

Inspector Rex's History Snippet #36

Why do they call Germany Fatherland and Russia Motherland?

Fatherland is the nation of one's "fathers", "[forefathers](#)" or [ancestors](#). The word can also mean the country of nationality, the country in which somebody grew up, the country that somebody's ancestors lived in for generations, or the country that somebody regards as home, depending on how the individual uses it.

It can be viewed as a [nationalist](#) concept, in so far as it is evocative of emotions related to family ties and links them to national identity and patriotism. It can be compared to motherland and homeland, and some languages will use more than one of these terms.

"Fatherland" was first encountered by the vast majority of citizens in countries that did not themselves use it during [World War II](#), when it was featured in news reports associated with Nazi Germany. German government [propaganda](#) used its appeal to nationalism when making references to Germany and the state. It was used in [Mein Kampf](#), and on a sign in a German [concentration camp](#), also signed, [Adolf Hitler](#).

Ref: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homeland>

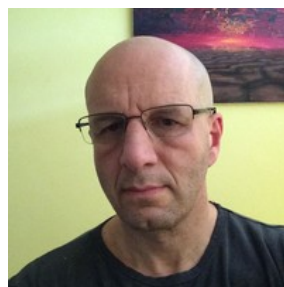
Other groups that refer to their native country as a "fatherland"

Groups with languages that refer to their native country as a "fatherland" include:

- the [Arabs](#) as [أبوالأضرب](#) 'ard al-'abā' ("land of the fathers")
- the [Armenians](#) as 'Հայրենիք' (Hayreniq)
- the [Albanians](#) as *Atdhe*
- the [Amhara](#) as አገሩ አገር (Abat Ager)
- the [Austrians](#) as *Vaterland*
- the [Arakanese](#) as A pha rakhaing pray (အဖရခိုင်ပြည်)

This is just a list beginning with the letter 'A'.

Ref: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homeland>



I Alex Jouravlev

Why do they call Germany Fatherland and Russia Motherland?

In Russian, there is no word that would be a literal translation of "mother-land". The closest - "otchestvo" - is literally translated as fatherland. For example, on German advance in 1918 (Germany tried to capitalise on their win over Russia before surrendering to UK, France and US), Lenin issued a decree titled "Fatherland is in danger".

However, the word for country “strana” is feminine rather than neutral. So is the word for land “zemlja”. The roots of that are deep in Slavic pre-Christian culture, which included such elements as having sex on the sowed fields. The allusion of land giving birth to rye and wheat was quite strong, and didn’t have enough time to disappear.

Actually, “strana” (country) comes from “storona” - informal name for any distinct area, district etc, which is also feminine. At the same time, the word for state - “gosudarstvo”, is a generalisation of Tsardom, from “gosudar” - lord. And it is neutral, just as the English word “state”. In general, Russian language hit civilisation, and with it the end of natural development of the language before the rural meaning of land giving birth to wheat was replaced with autocratic meaning of the land as an entity ruled by the ruler.

The word “rodina” has the same root as Russian word for “birth”, and can be loosely translated as “the land of birth, however most Russian speakers did not hear “mother” in it. It also shares root with the Russian word for “relatives”. Plus, its traditional meaning does not extend to the whole country, but has much more local meaning.

The Western idea of “Motherland” in the Russian language likely came from the WW2 recruitment poster:



The slogan at the top - “rodina-mother calls” should possibly be translated as “homeland-mother calls” [to fight Nazis]. That was an innovation created by talented Soviet propagandists that pretty much went against the development of the Russian language for the last few centuries, and dug into the most basic, pagan instincts. It worked, it stuck.

Comment by Inspector Rex

Inspector Rex asked this very question at the end of the U3A History Group meeting of 8 June 2021.

The above question and answers were from Wikipedia and a Quora article (by Alex Jouravlev). <https://www.quora.com/Why-do-they-call-Germany-Fatherland-and-Russia-Motherland>