

BABES-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF EUROPEAN STUDIES
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND EUROPEAN STUDIES
DOCTORAL SCHOOL

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SUMMARY

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**NATIONALISM AND XENOPHOBIA IN POST-SOVIET RUSSIA:
SKINHEAD AND NASHI MOVEMENTS**

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Abstract

The current doctoral thesis examines the two basic concepts of nationalism and xenophobia and how they impact the youth political movements Skinheads and Nashi, which we have chosen as case studies for this thesis, as well as the critical significance of these youth movements in current Russian society. The following study questions concern the emergence of nationalism and xenophobia among these two youth movements: What led to the increase of xenophobia and nationalism among Russian youth in post-Soviet Russia? What role did the Skinhead youth movement have in Russia's de-democratisation process after the Soviet Union? How did the political youth organisation Nashi prepare the path for a managed democracy in post-Soviet Russia?

The hypothesis is based on the role that these two youth movements played in the process of de-democratisation in post-Soviet Russia, as well as the fact that, during the de-democratisation process, these movements developed appealing messages, announcements, discourses, and activities for post-Soviet Russian youth to gain their support and transform their organisational forms and structures in a way that would allow them to achieve their objectives.

The qualitative method involved an interview with a former member of the Skinheads movement, and I interpreted the language used on the Nashi movement's website. I reviewed the documentation of the movements under consideration, including the VKontakte public group of the Skinheads movement and the Nashi movement website, where I was able to examine their brochures. Another method utilised to supplement this paper was a structured interview conducted on the VKontakte platform. To some extent, the interview allowed me to obtain knowledge on various aspects of the Skinheads movement and understand this person's experience inside the movement. I examined the numerical data produced by the SOVA centre that emerged monthly regarding the Skinheads movement's xenophobic activities and attacks, as well as the movement's present evolution in Russia.

In conclusion, I will demonstrate that these two nationalist-patriotic youth movements were integral to post-Soviet society. The semi-authoritarian state in Russia justifies the goals of nationalist youth movements simply by being their primary objective. The analysis of these two case studies contributes to understanding the trajectory of youth movements that deviated from the initially planned path to democracy towards an imperialist future and the re-Stalinization of the Russian state. Following the upheaval and instability caused by the Soviet

Union's fall in the 1990s, far-right movements proliferated. Impelled by a huge surge of nostalgia for empire, great power status, and the USSR economy, these movements are little more than symptoms of an illness that relapsed with the loss of this position. The Skinhead and Nashi youth movements use Nazi-style rhetoric, as well as xenophobic (anti-Russian) components, anti-Semitism, and chauvinistic nationalism. These two movements inherited elements addressed by their predecessors, the Slavophile and Black Hundred movements, such as white supremacy and the fact that Russians are descended from a pure northern race, and their role is to defend this race from all that can cause its degradation and decay. The Skinheads movement first emerged in England in the 1960s as a movement focused on a new approach to fashion. This movement's members gathered solely for recreational purposes. Both the Skinheads movement in England in the 1960s and the Skinheads movement in post-Soviet Russia emerged as a reaction to radical economic changes. Although they began as a source of entertainment, their membership grew in stages, eventually becoming a voice of the working class in the face of a changing world in economic, political, and cultural terms. The breakup of the Soviet Union and the first legislative elections in post-Soviet Russia in 1993 disappointed those who advocated for Russia to take the path of democracy. The 1990s saw the rise of the sociopolitical movement known as neo-Nazism. This neo-Nazi organisation in Russia gained popularity after the Second Chechen War, which resulted in a series of hate-motivated attacks against immigrants. In the 1990s, white supremacy emerged as a phenomenon among right-wing extremists of neo-Nazi ideology in Russia. The second Chechen war provided fuel for the fire, especially among the members of the Skinhead movement. Furthermore, the new presidential administration's imperialist and Stalinist syntax, as well as the authorities' lack of monitoring of these extremist formations, contributed to a large surge in membership and hate-motivated attacks. The 1990s period marks Russia's separation into Russians and non-Russians. The theoretical background for this thesis describes the principles and phenomena that underpin movements like Skinheads and Nashi and explains the proliferation of imperialist and Stalinist discourse based on the idea of Aryan race identity and white supremacy among members of the Skinheads movement, especially throughout post-Soviet Russia, when Darwinian theory and the success of the Russian Army during the Second World War advocated the idea of super-human and the supreme race. The research contributes to a deeper understanding of two youth socio-political movements known as Skinheads and Nashi that make up the image of hybridised social rules and processes of a socio-structural political post-Soviet Eastern Europe, the place where the post-Perestroika generation found itself caught between those who were nostalgic for the empire and militants for the transition to democracy.

Members of the more current Skinheads youth movement, such as the one studied in this thesis, come from a post-Soviet area alongside other right-wing parties. The thesis contributes to explaining the difference between the first Skinheads, who were a working-class phenomenon who gathered only to share a certain type of music, a different style of clothing, a passion for football, and the Skinheads movement, which has become more politicised and involved in hate crimes and ethnic conflict. The Skinhead movement in post-Soviet Russia is one of the most aggressive and violent responses to the instability generated by the disintegration of the USSR, and I will explain that these two movements are symptoms of the sickness, not the disease itself. Moreover, the research contributes to the understanding of the Skinheads and Nashi movement's ideological, cultural, political, and economic context. At the same time, the paper helps to understand the forces that create youth collective mobilisation in a post-communist society controlled by a non-official fascist ideology and an ideology that denigrates the West and the concept of democracy. The findings contribute to a better understanding of the patterns and dynamics of right-wing radicalism in this transitional climate. Explaining and assessing the reasons for collective mobilising among young people in a changing society are critical components for understanding the subject under investigation. These far-right movements have a mindset centred on the separation between Us versus Them, which is a fundamental aspect of the Skinhead and Nashi movements' philosophy. Based on their worldview, these groups draw divisions between communities with differing civic/ethnic qualities, resulting in hate crimes and ethnic conflict. The significance of this thesis is to provide an analysis of what the Skinhead and Nashi youth movements mean for democracy, post-Soviet Russia's economy, and how they built their way to de-democratisation.

I chose this topic for my thesis because Nazi ideology is an area of interest to me, and I wanted to bring up something that is an active phenomenon not just in Russia, but in other parts of the world. The reason for choosing this topic for my thesis comes from the desire for documentation in relation to the Nazi ideology. It is also, in some ways, a continuation of my dissertation thesis, in which I analysed the techniques used in Nazi propaganda through the speeches of Joseph Goebbels. The issue I selected to examine in this thesis is strongly tied to the Nazi ideology, as it is a new generation, a new form of Nazism, neo-Nazism, a socio-political movement whose goal is to resuscitate the Nazi ideology, reinstalling the doctrine of empire. I will answer my research questions by examining the crisis society of post-Soviet Russia, a society in which nationalism and xenophobia created a favourable environment for development.

The goal is to examine nationalism and xenophobia through the lens of two young movements: the Russian Skinheads Movement and the Political Youth Movement Nashi. The goal is to investigate the primary promoters that led to the intensification of xenophobia and nationalism among these teenagers, considering their popularity during Russia's societal instability in the 1990s. However, the most significant part of this analysis remains the relevance of these two movements to Russian society. The hypothesis relates to the role that these two youth movements had in the process of de-democratization in post-Soviet Russia, and the fact that, during the de-democratization process, these movements developed appealing messages, announcements, discourses, and activities for post-Soviet Russian youth to gain their support and transform their organisational forms and structures in a way that would allow them to achieve their goals. I collected data using a variety of methods during the development of this paper. The qualitative process utilised includes an interview with a former member of the Skinheads movement, the usage of documents from the Nashi movement's website, and articles from specialised magazines. By the qualitative method, I interpreted the language used by the Nashi movement on their website to attract as many members as possible, the messages being written in capital letters, providing a detailed analysis of what they wanted to convey. I looked at the documents of the analysed movements, such as the Skinheads movement groups and the Nashi movement website, where I was able to analyse two brochures. Another method used to elaborate on this paper was the structured interview held on the VKontakte platform. For this study, I interviewed a former member of the Skinheads movement about his time there, but no former member of the Nashi movement agreed to give me an interview. By joining the Vkontakte group and checking the Nashi movement website, I was able to contact a few people who were part of the movement but did not want to talk. This effort went beyond simply collecting data through interviews and analysing the documents mentioned above. To present a comprehensive image of the Skinhead movement in Putin's Russia, I analysed statistics compiled by the Moscow-based research centre of nationalism and xenophobia, the SOVA centre. On the centre's website, I was able to analyse the numerical data that surfaced monthly concerning the Skinheads movement's xenophobic acts and attacks, as well as the movement's current evolution in Russia. Although the movement is no longer widely publicised, its actions are still visible in Russia. The first chapter of this thesis addresses a theoretical debate by analysing and describing the major principles that constitute the foundation of the Skinheads and Nashi movements. The term nationalism requires an analysis that begins with the historical process of the formation of the state, a process that assumes that nationalism stems from the concept of the nation. Throughout the last two centuries, leaders used a series of strategies to

unify groups under one nation-state, and after these strategies, to incorporate these groups under one nation-state. These groups developed national symbols, a common identity, and expressions of loyalty for their leaders, all of which brought a strong nationalist wave. According to the historian, Anthony D. Smith the nationalism has five meanings. The usages of the term nationalism point out the formation of a nation, the national consciousness, the language and symbols of a nation, the social and political movement, and the image of nationalism as doctrine and/or ideology. These meanings reveal the specific processes and features of nationalism and, nevertheless, presuppose a considerable amount of national sentiment concerning their country and, of course, their leader. Given the theory that embodies the term nationalism, according to all my research, the concept of xenophobia does not have such a broad theoretical basis that we cannot talk about this concept without considering terms such as race, ethnicity, nations, and antisemitism. The meanings nevertheless presuppose a considerable amount of national sentiment for their country and, of course, their leader. Based on the principle of soil and soul, that is, a strong attachment that presupposes a close connection with the place where the individual was born and grew up, the ancestral earth. All these meanings of the concept of nationalism are related to everything about the past of a nation. An organised group or movement could show a high degree of national sentiment, possess national symbols, myths, and share a common language. On the other hand, a nationalist group or movement will come with the creation of their “nationalist world” as a reaction against the change that is taking place in society (a reaction against globalization) through historical research, songs, cultural journals, literature, activities, national flags that resonates with the historical past (the flag of the Russian Imperial Movement, inspired by Imperial Russia’s flag). In this chapter, I will emphasise various types of nationalism because in the specialised literature, we can find a fairly large number of forms that nationalism has used over time. Hans Kohn’s classification is the most relevant; thus, we can talk about 9 types of nationalism: Jacobin, liberal (*Risorgimento*), integral, traditional (conservative), civic, ethnic, Western-Eastern, economic, and extremist. The other term, “xenophobia,” is relatively new, as the term nationalism appeared in the late 18th century. But there are some examples of xenophobic sentiment in Ancient Greece (denigration of barbarians and the belief that the Greek culture and people were superior to all others), also Ancient Romans had this notion of superiority over other nations, and during this chapter, I will give a classification of xenophobia. From a social and political perspective, xenophobia manifests itself in the division of the world between ethnic groups and races. The term xenophobia is divided into two parts, namely, cultural and immigrant xenophobia. Throughout this thesis, I will analyse and explain in detail

these two components that characterise xenophobia. Nationalism is frequently accompanied by xenophobia in the case of identifying an enemy, a nation. This mentality is part of what psychologists call the US vs THEM effect. The tendency of individuals to view the social world in terms of an ingroup (us) and an outgroup (them).

In that chapter, I will present the use of the terms “Nation” and “Nationality”/Народ – Народность. In the Russian language, the terms “nation” and “nationality”/народ - народность are seen in a different way than their meaning in English. In the Russian worldview, народ – народность are the most stable concepts and most ambiguous. The term (народность) is the main innovation of Count Sergei Semionovich Uvarov¹. For Uvarov, nationality meant a local tradition rooted in the historical evolution of Russia, which connected politics with the Church to give both stability. The term народность refers to individual membership in a nation (народ) as a cultural, linguistic, and historic community who are

¹ was an Imperial Russian classical scholar, best remembered as an influential imperial statesman under Nicholas I of Russia, faithful to Russia’s distinct cultural heritage. The other term, народ (nation), is not the entire nation, just the working part of the nation

Moreover, I will analyse a concept often used by Russian nationalists, namely the Russian Idea, which is a concept that is at the core of the identity of the Russian people. To better understand the identity and conscience of a people, the analysis of the idea of a people is important to understand the meaning of a historical event. The national idea is closely related to the identity, conscience, dignity, and national unity of a people. This national idea dominates the consciousness of a people and is what determines the specific actions, behaviours, and goals in times of war.

The last subchapter focuses on building the meaning of Russianness/Русскость and what role this concept plays in the politics of the Russian state. The term Russianness is based on the idea of creating a nation-state that includes ethnic Russians (who do not live on Russian territory, but whose roots are in Russia), and the Russians living in the Russian territory. Over time, this concept of Russianness has metamorphosed into a key concept not just culturally but also physically. This led to the outbreak of various forms of ethnic violence, the best known is the skinhead movement.

The second chapter focuses on the historical background from the 19th century to the 21st century. It is an analysis of the far-right groups that have existed in Russia over time, starting with the Black Hundred and continuing with the 21st century Nashi movement. Aggravated by financial, political, and socio-cultural crises, the 1990s were filled with turmoil and violence, and a massive rise in crime and corruption was a distinctive characteristic of the

Yeltsin years. Further endorsing the use of force and increasing tensions between ethnic Russians and non-Russians, particularly Muslims from the southern regions of the Federation, the First Chechen War (1994-1996) strongly influenced the nationalistic and racist attitudes of many Russians. It is also clear that the difficult social and economic situation that resulted from the troubles of the 1990s provided fuel for the fire, creating an environment of social friction, low trust, and increasing racial intolerance, particularly Islamophobia, following the First Chechen War. Xenophobia and nationalism have become the keystones of the skinhead movement, and the roots of their ideology are multifaceted.

The third chapter focuses on the extreme nationalist skinhead movement and its role in the de-democratisation process. The movement first emerged as a symptom of wider changes throughout Russian society following the collapse of communism, being part of a general rise in nationalistic and xenophobic attitudes among the wider population. The Russian skinhead movement was composed of four groups of teenagers mimicking the style (including shaved heads and heavy boots) and actions (commonly viewed as extreme right-wing nationalists or neo-nazists who exposed antisemitic and other racist views) of their western counterparts. Referring to the Nashi youth movement, I analyse post-Soviet Russia, particularly Russia under Putin's leadership. During this time, the Russian state encompassed three distinct categories, such as: Tsarist official nationality, cultural and political nationalism. The first category establishes the criteria under which the other two nationalisms (cultural and political) gain autonomy. The Nashi youth movement encompasses all these categories of nationalism, the members of this movement did not directly experience these periods in Russian history (Tsarist Empire and Soviet Union), their political and social identity has been influenced by various factors such as books, films, and family or other officials' stories, being at a young age they were easily influenced by these factors that contributed to their political formation, all this was fed by the presidential administration, which organized camps (summer camps at Seliger) and promised them important functions in politics. Throughout this chapter, I will examine the Nashi youth movement through the ideals that it targets, including patriotism and nationalism. The Nashi movement is an example of astro-turfing (an action aimed at concealing an organisation's sponsor or sponsors' activity that seeks to conceal an organisation's sponsor or sponsors to give the idea that members (in the case of the Nashi movement, the kommissar in charge of activities/activist leaders) sponsor and support the organisation, rather than someone else). These two movements are defined primarily by the concepts of nationalism and xenophobia. To define and analyse the notions of nationalism and xenophobia, I used a book written by Hans Kohn, and Anthony Smith's publications provided a very significant

bibliography for understanding and classifying the concept of nationalism. Marlene Laruelle's books also helped me analyse Russian nationalism from various perspectives. The Skinheads movement, which I decided to analyse, gained a lot of attention from the press in Russia and the West. This provided me with a wide range of bibliographic sources, including Hilary Pilkington, Elena Omelchenko, and Albina Garifzianova, on *Russia's skinheads. Exploring and Rethinking Subcultural Lives* (2010). This study explores the Skinhead movement from a sociological perspective and describes the Skinhead movement as belonging to an uncivilised class that uses violence as its only means of expression and achieving its goals. While the Skinheads movement is no longer as visible in Russia as it was in the early 2000s, I was able to assemble some statistics on their vandalism and ethnic violence against non-Russians. The number of xenophobic actions is lower today than it was between 1990 and 2000, with the help of sources such as Alexandr Verkhovsky and Galina Kozhenikova, "Anti-Semitism in Russia: January-September 2006", and SOVA Research Centre. *Russian Nationalism and Xenophobia from January to November 2024*. Unlike the Skinheads movement, the Nashi youth political movement (also known as Putinjugend) did not receive as much attention from researchers. The documents used in the chapter dedicated to the analysis of the Nashi movement helped me to comprehend the ideology, ideals, and objectives of this youth movement. With the help of these studies, I was able to exemplify and broadly explain the relationship between the two youth movements and to draw comparisons and similarities between Skinheads and Nashi movements, which on the surface appear to be different, but a more in-depth analysis was required to see that the two are quite similar, particularly in terms of the ideologies addressed.

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