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B.A. (Hons) Media

Dissertation

Mediating a Murder: An analysis of Russian and British newspaper reportage and its subsequent socio-political ramifications following the assassination of Alexander Litvinenko in 2006.

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Abstract

This text identifies, critiques and evaluates a selection of Russian and British newspaper articles following the 2006 assassination of Alexander Litvinenko in London. It discusses the dichotomising ways in which the story of Litvinenko's death was conveyed by the British and Russian media, and attempts to identify both the reasons why their narratives were so radically different and the subsequent socio-political effects of their disparate reportage.

Whilst there is some academic literature which discusses the Litvinenko story from the perspective of criminality and politics, the journalistic and communicative implications of the case have been scarcely identified – this paper will focus, solely, on the way in which the techniques of the mass media were used to create the spectacle of Litvinenko's death. Using a combination of lexicographical, rhetorical and critical discourse analysis, this text identifies key themes which are perpetuated in the mediation of the Litvinenko story from both sides of the globe.

Through the aforementioned research methods, this text identifies two central, inter-continental conflicts, 'reinforced by the curiously elusive figure of Alexander Litvinenko, and his capacity to transgress categories' (Hutchings & Miazhevich, 2009, p. 225). A war on terror and brutality is debated, whilst also discussing a metaphorical feud; that of the disparate national identities between the east and west, deliberating Russia as an archetypal and transcending enemy. Further areas which are considered in this text include: news values, the concept of 'fake news' and moral panics – specifically discussing how these models can contribute to the creation and perpetuation of banal and injurious national identity stereotypes.

This text concludes that, for a diffusion of reasons, including spectacle and state influence, the way in which Alexander Litvinenko's death was communicated by Russia and the United Kingdom are in stark contrast. Semantic and rhetorical techniques, harnessed by the institutions which design and disseminate news, led to the application of radically different frames by the two countries. This dissertation aims to expose how mainstream media can construct a narrative based on conjecture and recriminations – a story which, eventually, would have much wider contextual implications.

Introduction

This dissertation will discuss the contrasting ways in which the death of former KGB agent Alexander Litvinenko was mediated by the newspaper outfits of both the United Kingdom and Litvinenko's homeland, Russia. In addition, it will examine the story as a spectacle and discuss the communication of his death through the lens of relevant, scholarly theory, whilst scrutinizing the agendas of some contentious media outlets which were so keen to pronounce on the event. Whilst the British public will hold their own complex opinions of their native press – the Russian equivalent has been the recipient of some acrimony from Alexander Litvinenko's wife, Marina. She describes the Russian media as a 'propaganda machine' with President Vladimir Putin using it to 'do whatever he wants'. She continues to describe a 'Russian counternarrative for every version of events [...] a parallel world where facts are twisted' (Marconi, 2015, p. 68).

This text, harnessing pertinent research methods and relevant academic literature, will examine Marina Litvinenko's statement, researching newspaper articles from both sides of the globe to determine whether there were any pertinent differences between the way in which Alexander Litvinenko's death was mediated by the United Kingdom and Russia, whilst attempting to hypothesize as to why these differences may exist. Using a combination of lexical, rhetorical and critical discourse analysis, this text will attempt to expose editorial decisions made by media institutions, discussing their role in the reinforcement of national identities and, in the case of the British reportage, the subsequent excoriation of Russia as a whole.

Born in Voronezh, Russia, Alexander Litvinenko was a former KGB intelligence officer who fled to London, from Moscow, in 2000 following persecution as a consequence of his dissenting tone towards the Kremlin. Soon after, he - along with his wife, Marina, and son, Anatoly - was granted asylum by the UK and they settled in the Muswell Hill area of north London. Six years later, Mr Litvinenko would meet an untimely and barbaric

fate – his death caused by Polonium-210 poisoning: the most dangerous substance known to man.

Upon Litvinenko's death on the 23rd November 2006, it became immediately obvious to London's Metropolitan Police that its narrative would become something of a worldwide spectacle, with 'news values and other ideologies of newspapers tending to favour negative topics for countries that are ideologically or ethnically different, distant or deviant' (Van Dijk, 1987, p. 361). In the blurb of his book *The Litvinenko File*, Martin Sixsmith (2007) describes the circumstances of Litvinenko's death as 'a shocking act of murder when Russia's war with itself spilled over onto the streets of London and made the world take notice'. This is a bold statement and one that certainly reverberates in the tenuous and transcending image of Russia; one that has long been perpetuated in western culture – that of the soviet enemy.

Heightened by the early *James Bond* films of the 1960s and '70s, such as *Dr No* and *The Spy Who Loved Me*, Russia as the archetypal enemy has long prevailed in western cultural consciousness. The action and distraction of Bond is similarly prevalent in the Litvinenko story. A drama in its own right, the dramatic narrative of his death craved an Agatha Christie-style denouement; a murderer, a culprit, a guilty party. From the very beginning of this case, Russia was identified by the British media as being just that: guilty.

Literature Review

This section will evaluate the texts and topics which have been selected to inform and enhance the conception of this dissertation. It will revolve around three central areas, namely: reviewing relevant, pre-existing academic literature surrounding the Litvinenko case, expanding on pertinent research methods to support this study, and, finally, discussing relevant, scholarly literature which will serve to delineate the Litvinenko story through the scaffold of modern media and communication theory. The texts that have been selected will expand on these three areas, helping to both inform the available knowledge of the subject and assist in answering the research question.

Because of the reverberating global implications of the Litvinenko case, there is a myriad of academic literature spanning a variety of different subjects and disciplines. The most common of these areas are political affairs and forensic science; due to the transnational repercussions of Litvinenko's death, the former was immediately likely to become entrenched in this story, whilst the brutal and cunning nature of his murder attracts intrigue from the world of pathology. There is, however, something of a vacuum when it comes to the analysis of this case from the perspective of media and communication. There is only a single scholarly article which discusses Litvinenko's death from these perspectives, specifically analysing the television coverage of the event. An article entitled 'The Polonium Trail to Islam: Litvinenko, liminality and television's (cold) war on terror' analyses coverage from both the BBC and Russian Channel One news, discussing how this 'war on terror reconstructs national identities and international antagonisms' (Hutchings & Miazhevich, 2009, p. 219).

Whilst that article focuses solely on the televisual coverage of Litvinenko's death, rather than the newspaper reportage, it is useful in highlighting some common and recurrent

facets of the mediation of this case. For example: the forging of very disparate national identities of Russia and the United Kingdom, resultant of the imbrication of conjecture and spectacle. This is a theme that, likewise, becomes apparent in the newspaper coverage of the case, just as Hutchings and Miazhevich recognise it in the televisual communication.

In addition, the article identifies the correlation between Litvinenko's murder and an archetypal, transcending, global cultural icon: *James Bond* - the 'suave, distinctly un-American warrior against communism whose very image conjures up nostalgia for British imperial might' (Hutchings & Miazhevich, 2009, p. 221). This cultural conglomerate, ubiquitous across the globe, is also something which closely corresponds to the newspaper coverage of Litvinenko's death. The linguistic choices and semantic connotations of journalists, just like the stylistic and thematic considerations of television news producers, serve to paint a picture of cut-and-thrust action and distraction, emblematic of a typical anti-Soviet *James Bond* film of the 1960s and '70s.

To ultimately 'uncover the buried ideology' (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 15) of newspaper journalism, it was imperative to explore the process of analysing, dissecting and critiquing newspaper coverage. This involved exploring methods that can be harnessed to critically analyse and delineate the print media of both the United Kingdom and Russia. Specifically, the area of lexicographical research and critical discourse analysis were pertinent here. Bob Franklin's (2008) book *Pulling Newspapers Apart – Analysing Print Journalism* discusses the former, whilst John Richardson's (2007) *Analysing Newspapers – An approach from Critical Discourse Analysis* debates the latter. Both of these texts are discursive of key arguments of critical news analysis.

Bob Franklin's book *Pulling Newspapers Apart – Analysing Print Journalism* features an in-depth, dedicated chapter on the analysis of *Crime Reporting*. It asserts that 'while the majority of studies of crime reporting focus on the narrative structure of the text, it is also important to consider the visual and linguistic choices made by journalists and editors, particularly in different types of newspapers' (Wardle, 2008, p. 145). It is these

‘linguistic choices’ that the study of lexicography looks to expose, whilst also hypothesizing as to why those choices were implemented. In this context, the ‘linguistic choices’ made in the mediation of Alexander Litvinenko’s death on both sides of the globe are radically dichotomising. The use of lexicographical research allows one to reveal those implicit editorial decisions.

According to Richardson (2007, p. 26), the overall aim of critical discourse analysis ‘has been to link linguistic analysis to social analysis’. This is something which can be directly applied to the mediation of Alexander Litvinenko’s death, purely because of its international social and political ramifications. He states that ‘language use plays a part in the production of social life’ and, thus ‘discourse must play a part in producing and reproducing social inequalities’ (Richardson, 2007). In essence, Richardson is implying that, through the lens of critical discourse analysis, it is possible for the researcher to elucidate the text on a page whilst recognising the broader social implications that the lexical and rhetorical devices used by journalists may have, in this instance, on both the production and protraction of national identities.

However, despite both the assertions of Franklin and Richardson on the broader analysis of newspaper journalism, the transcending issue with this type of qualitative research remains pervasive. Because this type of research will not provide quantifiable data, it relies solely on the inference of the researcher. As a result, it struggles to provide an ultimate answer to a question. Whilst it may substantiate one’s hypothesis, it can never truly give a definitive verdict, unlike some methods of quantitative research.

In order to analyse the mediation of Alexander Litvinenko’s death through the lens of media and communication studies, it is necessary to utilise some scholarly theory to critique the newspaper articles which have been selected for this study. The central theoretical frameworks which have been harnessed in this research are: Dr Douglas Kellner’s concept of *Media Culture and the Triumph of the Spectacle* (2005) and Professor Stanley Cohen’s framework of *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972) .

Kellner (2005, p. 58) discusses the way in which ‘entertainment permeate[s] news and information, and a tabloidized infotainment culture is more and more popular’. This hybridity between news and entertainment is something which correlates very closely with the British reportage of Litvinenko’s death, returning, once more, to the links between cultural icons such as *James Bond*, as highlighted by Hutchings and Miazhevich (2009), and discussed previously. Furthermore, Kellner (2005, p. 58) debates how ‘political and social life are shaped more and more by media spectacle’ with ‘social and political conflicts [...] played out on the screens of media culture which display spectacles like sensational murder cases’. This concept of political repercussions, shaped from media spectacle, is one that is deeply entrenched in the communicative implications of Litvinenko’s death. The intercontinental relationship between Russia and the United Kingdom following Litvinenko’s poisoning was certainly fraught, with major politicians from both sides of the globe often fighting in the ring of the press. Kellner (2005, p. 58) highlights how ‘media spectacle becomes a defining feature of globalization in an era of terrorism and war’, his framework will help to expose a series of conventions ‘specifically functional in the framework of news production’ such as ‘dramatization, personification, group attribution and negativization’ (Van Dijk, 1987, p. 362), considering how these techniques led to the broader socio-political ramifications following Litvinenko’s death.

Whilst Kellner’s framework will be useful in recognising the rhetorical and indoctrinative capacity of journalism, Stanley Cohen’s seminal model *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972) provides the structure for analysing representations constructed in the mediation of the Litvinenko case and, subsequently, their repercussions on national identities and the way in which this story further perpetuated international and transcending stereotypes. Cohen’s concept states that, at the crux of any moral panic or societal angst, there is a ‘folk devil’. This is a person, persons, concept, rule, idea – something which sparks anger and is castigated as the deviant culprit at the centre of a moral panic.

Whilst the circumstances of Litvinenko's death were certainly abhorrent, it did provide a more nuanced type of panic to the more mundane societal loathing of binge drinkers or benefit scroungers, for example. Rather less enigmatic, though, is the 'folk devil' which the British newspapers chose to condemn: Russia. The use of metonymy here is important – the British press didn't merely accuse one man of Litvinenko's assassination, they indicted the entire nation: its government, its people and, perhaps most significantly, its culture. Cohen's scaffold will provide the means of analysing these recriminations and dissecting the way in which Russia as a 'folk devil' was constructed by the British press.

Methodology

This study involves, amongst other aspects discussed previously, ‘dispelling the myth’ that ‘Russia is a dangerous adversary’ (Simes, 2019) and explores how these largely unsubstantiated attitudes of the west were fuelled and forged in the aftermath of Litvinenko’s death.

The central research method harnessed for this study, chosen specifically to explore the areas discussed previously, is critical discourse analysis. A tool used to ‘uncover buried ideology’ (Machin & Mayr, 2012) in a text, this method serves to explore, extract and examine lexical and rhetorical conventions used by journalists and editors.

Importantly, though, critical discourse analysis doesn’t merely highlight said editorial decisions, it can contribute to the wider interpretation of the implication of those decisions, and the socio-political reverberations certain newspaper reportage can have. Essentially, enabling the researcher to examine language as a form of social practice. Semantic modality is something which is somewhat ambiguous, the ability to differentiate between, for example: epistemic modality – the uncertainty or ambivalence of a speaker – something which will become apparent in the Russian coverage of the Litvinenko case. Compared to deontic modality – lexis which wield a greater, autocratic influence – a theme recurrent in the British reportage - is a useful asset in an analysis of this kind.

Central to this study is the evaluation of four newspaper articles selected from the British and Russian press, respectively. Features taken from the somewhat conservative British broadsheet *The Telegraph* will be compared to the now-defunct, former state-governed Russian newspaper *RIA Novosti*. Articles have been selected at two key junctures in the week following Alexander Litvinenko’s murder, providing disparate coverage ensuing crucial revelations during the investigation. These are taken from: A) The announcement of Litvinenko’s death on the 24th November 2006, and B) The first insinuation of Russian involvement on the 29th November 2006, following the disclosure of the use of Polonium-

210 in the incident and the subsequent ‘fascination that polonium exercised on British media imagination’ (Hutchings & Miazhevich, 2009, p. 226). The scaffold of critical discourse analysis will be harnessed to explore the selected articles and scrutinise their construction - examining lexicography, rhetoric and socio-political bias.

This type of qualitative analysis, however, is plagued with certain issues. Despite its use in identifying patterns and its subsequent ability to help explain why said patterns emerge, its inability, in this instance, to provide quantifiable and irrefutable data may be an issue. Whilst the collation of data is not something which this study will rely on, the inclusion of enumerative research can bequeath a certain scientific edge. This type of qualitative investigation, though, hinges almost solely on the inference and interpretation of the researcher, meaning that it can never provide a true, ultimate answer to the research question. The use of empirical research, here, is likely to conclude with a ‘hypothesis, concept, model or theory’ (Watson & Hill, 1993, p. 66) rather than a definitive and indisputable verdict. As is ubiquitous with linguistic and lexical research, the connotation and suggestion of semantics is entirely subjective rather than objective.

This research into the mediation of Alexander Litvinenko’s death, and its subsequent implications and representations, has to be entirely based on qualitative analysis. It is this detailed reading that exposes the implicit signifiers that construct the more overt agenda that one sees on the page. It may be simple to hypothesize, “*The Telegraph* accuse Russia of this aberration”, but what is more difficult to explain is how this becomes apparent. The methods of analysis that have been discussed will contribute to answering that question. Whilst some quantifiable data may give the study a more scientific footing, the aim of this research is to examine not merely what we read, but why we read it.

Findings and Discussion

This section will discuss conflicting articles written at two key periods during the aftermath of Litvinenko's death. After the initial analysis and dissection (reviewing all four newspaper reports), broader, societal scaffolds will be discussed, in addition to the scholarly frameworks set out in the Literature Review, attempting to reach a 'point de capiton'. In essence, this is the 'interaction of the signifier and signified when they are knotted together' (Lacan, 2018, p. 169); where both the discourse analysis and scholarly structures collude to crystalize as a form of concluding assertion or understanding.

The first epoch of newspaper coverage revolves around the 24th November 2006 – the day following Alexander Litvinenko's death and the first opportunities for newspapers to discuss the breaking story. An article entitled *Former spy 'poisoned by Russians' dies in hospital* (Barnwell, 2006) discusses the story from the British perspective, whilst Russia's *RIA Novosti* (2006) led with *Ex-spy's death should not be used for political provocation – Putin*. The first day of this case, and the beginning of a worldwide spectacle, ensured the two outfits could outline and express their agendas at the first opening. It is the 'opportunity for the mass media to influence in making a certain issue a public agenda, a main focus or prime issue which members of society and public concern about' (Razinah Binti Mohd Zain, 2014). This analysis of framing – the method of 'organising principles, themes, motifs and stereotypes that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world' (D'Angelo, 2018, p. 206) – and its imbrication with agenda setting, contributes to our understanding of how the mediation of the Litvinenko case was complicit in the forging of national identities.

Using methods of critical discourse analysis and lexicographical research outlined previously, it is clear to see the antonymous frame that the two newspapers, and thus, countries, utilise. This, overtly, becomes evident through the alternate modality harnessed in the two articles. *RIA Novosti's* reportage is littered with evidence of epistemic modality; this is where 'the author expresses uncertainty' (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 187), becoming vague and evasive. Repeated use of a refractive lexis, harnessing terms such as

‘speculation’, ‘alleged’, ‘dismissed’, ‘nonsense’, ‘discredit’ and ‘no grounds’ ensure the reader is aware of *RIA Novosti*’s position – that of evasion and, crucially, deflection. Whilst being seemingly unwilling to be drawn on any castigation from some western media, the state-owned Russian newspaper is subtly preparing its arsenal of recrimination, something that will become evident as the reportage proliferates.

Saliently, the most explicit indication of an article’s intention is its headline: *Ex-spy’s death should not be used for political provocation*. Immediately this is indicative of the state-governed outfit’s intention to plea for no ‘political provocation’, indicating their anticipation of acrimony from the west and their desire to quash the spectacle from the very beginning – highlighting Russian consciousness of their own ambiguous profile in the west. As part of their retort, *RIA Novosti* describe Alexander Litvinenko as a ‘traitor’, ‘defector’ and ‘fugitive’, with the report continuing to refer to him as a ‘strong critic’ of the Kremlin. Whilst the latter may be a truism, the vocabulary used to describe Litvinenko is deliberate and, somewhat, libellous. The rhetoric and agenda, harnessed by state-owned *RIA Novosti*, is designed to defame the image of the ‘traitor’ – to legitimate his death as nothing more than the unfortunate demise of someone to whom it was merited after his so-called treachery of Russia. To synopsise, there are two key weapons used in the arsenal of the Russian media here – they intended to both refute and rebuke. This article, similar to the one which will be discussed later, is early evidence of Russia’s eagerness to distance themselves from the story that was emerging in London, conscious of the ‘historical, political and socio-psychological’ (Hutchings & Miazhevich, 2009, p. 222) ramifications which would be entrenched in the drama.

The techniques of deflection and, in this instance, recrimination are also utilised in the first communication of Litvinenko’s murder by *The Telegraph*. Whereas the Russian report includes evidence of disregard, the British equivalent seems entirely suffused with accusation. Similar to the previous piece, the first, and most overt, indicator of an article’s agenda lies within its headline. ‘*Poisoned by Russians*’ included in *The Telegraph*’s interpretation of events leaves little doubt amongst readers as to whom the guilty party is. The British broadsheet began, and would continue, to frame the death of Alexander Litvinenko as an attack on a British citizen on British soil – embellishing this one news

story to create a global conflict of national identity and, consequently, morality. Litvinenko is described as a 'hero of Britain' fighting against 'the evil forces of Russia'. This acts as unambiguous evidence; a hero of Britain, fighting the evil of Russia – there is no question as to whom 'good' and 'bad' apply in the unusual framing harnessed by *The Telegraph*. Parenthetically, Litvinenko is described as a man with 'a clear conscience, a heart and dignity', whilst the report also describes how 'his wife, Marina, had been at his bedside all week'. Here, the British press were inciting an obvious ploy – that of empathy; he ultimately became 'a more credible and respected figure after his death than he was alive' (Marconi, 2015, p. 67). Utilised by *The Telegraph* as a pawn in their excoriation of Russia, they continue to describe his death as 'the murder of a British citizen on British soil'. This is deliberate and vitally important when analysing the slant of Britain's news-media. Repeated correlation between Litvinenko and Britain further highlights whom the prey of the heinous crime is; an attack, not only on Alexander Litvinenko himself, but on British democracy and on the civilised culture of the west; with the entirety of Britain becoming victims of the 'rancour, revenge and malice of forces in Russia' (Barnwell, 2006).

Perhaps, though, the rhetoric utilised by *The Telegraph*, whilst is obviously defamatory of Russia, may indeed be advantageous for Britain. The Russian 'other', as mediated by the British press consciously places the United Kingdom on something of a pedestal – a modern, moral, metropolis, veritably advanced of the backwards, brutal and barbaric Russia who 'pose a threat to our norms, values, principles and religion' (Van Dijk, 1997, p. 40). Western states consider Russia as a mere 'index' against whom 'they define their sense of national identity' (Siddi, 2012, p. 1) with a 'constant sense of confrontation felt by westerners dealing with the east and its varying degrees of inferiority and strength' (Said, 1978, p. 201). As postcolonial-media scholar Albert Memmi (2003, p. 123) describes, 'just as the bourgeoisie proposes an image of the proletariat, the existence of the colonizer requires that an image of the colonized be suggested'. Here – these binary opposites are reproduced, as the very image of a backward-thinking Russia delicately and sub-textually implies the company of a forward-thinking Britain; two very disparate nations, happy to maintain their distance for the sake of precious and fragile national identities.

The next pair of articles that this essay will discuss are taken from the 28th November 2006 – five days after Litvinenko’s death. Here, after the initial furore of the breaking news had subsided, other peripheral and spectacular narratives began to creep into the reportage of the story. *RIA Novosti*’s (2006) article entitled ‘*UK Police find radiation in Berezovsky’s office building*’ attempts to pose an alternative suspect, one that, aligned with the Kremlin’s rhetoric and its desire for ‘the polonium trail’ to ‘never quite come to an end’ (Hutchings & Miazhevich, 2009, p. 227), also happened to be a Russian ‘traitor’.

Boris Berezovsky was a Russian oligarch. A billionaire businessman, he, like Litvinenko, was forced into exile from his home country due to antagonisms surrounding the Russian secret service. Described by *RIA Novosti* as a ‘fugitive’, ‘defector’, and ‘an outspoken critic of President Vladimir Putin’ – the Russian reporters, once more, loaded their arsenal of deflection and recrimination, harnessing similar adjectives to those used to describe Alexander Litvinenko when *RIA Novosti* first communicated his death. The article swiftly becomes crass and suggestive of a labyrinth of unfounded theories with Berezovsky, the ‘traitor’, centric to them all. ‘The discovery of polonium in his office implies his involvement in Litvinenko’s death’ the article denotes, ‘he will already have taken care of his alibi and would accuse special services’, it continues. According to Alexander Litvinenko’s wife, Marina, ‘in 2000, Putin realised that using the media you can do whatever you want [...] for every version of events there will be a Russian counter-narrative, a parallel world where facts are twisted’ (Marconi, 2015, p. 67). This ‘parallel world’ is evident here as *RIA Novosti* (2006), accuse another Russian ‘enemy’, Boris Berezovsky, of the ‘deliberate poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko’ and his attempt to ‘kill several birds with one stone’. Many believe that this prevailing narrative of Russian misinformation is attributed to one man: Vladislav Surkov. Known as the ‘one Russian that turned reality inside out, bringing about a political spectrum which didn’t represent anything real (Gatehouse, 2019)’, Surkov, an aide to President Putin, completes PR tasks on behalf of the Kremlin. His style revolves around allegory where ‘facts are irrelevant, with myths multiplying around him like bacteria in a petri dish’ (Gatehouse, 2019). As a result, one might interpret information disseminated by this state-owned outfit, influenced by the epithets of Surkov, as being contentious and discombobulated, at the very least, assuming that they have little hesitation in refracting the truth for the sake of precious political prevail.

Perhaps, though, there is an explanation for the somewhat disingenuous reporting disseminated by *RIA Novosti* – a lesson that was learnt, in the most barbaric and brutal fashion, by Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya. Whilst researching the Russian government's involvement in the aftermath of the Chechen War, Politkovskaya was ambushed, shot and killed in the street. Sadly, and somewhat unconceivably to those in the west who enjoy the myriad benefits of the free press, this is not an aberration for Russian journalists. In her book, published posthumously and edited to include the story of her murder, Politkovskaya (2011) describes the difference between two types of journalists in Russia: those who are either 'on side' or 'off-side'. Under President Putin's 'pyramid of power', almost the 'entire present generation of Russian journalists, and those sections of the mass media which have survived to date, are clowns whose job it is to keep the public entertained'. She continues to exclaim that many of her journalist colleagues are 'prepared to do anything required of them; to report interviews without worrying about the truth, to write about scandals even when there are none' (Politkovskaya, 2011, p. 17).

Her distinction is that Russian journalists take one of two sides: 'on-side' refers to those 'appointed by Putin's presidential administration', who do as they're told and, crucially, support the Kremlin rhetoric. Whilst 'off-side' journalists are those who look to expose big stories and are not afraid to besmirch the Russian government – they become 'the enemy' (Politkovskaya, 2011, p. 3). As in the sad case of Anna Politkovskaya, though, several 'off-side' journalists meet an untimely and unjust fate, and, 'as the numbers of one kind of journalist fall, there is an increase in the number of those who *prefer* undemanding journalism' (Politkovskaya, 2011, p. 24), shunning their responsibility to the truth in an industry 'intimately tied with Russian electoral politics' (Goldfarb, 2007, p. 32). This could contribute to our understanding as to why the reportage disseminated by *RIA Novosti*, a government-owned news outlet, was so quick to set their agenda of support for the Russian rhetoric in retaliation to suspicious glances coming from the western media.

The British equivalent of this story is rather more overt in its framing and agenda – its headline ‘*RED ALERT: The sinister death of Alexander Litvinenko has unveiled the shadowy world of ‘Londongrad’ – a melting pot of dissidents, defectors and billionaire oligarchs*’ (Wansell, 2006) is immediately indicative of that. Here, all of the scholarly frameworks and cultural connotations, identified previously, collude to crystalize and shape the international reverberations of this case as a whole. Whilst Russia’s state-governed press’ attempts at counter-accusation and deflection have been evidenced, *The Telegraph*, here, combine both factual aspects of the case and spurious conjecture, based on cultural nuances and stereotypical national identities, to devise a piece titled by a hugely provocative headline, fuelled by the coincidence ‘with a period of heightened UK media concern about locally grown terrorist activity’ (Hutchings & Miazhevich, 2009, p. 225) .

The report, which discusses the impact of ‘mysterious Russians’, further alienates the ‘rogue’ Russia as a mere backwards ‘other’, inferior to the omnipotent west – an agenda which *The Telegraph* had already began to perpetuate through its first report on the Litvinenko case. Here, we see a lucid example of a ‘folk devil’ and a subsequent ‘moral panic’ – a group of individuals, in this case: Russians, reproved through hyperbolic mediation by the right-thinking ensemble that dominate the British press. As with every moral panic, the issue of ‘the social construction of deviance’ is important. Therefore, the contribution of the mass media, and their ‘depiction between good and evil, black and white, them and us’ (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994, p. 99), is vital in regard to setting an agenda – whether they choose to condone or recriminate. Public opinion can so easily be influenced by the information of the press as ‘people do not spontaneously invent negative opinions’ (Van Dijk, 1987, p. 359). The migrant, for instance, be it an economic migrant, an asylum seeker or an illegal immigrant, often saturates the front pages, particularly with the right-leaning newspapers to whom sovereignty and patriotism are at the crux of British culture. Litvinenko, though, is different here, enacting a more ‘positive version of the asylum seeker phenomenon’ (Hutchings & Miazhevich, 2009, p. 226). Described as a more diluted ‘émigré’, Litvinenko becomes both a ‘time-out’ from the ‘paranoid, security-ridden agenda to which British news had become wedded following the 7/7 suicide bombings’ and a ‘metaphoric recapitulation’ of that agenda ‘cleansed of its awkward ethnic colouring’ (Hutchings & Miazhevich, 2009, p. 225). He actually

receives the backing and sympathy of the right-leaning broadsheet, despite his salient imbrication with *'Londongrad'*, rather than the disdain which migrants usually receive from British newspapers whom often associate migrants with 'terrorists', 'suspects' and 'criminals' (Allen & Blinder, 2013, p. 3).

The rhetoric used by *The Telegraph* is evocative and hyperbolic – seemingly designed to besmirch and vilify Russians as little else than dangerous assassins aligned with the fictitious 'SPECTRE' of the *James Bond* franchise, a group with whom many have long associated Russia and the Soviet Union. Perhaps, though, this perspective isn't one conceived by *The Telegraph*, but one that is instilled in the minds of swathes of the western public - inculcated by their consumption of western culture. As referred to previously, commentators were quick to assimilate the Litvinenko story to the cultural conglomerate which is *James Bond*. Bond himself is truly an icon of western power. His very construct is a lesson in capitalist, western grandiloquence 'from the tuxedo and martini to the one-liners, stuff blowing up, the gadgets and the weaponised car' (TV Tropes, 2019). This is evident, perhaps most saliently, in the 1962 film *Dr No*. Here, Bond, along with assistance from his ever-present American colleague, Felix Leiter, find themselves in Jamaica attempting to combat the mysterious circumstances surrounding an island guarded by a large, surreptitious creature (which, eventually, turns out to be a tank). There is a trident of representations that one may consider here; firstly, Bond, the symbol of white, western authority. Secondly are those who we may consider represent the global south – in this case, the native Jamaicans. Lastly is *Dr No*: himself, a white character, but certainly not one whom aligns with the morality of the western Bond – he represents the fictitious 'SPECTRE' who, in the earlier Bond films, appeared to have a correlation with the Soviet Union.

It is this image of 'SPECTRE' which is most relevant here, an archetypal and transcending enemy, brought to cultural consciousness in the 1960s and prevailing today. 'SPECTRE's assimilation with the Soviet Union, and thus, Russia, alongside its imbrication with violence, death and despotism, has contributed to Russia being seen through the lens of this cultural icon. *The Telegraph's* reportage simply perpetuates that. This is similar to the two-pronged model of *Orientalism*, premised by Said (1978, p. 205). He discusses how 'manifest orientalism' – the way in which the east is represented in

cultural practices such as literature and art, evolves into ‘latent’ orientalism: the unconscious ‘paternalistic or condescending’ opinion and attitude of the west toward the ‘separate’ and ‘backward’ east. Whilst Russia may not be considered as part of the Orient, the distinction between manifestation, this time through modern methods of the mass media, and its subsequent inculcation of latent attitudes is prevalent here in the ‘KGB-phobia’ (Kovalev, 2006) of the west. The article continues to assimilate the Litvinenko case with a ‘classic spy novel written at the height of the cold war’, vilifying the ‘shadowy but evermore significant community of Russian exiles in Britain’, bringing the ‘criminal gangs with connections to the Russian mafia’ from the printed page, into our neighbourhoods. The way in which *The Telegraph* describe the ‘rapidly growing Russian community in London’, the reading public would be forgiven for assuming the presence of an assassin on every street corner.

This returns to the concept of agenda setting and hyperbolised mediation – the cornerstone of Stanley Cohen’s seminal *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972). The way in which Russia is identified and vilified, in *The Telegraph*’s reportage, further contributes to the panic and anachronistic public perception of Russia as an enemy force, forged in the crucible of the Soviet Union and the cold war. Whilst it’s possible to criticise the coverage from *RIA Novosti* and its ‘on-side’ tactics of placation – it is equally appropriate to scrutinise that of *The Telegraph*, for falling into the trap of perpetuating lazy stereotypes and inciting a baseless moral panic around the spectacle, as spurious conjecture takes over and suffocates the important issues at the crux of the case with a fabric of stereotype, accusation and hyperbole.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is, indeed, evidence of contrasting reporting emanating from both sides of the globe. The way in which Alexander Litvinenko retains a ‘liminality’ of being both ‘inside and outside’ (Hutchings & Miazhevich, 2009, p. 224), a ‘fugitive Kremlin dissident’ and a ‘hero of Britain’, highlights the disparity in agendas which were immediately set and maintained by the intransigent countries at the heart of this case.

The socio-political reverberations and the consciousness of intercontinental representations is clear to see in the reportage highlighted in this essay. Russia’s endeavour to deflect the blame on to other Kremlin dissidents living in Britain through their web of state-owned newspapers and ‘on-side’ journalists led to a refraction of the story – shunning an obligation to the truth and becoming uncooperative with the investigation.

Britain, on the other hand, is equally to blame for the way in which it hyperbolised and exacerbated the death of one man to become a feud of international cultures. *The Telegraph*’s incitement of a moral panic through its provocative and emotive language served to fuel the fire of stereotypes surrounding Russia as the archetypal enemy – one that has long prevailed in mass media and popular culture and has continued to recur in global violence since, such as the 2018 poisoning of Sergei Skripal in Salisbury and the subsequent ‘violation of normal political and diplomatic rhetoric’ (Panova & Afonshina, 2019, p. 764) demonstrated by the British press in themes recurrent of those identified in the mediation of Alexander Litvinenko’s death. The ‘infotainment’ nature of the story, and the way in which it became a spectacle, further suffocated the truths at the crux of the case, with the press, instead, becoming embroiled in a web of accusation and recrimination.

Alexander Litvinenko, ultimately, became merely a pawn of mass communication – weaponised by the east and the west to further fuel their controversies and used as an example by *The Telegraph* of their disparate cultures. The British press exacerbated the story, embellishing the morality and empathy of the west, whilst vocally criticising the brutality and barbarism of the east, lighting the fire of counter-accusation based on spurious conjecture and stereotype.

Alas, the third side of this story – the truth – becomes somewhat inconsequential in the spectacle of news media. Attractive *James Bond*-esque conspiracies dominate the narrative and the public become eager for an Agatha Christie style denouement to the story. Sadly, for the family of Mr Litvinenko, this seems ever more unlikely with each passing year.

6350 words.

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