



## Multiculturalism and Ostalgie

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### Abstract

*“Ostalgie” is coming from a German word referring to nostalgia for aspects of life in East Germany, and not only. It is a new multipurpose and new expression related the German terms “Nostalgie” (nostalgia in Italian) and Ost (East). Its anglicised equivalent, ostalgia, it is rhyming with “nostalgia” and it is also sometimes used. The collapse of Soviet Union and the Berlin Wall destruction, was the concept protected concrete barrier that physically and ideologically divided Berlin from ‘61 to ‘89, It especially divided West and East European countries, the wall cut off West Berlin from almost all of surrounding East Germany and East Berlin until government officials opened it in November 1989. Formally its demolition began on 13 June 1990 and finished in 1992 and coincides in some generation from the Warsaw Pact countries, legally the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation with the “Mutual Assistance” URSS of the birth of “ostalgie”, that it goes against with modern principle of multicultural society and globalisation of the world. At the eighth congress of the communist party Lenin recognized the right to self-determination of the populations of the empire and promised them significant concessions, although its final intent was to reach the true dictatorship of the proletariat which would have rendered the ethnic-national distinctions useless. The Soviet Union became the incubator of new nations with the dissolving of the Russian nation in the Soviet state. Does the “ostalgie” refer to the USSR, is this compatible with multiculturalism? Is it compatible with that plurality of tending different cultures that coexists in mutual respect and which implies the preservation of their specific traits by rejecting any type of homologation or fusion in the dominant culture?*

**Keywords:** Ostalgie, Ostalgic, DDR, Goodbye Lenin, USSR.

## 1. OSTALGIE (DDR)

We can start from the “ostalgie” concept and in this case we need to start from Germany, especially from East Germany. Yes, from the German Democratic Republic, the GDR and in German language the “Deutsche Demokratische Republik “, DDR, of that thing there some people now they have “nostalgie”, that was a communist state that during the Cold War period, from ‘49 to the years Ninety, it was controlled as a portion of Germany that had been occupied by Soviet forces at the end of World War II bounded on the east by the Oder-Neisse line. East Germany was a satellite state of the Soviet Union. In fact, more than Fifty years since the starting of building, and almost thirty since its collapse, Germany has been experiencing the ineradicable effects of the existence of Berlin wall on political, social and cultural scene<sup>1</sup>. All of those aftermaths combine a phenomenon called Ostalgie - a signature term given to a cluster of behaviour, thoughts and emotions derived from the feeling of nostalgia for the characteristics of life in the East Germany. The word Ostalgie is a noun combined of the German terms “Ost” that is translated as East, and Nostalgie<sup>2</sup> which signify nostalgia. It was publically introduced to the German language in 1993, when first movements that attested that the significance of East Germany survived in the collective mind of German people were recorded.

Ostalgie, in this context, presents a third phase of the integration process of two parts of Germany - East and West, after first one which is the actual fall of the Berlin wall and triumph of the model proposed by West, followed by the second one – a frustration in the 1990s caused by the inability to overcome the differences between the two parts of one state<sup>3</sup>. The Wall was erected by the German Democratic Republic, the GDR, the East Germany, it was built on 13 August 1961, the Wall cut off West Berlin from practically all of surrounding East Germany and East Berlin until government officials unlocked it in November 1989.

Its demolition formally began on 13 June 1990 and finished in 1992 and coincides in some generation from the Warsaw Pact countries, formally the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and “Mutual Assistance” with URSS of the birth of “ostalgie”, that it goes against with modern principle of multicultural society and globalisation of the world. It is also an interesting picture of two different time, the first in 1957 with EU-6 and today with EU-27 and will refer to the phenomenon “ostalgie” (only DDR or more countries?).

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<sup>1</sup> see Poesio, C. (2012). Il Muro ai tempi del muro, il Muro ai tempi della Wende, il Muro oggi. Eventi, memorie, fiction, miti. *Memoria e ricerca*.

<sup>2</sup> See Hyland, C. (2013). ‘Ostalgie doesn’t fit!’: Individual Interpretations of and Interaction with Ostalgie. *Remembering and Rethinking the GDR: Multiple Perspectives and Plural Authenticities*, 101-115.

<sup>3</sup> See Banchelli, E. (2006). *Taste the East: linguaggi e forme dell'Ostalgie*. Bergamo University Press; Sestante.

We would like to consider a deep analysis of social and political society before and after the time considered and will be possible to involve several countries as Italy, that was part of EU-6 and is part of EU-27, and ex-URSS, or countries influenced by URSS. At the eighth assembly of the communist party Lenin recognized the right to self-determination of the populations of the empire and promised them significant concessions, although its final intent was to reach the true dictatorship of the proletariat which would have rendered the ethnic-national distinctions useless. The Soviet Union became the incubator of new nations with the dissolving of the Russian nation in the Soviet state.

Reflective longing or Ostalgie presented itself as a somewhat crucial exit path from the irritation and towards mental, non-physical restoration of the previous times, as claimed by Svetlana Boym, one of the most prominent researches in the area. Ostalgie is nowadays again taking its toll through popular media and cinema, art and even political movements.

However, to localize and restrict the outbreak of Ostalgie simply on the Germany would be underestimating the pandemic impact the concept had on the whole world. Republic of Italy, alongside with Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Netherlands and West Germany, formed Inner Six, officially creating European Communities in 1957. Following the emerging of the new concept – western globalization and unification under the wings of European Union, Italy, traditionally considered the geographical connection point and mediator between East and West, found itself crucified by modern capitalistic aspirations and Ostalgie. On the other hand, Republic of Lithuania spent the years leading to the fall of the Wall in the former Soviet bloc and joined European Union in 2007. However, even though its pro-west affinity was incomparably high compared to Italian one at the point of self-determination from Soviet Union, it cannot be concluded that it was not touched by the effects of the Ostalgie.

If analysed through the time in a form of cultural, political and social products, the Ostalgie presents a caricature of the society's development. The following project will present the mentioned development through a snapshot the today EU society as was in Germany and as a compare and contrast analysis in two different points of time – 1957 and 2007. It will, furthermore, touch a deep analysis of social and political scene before and after the time considered. The data collected will be, moreover, presented in the form of the report and a documentary.

It is important to answer the research questions how does the Ostalgie effects the society in Italy and Lithuania and how did that effect and its strength vary between 1957 and 2017. The reasons for asking ourselves this lies in the idea of the hypothesis that both Germany, a country that was generally pro-West and all time has been in contrast with the East Europe, as East Germany or Poland, states that experienced influences of communism but is currently a member of European

Union, are at certain level influenced by the Ostalgie<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, the time-lapse analysis is useful for estimating if the effect of Ostalgie is becoming more prominent and pronounced now then it was after the World War II.

We need to consider the important idea of the general public opinion, as well as the contemporary standpoint of the politically dominant parties. It will also provide an evidence of which propaganda and marketing course is best to apply on certain general public, both for business and political campaign purposes.

What and why is a growing trend in the influence of Ostalgie through time, as well as that both Germany or Poland, that are feeling that influence although they have different histories as states and different relations with the Eastern bloc. These hypotheses were chosen based on empirical observations of the cultural and political products previous to the research.

The former one is visible through general analysis of the products of media, culture and subculture, as well as the public opinion and behaviour on the political scene. Until today, Ostalgie has been proven to play an undeniably great role in the lives of citizens of the former GDR. If there is a growing trend of the practice of psycho-social expression of melancholy towards German Democratic Republic, it should be visible on every level of society and, therefore easily measurable and compared to the situation before.

However, for the later hypothesis it could be trickier to decide should it be accepted or rejected. Although materials and sources are not difficult to find, it is important accept the fact that theoretical insights on the concrete influence of Ostalgie on for example in Baltic countries, but also in the today modern Russia, or where this is scarce to non-existent and in contradiction with concept of multicultural society.

In fact, in 1991 the red flag with the scythe and the yellow hammer had been lifted forever from auctions outside the Kremlin. In its place appeared the horizontal striped red white and blue. It was the end of the past of the Soviet Union and the beginning of that of Russia. For many it was the end of an authoritarian regime that for 70 years had reduced freedom of expression, thought, the circulation of millions of people and the beginning of a democratic era. This is the past that in the early years had tried to overcome and forget, is nevertheless less and less forgotten and forgotten.

Rather, more and more Russians regret it<sup>5</sup>. We don't know exactly but we are sure (in reality we have some Russian statistic evaluation) some Russians today regrets the fall of the USSR.

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<sup>4</sup> See Capuzzo, P. (2004). " Good bye Lenin". La nostalgia del comunismo nella Germania unificata. *Studi culturali*, 1(1), 151-166.

<sup>5</sup> See Ekman, J., & Linde, J. (2005). Communist nostalgia and the consolidation of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe. *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 21(3), 354-374.

The foremost reason for this nostalgia for the past is the end of the union's shared economic system., this change was a very negative transition to a market economy which, over the years, only caused negative changes in the living conditions of Russians.

However, the return of nostalgia for the communist era is also linked to a reduction in the perception of the political weight that Russia has in the world, despite Putin's policies in recent years have brought Moscow to be a fundamental pawn in the world chessboard. We are in front of a common sense of belonging to a great political-military power is a non-negligible factor of collective identity.

Russians are as some Eastern German favourable to the return of the USSR, this percentage has largely decreased during the era of Putin. Instead, the number of people who would like Russia to head a federation of republics on the model of the European Union<sup>6</sup> would grow.

Yet today we are talking about a globalized and multicultural society and where in numerous countries locked national and religious communities have formed, which not only decline to re-assimilate, but even refuse to adapt. Renowned areas and entire cities where generations of immigrants already live on social benefits and do not speak the language of the host country. The answer to this model of behavior is the growth of xenophobia among the public populations, an attempt to defend one's own interests, work, and social profits from foreign competitors. People are shocked by the aggressive pressure on their traditions, on the usual way of life, and are really afraid of losing their national identity, which is why even for a growing economic crisis and the capitalist system, we tend to look at the past, with nostalgia.

We observe of both historical descriptive and archival research, it is important to conceptualize and operationalize *Ostalgie*<sup>7</sup> in details putting a lot of attention on possible mistakes, considering that it is one indirectly measurable concept that is neither a wish for a change of political system, nor presents any active process. The phenomenon of *Ostalgie* revolves around expression through cultural artefacts, such as TV shows, return of GDR products and objects of consumption; and Internet sites that sell memorabilia. Moreover, the years Sixty and Seventy are represented through material culture, counting furniture, wallpaper and outdated technology, and etc. etc..

We know of to have compared past and present in such close detailed manner, some traditional EU and some new EU countries, as such, it is found to present a valuable comparison. If the similarities do exist, they should encourage further research of this matter. Though no prediction was made implying that such similarities will be observed in the research, finding them would be an interesting starting point for future referencing and investigating. Same goes for the trend of *Ostalgie*, as it is

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<sup>6</sup> See Figus A. (2011), *Sistema Europa*, Eurilink, Roma.

<sup>7</sup> See Berdahl, D. (1999). '(N) *Ostalgie* for the present: memory, longing, and East German things. *Ethnos*, 64(2), 192-211.

predicted it is experiencing its growth and will probably culminate in the near future, which would bring changes on the whole political and social scene of the world.

It is clear and evident we need to take the picture of the past and the picture of today, in globalisation era where is planned to belong to the post-positivistic paradigm, strongly grounding on conceptuality. A lot of questions are on the table, the question or gives an answer what are the causes of Ostalgie, it focuses on the way it is developing and where. Further, it does not deny or overrule the impact of socioeconomic pretext, it recognizes it, but emphasizes the importance of multinational political level and social movements.

The role of human experience in this research as well as the psychological factors will contribute to the findings. Multiculturalism is the existence of, and/or support for the presence of several distinct cultural or ethnic groups within a society. In this case the promotion of ideology of USSR was the internationalism which is quite different from current Multiculturalism. The collapse of USSR was the result of internal paradigm shift in ruling party establishment, the multiculturalism didn't influence very much that society<sup>8</sup>. The "culture of the Soviet Union" accepted through several stages during his existence, in fact it was contributed to by people of several nationalities from every single one of fifteen republics, even though a slight majority of them were Russians.

The Soviet state reinforced cultural institutions, but also carried out strict restriction, how it is possible to day to have nostalgia of this, in a society where we need to promote the multiculturalism and not the prevalence of the nation. Beyond the globalisation we have not only the national interests, in fact, it is important care must be taken to the topic of history and anthropology.

When German-speaking countries anthropologists and Italian anthropologists have a meeting to debate the anthropological understanding of past and enter into the similarities and variances between the Italian and the German academic traditions in this regard, they find lots and lots of common points, common places, and they depart from this.

## **2. Ostalgie and Multiculturalism**

Depart from multiculturalism and cultural historian and not only from an integration project.

They don't want the approval, but the respect of their identity.

We talk less of integration, because we do not like the concept of approval, we talk about most of multiculturalism and respect for the qualities and differences, and above all respect for others. culture often does not have a face but many faces.

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<sup>8</sup> Ekman, J., & Linde, J. (2005). Communist nostalgia and the consolidation of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe. *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 21(3), 354-374.

Important is to start a dialogue, it is the key of the lecture. Sporadically in life there are those moments of unimaginable fulfilment which cannot be completely explained by those symbols called words. I would like to return to some concepts expressed by Martin Luther King, about the expression that symbolizes the spirit and the external form of our encounter is “nonviolence”, we adopt the means of “nonviolence”, we need to find the best way to cooperate, but to cooperate we need to be in two and to look the future<sup>9</sup>.

Therefore, multicultural and intercultural must therefore be included in the Soviet system to understand if there can be a relationship even in conjunction with the phenomenon of “ostalgie”. In multicultural society there are more peoples or ethnic groups, separated from one another, each in their own physical and cultural areas and rarely come into contact.

A step forward is made with the intercultural society where in a relational context the various linguistic and cultural groups establish a constant dialectical relationship of mutual enrichment based on mutual respect, on the interest for what the other represents or can represent.

The “ostalgie” is the nostalgia for the lost socialist empire. The Soviet past knows several variations in the block of the former Warsaw pact. In united Germany, the memories of the socialist era are distributed in the territories of the former GDR.

In such a vast territory, keeping such a diverse society together was not a simple task. It is now difficult to believe that in Russia there can be a marked change that favours the rights of minorities and a more multicultural society, it is not known how the population does “Not-Russian” will react to the innovations proposed by Putin, and how multiculturalism can act, and if the Russian culture is to be strengthened as an indoctrination to loosen the strength of its traditions or adapts itself in the hope of integration.

### **3. Ostalgies - what past for what future?**

We must think that often all that has been experienced and that no longer exists, we can remember with a sense of ambivalence, on the one hand of pain, on the other of nostalgia.

If then what no longer exists, is not a person, a situation, but is a country, a nation, a way of life and thinking, like Eastern Germany, then we can say that feelings and

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<sup>9</sup> See Figus A., (2014), Multiculturalism, Azerbaijan's development and Trentino-Alto Adige-Sudtirolo, Baku Humanitarian Forum 2014, Materials of the 2012 Baku International Humanitarian Forum 2014, pp.214-229.

memories become so many and important and combine private and working life, admit or even worse force to believe that they were wrong, can create a problem, a problem that today we call "Ostalgie."

It is normal to think that "the past" is an important period to understand our mistakes and our successes, but above all, the past is fundamental to understand our present and our future. Analyzing what has been, and making comparisons with our present, helps us to create a narrative thread that tells and will guide the future of our lives.

But what happens when we believe that the past that we have lived through and that we would like to treasure for our present and our future, is "demonized" and even lead us to think and say that everything was wrong, when, we, in fact, are sure that wrong is not, and that should be revived?

All this generates a state of manifest "mental confusion" and it is precisely this "confusion" that has meant that not all the citizens of the former East Germany were happy to be in a world based on capitalism and democracy, but with less protection and guarantees.

In fact, many East Germans were convinced that the fall of the wall, that the "change", in addition to freedom, the end of the socialist dictatorship and especially the repression and tight control of the Stasi, would bring the advantages of a more modern, richer and more advanced society than the one in which they lived, without losing any of the positive aspects of the previous life, such as public health, social security, education, the very low cost of living, the sense of community, safety at work, the clarity of the rules, phenomena that made the population in some ways more relaxed, without the stress of today.

Not all this happened and there was a logical misunderstanding, "it was better when it was worse".

The fact that "change" on some essential aspects of life, such as the satisfaction of basic needs (e.g. health) or safety needs (e.g. work), has compromised a "discounted" satisfaction, can only be lived negatively.

The Ostalgie can be seen, as a form of defence of its past, but it also becomes, paradoxically, a defence against the (often rightly) destructive judgments towards East Germany and towards its rigidity and its limitations of freedom. The "change" did not bring with it the "paradise of capitalism", but an extremely competitive society (to which no one was accustomed), in fact in the GDR its dictatorial system of control and repression, led people to greater social cohesion to have much more solidarity in everyday life, but today people live much more closed in on themselves, much more isolated.

Above all, however, there has been a transformation of society, in which the skills and experience of the citizens of the East have not been taken into account at all, making them feel like second-class citizens.

In fact, immediately after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, there was a phenomenon of change in the ruling class, the former East Germany saw the replacement of its entire elite of people who were no longer confirmed in top positions, and consequently the citizens who did not belong to that class were led to think that if the ruling class was cut off, they would most likely also be as simple workers.

Therefore, the Ostalgie serves to defend and protect the past and also because otherwise you would lose the difficult path of life, difficulties, suffering, all those people who have lived in the GDR. All this does not mean in any way that we want to recover the lost state, but rather that in some way there is recognition of their wounded dignity, and that their work and their effort have not been in vain.

Ostalgia can be defined as a romantic idea about what has passed, it is "memory", and it is understandable (maybe not in all justifiable), let's always remember that every man (generally) nostalgically remembers his past and the citizens of East Germany, have no other.

Finally, the Ostalgie is probably a condemnation of a political system that has collapsed, but it is also a form of defense against those men who have in that system. Finally, the Ostalgie is probably a condemnation of a political system that has collapsed, but it is also a form of defense against those men who lived in that system. The ostalgies are also the answer to an evident inequality perceived by the inhabitants of the former East Germany, dictated by the fact that the collapse of the wall generated the phenomenon of a new fall, in the East, everything had to be changed, everything had to be reformed and in the West nothing had to be changed, the citizens of the East were the students and those of the West of the masters of life.

All this has also generated important differences in rights between one and the other and this, from a psychological point of view, has been particularly harmful for the East Germans, giving rise to a series of complex "natural" desires, one thinks nostalgically of the pleasant aspects (which, however, existed), something that was not so terrible and bad, and one wonders why there is no longer one because it has been destroyed, this too is Ostalgie.

Ostalgie today is, to conclude, also in part, the system that binds 2 generations, that of grandparents, who built that system, that of grandchildren who strongly wanted change and freedom. The oldest are "ostalgic" by heart, the youngest are "ostalgic" by necessity, the latter, are generating intransigent and aggressive policies, which also frighten Europe (such as the Neo-Nazi movements), because of disappointed expectations, missed promises, generating a reaction typical of the sub-proletariat, still, fortunately in an embryonic phase, but which, once again, shows how a large part of the population is looking for greater institutional protection to protect the national community.

In reality, the Ostalgie does nothing but show us how the division between East and West is still strongly marked, in the elderly, in young people and especially in politics, and other generations will be needed so that the democratic system in the former

East Germany finds an adequate application that will turn the Ostalgie into a simple faded memory, clouded by the prospects of a certainly better future.

#### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the “ostalgie” could also arise in relation to the multicultural society but we need to identify the multiculturalism in Soviet Union. There was the multiculturalism in USSR because it was possible to consider the ethnic groups had their republics and autonomies in USSR, because their own territory for their indigenous culture – was a form of multiculturalism, in fact, multiculturalism means that one territory permits different cultures and sometimes non-consistent with each other and to co-exist on one shared by everybody and by other cultures territory. At that time in URSS it was not properly called multiculturalism, but today the “ostalgie”, it starts from that model of society. USSR ethnic groups could enjoy their culture on their own territory and ethnic republics and autonomies, not much irritating other cultures of other territories, maybe didn't give a hoot about ethnic roots and culture but associated themselves only with citizenship of USSR and turned around the communist ideology, “ostalgie” of certainties, today more and more in search of identity....”kagdila Lenin”.....

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