an amendment signed into law by Putin and taking effect from January 2000, an additional seven law-enforcement bodies have been authorised to monitor e-mail and other electronic traffic.⁶³ It is further proposed that all Internet publications will need to register with the Communications Ministry if they want to be considered members of the mass media, a status which gives both tax breaks and official recognition.⁶⁴ However, in finding solutions to the problem of racism in post-Soviet Eastern Europe the importance of protecting free speech in fragile democracies should be addressed,⁶⁵ and it is clear that this is not high on the current government's agenda. It is also clear that one can overstate the concern of Russian citizens to preserve their new freedoms. A nationwide poll conducted by VCIOM in October 2000 found that 36 per cent of respondents would certainly or probably support the temporary limiting of freedom of speech and democratic elections, 52 per cent probably or certainly would be against such a limitation, and 12 per cent could not answer the question. 55 per cent of respondents also stated that they expected and hoped that Putin would strengthen state control over the media.⁶⁶

Disregarding arguments about whether the state should proactively pursue 'hate speech' and the legitimacy of their tactics, currently national legislation can be easily bypassed by racists, who simply move their offending websites to

62. Anti-Semitism in Russia 2000 (ADL Moscow Report).

63. See CPJ briefing paper: http://www.cpj.org/Briefings/Russia_analysis_March00/Russia_analysis_march00.html and also Leonard R. Sussman's 'The Internet and Press Freedom 2000', available online at: <http://freedomhouse.org/pfs2000/sussman.html> (last accessed March 2001).

64. *The Moscow Times* January 31st 2001.

65. Nils Muiznieks 'The Struggle against Racism and Xenophobia in Central and Eastern Europe: Trends, Obstacles and Prospects' (HR/WSW/SEM.2/2000/BP.1) presented as part of the *UN Report of the Central and Eastern European regional seminar of experts on the protection of minorities and other vulnerable groups and strengthening human rights capacity at the national level (Warsaw, 5-7 July 2000)*; available online at <http://www.unhcr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/>

66. <http://www.russiavotes.org/> (last accessed May 2001).

US-based servers. America's prioritising of the right to free speech has created a haven for racists of all nationalities, and as we have seen, a significant number of Russian racists have taken refuge there—ironically, given the anti-US feelings harboured by many of them. As Michael Whine points out,

Any international action that is considered must now inevitably focus on the fact that much offensive and illegal material originates in America, where the First Amendment to the Constitution protects all free expression of opinion except that which directly incites violence.⁶⁷

Technical Measures

Recently ADL Moscow have achieved some measure of success working with ISPs to stem the flow of racist propaganda online.

ADL contacted access providers urging them to adopt policies that would stop dissemination of hateful materials by some of their clients. Resulting from those contacts, a number of Web-sites containing anti-Semitism had been closed down.⁶⁸

They further suggest that such positive action would have greater effect if ISPs, instead of simply deleting the site, would replace it with a notice stating that the offending pages have been removed because 'antisemitism and fascism are dangerous'.⁶⁹ Unfortunately, we have witnessed the development of services by racists to overcome the lobbying of activists like the ADL. Front 14, who host websites written around the world, declare:

Many White people don't have the time and energy to put into hosting their own domain, so they join Geocities, Angelfire, etc, in an attempt to get their voices heard. But these 'free' services (who bombard you with ads) have adopted an aggressive anti-White policy. We decided to provide an alternative to proud White men and women, one that would be for our White interests only.... When you sign up for a Front 14 account, you will receive 10 MB of webspace, and POP/Web-based Email. We also

67. *International Co-operation to Combat the Use of the Internet for the Purposes of Incitement to Racial Hatred* Report sent to Mary Robinson at the UNHCR Geneva, on 2 August 1999 by the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Courtesy of Michael Whine.

68. Anti-Semitism In Russia 2000 (ADL Moscow Report).

69. ADL *Antisemitism and Xenophobia in the Russian Federation Bulletin* No. 5 August 2000; my translation.

offer our users counters, guestbooks, message boards, polls, and free advertising on the Front 14 website.⁷⁰

David Sitman, Head of Computer Communications and Databases at the Louis Calder, Jr. Computation Center based at Tel Aviv University suggests a solution that may impact significantly on the visibility of racist sites thereby reducing any influence their propaganda may hold for the uninitiated:

While it is true that the Internet, unlike radio and television, allows global access, and in that sense the potential audience for any site is now more than 100 million, if a site cannot be found, it will not get visitors. Today's leading web indexing sites (such as Yahoo!) and search engine sites (such as AltaVista, Lycos and Infoseek) cover only a small portion of all the pages in the global Internet. As these sites redefine themselves as Internet 'portals'—full-service entry points for all Internet usage, access to Internet resources is being centralized in the hands of a small number of key players controlled by large commercial interests. Sites which are unknown or unacceptable to the new Internet information oligarchy will be marginalized.⁷¹

ADL Moscow agrees that the key to marginalising racist sites lies with search engines:

Undoubtedly, if the owners of search engines did not include similar sites in the ratings (such as Yandex, Rambler and Aport in the .ru zone), access to them would be complicated many times over.⁷²

These suggested solutions rely heavily on the co-operation of ISPs and commercial companies, but still offer more potential success than the partial solutions of blocking and filtering software, the limitations of which are well-documented.

Positive Counteraction and Conclusions

I have chosen 'positive counteraction' as a sub-heading in place of 'moral measures', as it better describes what I would suggest is the best way to address

70. <http://front14.org/indexold.htm> (last accessed May 2001).

71. David Sitman 'Hate On The Internet: A Cause For Concern?' Anti-Semitism Worldwide 1998/9 (Stephen Roth website) <http://www.tau.ac.il:81/Anti-Semitism/asw98-9/sitman.html>

72. ADL *Antisemitism and Xenophobia in the Russian Federation Bulletin* No. 5 August 2000; my translation.

the issues raised by this paper. There seem to me to be two key points which help to explain the current growth of Internet racism in virtual Russia, and which to a great extent explain the failure of the current system to curb it. Both these issues, I would argue, need to be tackled in a positive (rather than a 'punitive') fashion.

1. The last decade has created a society in which economic and social inequalities are glaring and ubiquitous, and for which the population was psychologically unprepared. The sharp population decrease as a result of alcohol and drug abuse, poverty-related diseases, stress and depression, coupled with inadequate medical and social services, is cited as evidence of what some racists are now calling the 'genocide of the Russian nation'. Racists exploit the jealousy, bitterness and loss of self-worth experienced by the numerous losers which 'wild' capitalism created in post-Soviet Russia. The collapse of the former Soviet empire, the resulting chaos, ethnic tension and the perceived 'humiliation' of Russia have also created a ready audience of patriots old and young who long to find an 'alien' (or perhaps more accurately a non-Slavic) enemy to blame.
2. Racism, xenophobia and antisemitism are neither confined to the margins of society nor to any particular strata of the population. They can be found amongst intellectuals,⁷³ the working class, mainstream politics, the army, the Church—in all spheres of Russian life. Those few politicians who have consistently spoken out against racism have fared badly; Grigory Yavlinsky of the liberal Yabloko party won a miserable 5.8 per cent of the vote in the recent presidential elections. It is difficult for those in positions of authority (whether in the government or in institutions such as the Russian Orthodox Church) to take a moral stance on the racist activities of extremist groups, when their own houses are so clearly in disorder.

To counter-balance these depressing observations, it should be noted that the last decade has seen a strong NGO human rights movement emerge, with an active programme of monitoring, lobbying and education work. Any measures to address the issue of racism on the Internet must be developed and imple-

73. See for example Vadim Rossman 'The Ethnic Community and its Enemies: Russian Intellectual Antisemitism in the Post-Communist Era' in the SICSA Annual Report, October 2000.

mented with the full participation of those who are already working to change the current climate of intolerance.

The current administration has made an attempt to deal with the issue of racism by the creation of the Federal 'Interdepartmental Programme for the Creation of Tolerance and the Prevention of Extremism in Civil Society', the main aim of which is the development and realisation of an effective State policy to that end.⁷⁴ This programme is as yet in its infancy, and so has had little impact, although it is already working with the Holocaust Centre in Moscow to develop education programmes that will go some way to counteracting antisemitic 'revisionist' propaganda in circulation, and the ignorance of Hitler's genocidal policies which is the legacy of the Soviet education system.⁷⁵ The programme, which unites federal departments and academics from Moscow State University, is also providing 'tolerance' training for police, social workers and medical staff providing services to ethnic minorities and refugees, and there are plans to publish research on racism and extremism on the Internet this year.⁷⁶

Education programmes aiming to counteract racist propaganda must make use of the media exploited by the racists, and as observed, the strength of extreme nationalists within the Church for example is built on their successful exploitation of mass media, including the Internet. The positive potential of the Internet has already been identified by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights:

The Internet can ... also serve as a tool in the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. The use of the Internet to distribute positive information and materials, research and facts about immigrants and minorities can support action against racism and anti-Semitism, raise awareness, promote understanding and increase tolerance.⁷⁷

74. The Centre for Social Innovation website: <http://www.innovations.ru/tolerant/> (last accessed May 2001).

75. Interview with Dr Ilya Altman, Holocaust Centre, Moscow, 9th April 2001.

76. Interview with Professor Alexander G. Asmolv, Moscow State University, author of the Federal Programme and one of the Programme initiators, and Galina Soldatova, Moscow, 15th April 2001.

77. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) *Consultation on the use of the Internet for the purpose of incitement to racial hatred, racial propaganda and xenophobia* (A/CONF.189/PC.1/5) 5th April 2000; available on the United Nations website: <http://www.unhchr.ch/>

In attempting to address these issues, we should be aware of the fact that educational institutions provide one of the main access points for Internet users in the Russian Federation. The Internet offers an ideal medium for reaching not just one generation but several—the current generation of students will form the next generation of school teachers and university lecturers, and now is the time to develop materials to be disseminated on rapidly expanding provincial networks.

Finally, given the prominence of the Russian Orthodox Church in the formation of post-Soviet national identity and its unhappy (although arguably unintentional) role in the propagation of antisemitism, I would argue that it is essential to involve Orthodox leaders, in conjunction with religious leaders of other religions of the multi-ethnic Russian Federation, in the development of measures to combat xenophobia and intolerance. There is some movement on the part of the Church in this direction already. In November 2000 Metropolitan Kiril attended the Interreligious Peace Forum in Moscow, at which spiritual leaders of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism issued a statement declaring ‘We are seriously disturbed by acts of vandalism to sacred places, manifestations of xenophobia and sacrilege, propaganda of prejudicial attitudes toward religion and public actions that offend the feelings of believers.’⁷⁸

The Patriarch too has seen the potential benefits of the Internet, and blessed all users of the official Church website, saying:

The use of new opportunities of the global computer communications gives another example of this position [the openness of the Church]. Now the news of current events in the life of the Russian Orthodox Church and of various aspects of her ministry could be received undistorted through our official server in the Internet. I hope that it would indeed serve to the good cause of reconciliation and would help understand the ministry of the Church in the world more profoundly.⁷⁹

It would indeed serve the good cause of reconciliation if the Orthodox surfer were able to distinguish easily between those websites which are sanctioned by the Patriarch, and those which (one hopes) would be identified by the Patriarchate as inimical to the true spirit of Russian Orthodoxy, and if the official webserver could host material promoting tolerance to counter-balance the aggressive xenophobia of some Orthodox in cyberspace.

78. <http://www.axt.org.uk/antidem/countries/russia/index.html>.

79. http://www.russian-orthodox-church.org.ru/pa2_gr_en.htm (last accessed December 2000).

In conclusion, I would suggest that we should be afraid of our virtual Russia not because it exists in a dangerous medium that has the power to corrupt, or distort, or strengthen neo-Nazi networks, or even incite violence. While all of these may be to varying degrees true, I would argue that the most disturbing aspect of virtual Russia is that it reflects a real nation where the spirit of intolerance and xenophobia has affected all strata of society.

In addressing the problem of racism in virtual Russia, I would argue that positive counter-measures (particularly in the sphere of education) are likely to yield the best results, as judicial measures are currently ineffectual and likely to remain so in the prevailing climate of antisemitism and xenophobia. Similarly, it seems likely that racists will continue to grow in technological proficiency, and find creative solutions to any technical solution that might be imposed to limit their Internet activity. Finally, I would argue that because of the pervasive nature of racism in Russian society, special measures directed against racism on the Internet are likely to prove ineffectual unless more comprehensive and general work is initiated to address the issues that racists are exploiting so successfully: poverty, personal insecurity, inequality, the desire to find a scapegoat rather than acknowledge past mistakes, the need to create a national identity, to feel both individual self-worth and national pride.