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Lost Before Ever Fought: Russian Culture War

Although culture and art have always been the factors that are pushed into the background in wartime, wars are also one of the leading factors that guide the development of today's culture, art, and literature. After many years, the Western world and Europe face close wartime periods again. Nowadays, most media and academics attach more importance to the political aspects of events and armaments, prioritizing research on these issues. But in the battlefield's background, a cultural war is going on.

On the same day the Soviets entered Prague in 1968, the Russian violinist Rostropovich performed the works of the Czech composer Dvorak in London. How did the West see the regimes settled in the Middle East as enemies for years but did not have a problem with Arabic films, and on the contrary, gave them opportunities, stating that these people and terrorists are not the same, insomuch that the West did not have a problem with the past German culture and philosophy during the Nazi Germany period. However, it has chosen to wage such a cultural war against Russia today.

It would not be right to handle this issue uniformly, as only the problem of the West. This is because Russia has lost all its "respect" in the world, especially in the West and among the former Soviet countries, especially after the occupation of Georgia in 2008 and Crimea in 2014. However, some of Russia's failed operations in the Ukraine invasion and political and military inconsistencies replaced fear of Russia with Russophobia in many countries. However, it should be remembered that Russia did not lose this cultural war today; it was a lost country. Moreover, Russian culture lived only as a beautiful nostalgia in its border countries and the West; it has now lost its nostalgic flavor with the attack on Ukraine years after losing the cultural war against America.

Artists migrating from Russia to other countries are not a new phenomenon. Russia has forced many artists and writers to emigrate to the USA and Europe since the Soviet era, or the artists have made these decisions themselves. Although the reasons for these decisions vary, it is generally possible to divide them into two main categories:

1. Political structure and cultural uniformity of Russia

2. Western freedom and individualism

The reason for the fact that the soldiers of a country known for its modern geography and geology, such as the Trans-Siberian Railway, lost their way in neighboring Ukraine, and how a nation leading the world's written literature classics has regressed so much today and has become a culture easily excluded by the world are multidimensional. However, one of the leading causes for this is Putin's cultural and educational policies.

Russia's cultural derealization is not only limited to today's Russia but also related to the Soviets. There was a Western dominant (За́падник) literary and cultural life in Imperial Russia. While this group believes the future and modernity are in the West, they also perceive Russian culture as Western. Therefore, almost all the great literary works and paintings known today were cultural goods produced in Imperial Russia. This situation changed completely after the Russian Revolution. Russia started to perceive the West as foreigners and divided the world into those who were with them (Eastern Bloc, communist) and those who were not. Russia was no longer the country of the art, culture, and scientific elites but of the "nomenklatura". Incompetence and the penetration of politics into cultural life chased Russian culture down a blind street.

Today's modern Russia does not follow a different path from this one. Following policies like the Tsarist regime after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia began to Sovietize again

over the years. Russia, first, began to maintain the cultural elitism of Imperial Russia and gave more importance to state officials, culture, art, and scientists like in Imperial Russia. However, this wholly changed with Putin's second term. All the administrations and elites of the country became a group that consisted of Siloviks (силови́к) chosen by Putin, especially former KGB, and army members, instead of the nobility of the people. Russia ceased to be a country that supports culture and art and instead evolved into a country with a Minister of Culture who said, "I get bored in exhibitions, operas, and museums". Russia's most significant cultural element, the "literature", was exposed to the devastating effects of Putin's policies. So much so that, when they were written, works denigrated wars and praised unity, westernism, and humanism became unacceptable to young people because of Putin's nationalist policies. That is to say, the Russian Literature curriculum for schools that came out in 1997 was briefly classified as "Literature lessons instill humanism in young people, learning and understanding Russian literature, and adopting world literature", but when it came to 2010, some additions were made to the new curriculum and subjects such as "understanding the Russian nation", "learning to be a patriot" and "the difference between Russian and Western literature" were added. This is where the problem began, and Russia had lost its youth to the West. Because of the stilyagi (стиляги) movement that started in the 1960s, the Russian youth began to exclude the Russian-Soviet culture from clothing to music, and the number and volume of western products (films, books, music, and clothes), which are brought to Russia from the Soviet countries neighboring the West, grew inexorably.

As a continuation of this, it has become impossible to carry out a Russian-Slavic policy in a country with a high rate of internet use by the youth and a reasonably high literacy rate in the 21st century. Because Russia did not give the young people the right to choose and tried to make people like what was happening, Russian cultural life could not separate from uniformity. Russian youth, a part of the liberal world even if it lived in Russia, directed all its

cultural choices to the West. Russia's use of all television and internet channels as a propaganda tool today pushes the youth to use the products of Western culture even in illegal ways. The most significant example is that Russia wants Western movies from cinemas instead of watching only movies and TV series that support daily politics. That is, after all the major companies of the West stopped importing films to Russian cinemas, theatres acquired pirate movies. According to the report of VPN providers, Russians who have access problems on the internet after the war spend more time watching series and movies instead of reading the real war news using these VPN applications.

Therefore, although Putin accuses Ukraine as a Nazi, racist, and Russian enemy in every speech and puts the West, which helped Ukraine, in the same equation, influences the elderly mass of the country, it no longer affects the new generation. Instead, Russia used these old propaganda methods from the Second World War to show everyone again that they could not keep up with the times.

But this is not only a Russia-sided war. The West also sees its culture as a "soft power" that affects not only Russia but also the whole world. Opposite Russia is not only America but also the cultural cluster of what we call Western culture. It would consistently divide the West into three parts to understand this issue. First, Western culture generally is a liberal worldview that mainly covers socio-political issues. Secondly, European countries use their own cultures as soft power; that is, the cultures of other countries leave a mark here. Thirdly, America has established its cultural hegemony in Europe and the world and wants to maintain it.

Western culture, perceived as a party here, is a purely political and socio-cultural phenomenon. For example, the West now perceives individual thought, protection of homosexuals and ethnic minorities, and liberal and democratic state administration as part

of the Western culture. The politics and general social environment of Russia, especially with the last presidency of Putin (from 2012 to the present), are incompatible with this cultural-political environment of the West. Today's Russian regime has enacted various laws to incorporate religion into the palace and gain the popularity of clergypersons as in Imperial Russia. At first glance, this seems like freedom of religion and belief is protected by the state, as in the West, but it did not affect other religious groups that later increased the power of the Orthodox Church. The other decision adopted on the same day as the law on freedom of religion is the prohibition of gay propaganda in the country; today, the West is so insistent on solving problems related to homosexuality, while Russia's doing so has pushed it a little further away from the West. With a law (2014) enacted to prevent the cultural expansion of the West in Russia, the upper limit of the total amount of shares that foreigners can have in the Russian media (television, newspapers, radio, digital media) is limited to 20%, that is, according to this law, it is very difficult for new countries or new foreign media to take place in the country today. Russia's alienation from the West, especially from Europe, included Russia in a world of Slavic culture rather than being of Europe's most influential cultures and influencing others. Unlike America, Russia wants to use soft power by trying to impose Russian culture on other countries, not as national ideologies and culture. The fact that Europe or the West, which uses its culture as a tool of power and influence, is against Russia put Russia a war against the culture of the West just as Russia declared war on Ukraine to prevent NATO from growing. In other words, today's Russia is unlike Imperial Russia, whose cultural policy or soft power sees itself as a part of Europe and established its hegemony in it, even by entering the First World War. Today's Russia continues to be like Soviet Russia, which does not distinguish between political and cultural influence, where there is no dialogue and freedom, where the state imposes cultural life, and therefore it is losing.

The development of the war and its profound impact on Europe, the energy crisis it has

created and the possibility that it will put Europe in a difficult situation during the next winter push the European countries to talk about issues that they will now attach more importance to than culture. For this reason, we cannot see the same cultural diplomacy effect these days.