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**RUSSIAN NATIONALISM
AND THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY POLICY
OF RUSSIFICATION IN THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE'S
WESTERN REGION**

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INTRODUCTION

In 1997, the British historian Geoffrey Hosking offered a heuristic and provocative idea that has shaped recent debates over the nature of Russian nationalism. Hosking argued that in Russia state-building obstructed nation-building. In the imperial period, nation-building was blocked by the archaic imperial order.¹ The very idea of national identity, of the nation as a supreme value, was undermined by pre-modern imperial allegiances and exclusive loyalty to the autocratic Romanov dynasty. In addition, the transformation of the diversity of imperial subjects into a national entity encountered the huge obstacle of the divisive estate (soslovie) principle of social organization.

Without denying the conflict between the national and the imperial in nineteenth-century Russian history, I will argue in this chapter that it had a more complex dynamic. The imperial officials, among the chief proponents of empire-building, were themselves developing into nationally-minded people.² A number of them were among the most frequent practitioners of nationalistic rhetoric. Since the time of Nicholas I (r. 1825-55), imperial authorities needed nationalism to modernize the legitimizing frameworks of autocracy. Nationalistic elements were

¹ Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552-1917* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997), pp. xxv-xxvi.

² On the nationalism of Nicholaevan bureaucrats in the so-called South-Western region (Right-Bank Ukraine), see: Daniel Beauvois, *The Noble, the Serf and the Revizor. The Polish Nobility between Tsarist Imperialism and the Ukrainian Masses (1831-1863)*, trans. by B. Reising (Chur, New York, 1991).

absorbed into the symbolism of power – the coronation ceremony, the imagined geography of empire, with accent on territories inhabited by the populations officially called “Russian,” and others.³ Not infrequently, the conflict of nation and empire was a clash of two streams of discourse in the mind of the same person.⁴

More important still, Geoffrey Hosking’s argument implicitly counterposes nation-building to empire-building as an emerging, at least potentially dynamic force to an irrevocably static, nearly frozen structure (with territorial expansion as the only exception). This is hardly true. Archaic though the Russian empire might seem, empire-building was certainly not stagnant, even as late as the 1860s. And it is precisely the nation-building efforts that, in some respects, came to obstruct the completion of the empire’s edifice, or the internal power structure of the empire. In other words, the relationship between empire-building and nation-building included both mutual support and mutual weakening.⁵

My focus is on that version of Russian nationalism that was promoted in the 1860s and later by the imperial bureaucrats who served in the empire’s western borderlands, the former lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the *Rzeczpospolita*, annexed by the Russian Empire in the second half of the eighteenth century (the so-called partitions of *Rzeczpospolita*). These bureaucrats thought of themselves, first and foremost, as defenders of “Russianness” in that highly contested area.⁶ Geographically, my discussion is confined to the so-called North-western region (*Severo-Zapadnyi krai*), which consisted in 1863-69 of six provinces – Vil’na (Vilnius), Kovno (Kaunas), Grodno, Minsk, Mogilev, Vitebsk – and was administered by the Vil’na Governor General, a kind

³ Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*. Vol. 1: *From Peter the Great to the Death of Nicholas I* (Princeton, 1995), pp. 296-332.

⁴ For insightful observations about such a clash, see: Aleksei Miller, “*Ukrainskii vopros’ v politike vlastei i russkom obshchestvennom mnenii: Vtoraia polovina XIX v.*” (St. Petersburg, 2000), pp. 138-152.

⁵ On the complicated relationship between the national state and the empire as ideal types in Russian imperial practices, see the provocative notes in Peter A. Blitstein, “Nation and Empire in Soviet History, 1917-1953,” *Ab Imperio* 1 (2006), pp. 197-208.

⁶ For more detail, see my “Russification and the Bureaucratic Mind in the Russian Empire’s Northwestern Region in the 1860s,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 5: 2 (2004), pp. 245-271.

of the emperor's viceroy. This is the present-day territory of Belarus and Lithuania.

During the 1860s and later, the Northwestern region was the area of the most intense Polish-Russian rivalry, the bitterest clash of the Russian and Polish nation-building projects.⁷ Contention with the Polish presence was not simply military struggles, oppression, reprisals, and persecutions of those whom the government considered irreconcilable rebels or incorrigible separatists. Such contention also included a good deal of sophisticated cultural and semiotic legitimization of imperial power, resourceful myth-making and representational strategizing.⁸

Analysis of geopolitical perceptions of the imperial elite in the era of the partitions of Poland shows the complexity of the task bureaucrats-Russifiers were facing in the Western provinces in the 1860s. As the American historian John LeDonne has convincingly demonstrated, the partitions of Poland in 1772, 1793 and 1795 were not the best solution to Russia's "Polish question" from the standpoint of the empire's "grand strategy" of expansion.⁹ A number of statesmen were quite sure that preservation of a powerless, but nominally independent Poland would have been more favorable to the Russian interests. First and foremost, the empire's potential mattered. In the early 1770s, Catherine II's war minister, Z. G. Chernyshev, warned that the imperial manpower, administration, and finances were sufficient to incorporate only the eastern fringe of Rzeczpospolita with the rivers Dnepr and Dvina as its western border (only slightly west of today's western border of the Russian Federation). Diplomatic and political considerations, the vicissitudes of relationships with the Habsburg empire and Prussia pushed Catherine II

⁷ In contrast, in the "Southwestern Region," i.e., the Right-Bank Ukraine, the Polish presence was less visible; the contention was not so dramatic. In the Polish Kingdom, the imperial government never pursued the goal of total ethnocultural de-Polonization.

⁸ See, e.g., Theodore Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia. Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863-1914* (DeKalb, 1996); Miller, 'Ukrainskii vopros'; Anna Komzolova, *Politika samoderzhavna v Severo-Zapadnom krae v epokhu Velikikh reform* (Moscow, 2005); Henryk Głębocki, *Kresy Imperium: Szkice i materiały do dziejów polityki Rosji wobec jej peryferii (XVIII – XXI wiek)* (Krakow, 2006); M. Dolbilov and A. Miller, eds. *Zapadnye okrainy Rossiiskoi imperii* (Moscow, 2006). See also two recent forums in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 5: 2 (2004) and *Ab Imperio* 2 (2005).

⁹ John LeDonne, *The Grand Strategy of the Russian Empire, 1650-1831* (New York, Oxford, 2004), pp. 103-105.

to annex far larger territories, all of which were underdeveloped eastern borderlands of the Rzeczpospolita.

For a long while, these new western borderlands of the Russian Empire were associated in imperial officials' minds with Polish culture and language. During the first half of the nineteenth century, despite Nicholas I's attempts at establishing (especially after the Polish uprising of 1830-31) a unified Russian-language administration, court and education in the western provinces, the latter remained predominantly Polish on the mental maps of the ruling elite itself. In essence, a kind of alliance between the imperial state and Polish nobility was preserved. This was a peculiarity of the imperial "lenses" through which officials perceived the region. Serfdom (*krepostnoe pravo*), in particular, rendered the non-Polish and non-Catholic peasantry "invisible" in the eyes of authorities, definitely a pre-nationalist worldview. And it was not until the early 1860s that such a state of things radically changed.

THE NATIONALIST MESSAGE OF THE 1861 PEASANT EMANCIPATION

Further, my analysis challenges the wide-spread opinion that the chief factor behind the Russian nationalist(ic) outburst in the 1860s was the Polish uprising of 1863-64 and that the ensuing Russifying measures were at odds with the reformist undertakings of the early Alexander II. This opinion lends to Russian nationalism of the time the character of an enforced and imitative response to an outer challenge.¹⁰ In my view, the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, as well as other components of the Great Reforms, were of primary importance to the rise of nationalist sentiments in the Russian elites.¹¹ The Russian government accomplished the peasant emancipation in a very centralized and synchronized manner,

¹⁰ Typical of this trend is a well-known notion of "official nationalism" articulated by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York, 1996), Chapter 6.

¹¹ For a more detailed argument, see my "The Emancipation Reform of 1861 in Russia and the Nationalism of Imperial Bureaucracy," in *Construction and Deconstruction of National Histories in Slavic Eurasia*, ed. Hayashi Tadayuki (Sapporo, 2003), pp. 205-235.

by means of issuing a single sweeping corpus of legislation related to more than twenty million peasants all across the empire. It is precisely the *empire-wide* dimension of the 1861 Emancipation that gave a strong impetus to a nationalistic mode of thinking.

An immense mass of peasants throughout the diverse parts of the Russian empire was liberated even as their links to the land were legally reinforced. Borrowing terms from Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, I would argue that the reform validated an "aboriginal essence" of peasants and their "awakening from sleep."¹² The solemnly proclaimed aim of reform — the creation of peasant landownership — was interpreted as the restoration of the historical, aboriginal link between the tiller of the land and the land itself.

Paradoxically, the reform simultaneously liberated and segregated the peasantry. The peasants' right to the land came hand in hand with a lot of (supposedly benign) restrictions imposed on their newly obtained civil freedom. They received no right to leave a land allotment and no right of free movement; they were obliged to use and till land allotment and so on. The government, so to say, tried to make peasants uniformly and evenly happy irrespective of their own individual will. *Soslovnost'*, the estate, caste-like character of the peasantry, was by no means abolished by the reform. However, nationally minded officials tried to redefine the pre-modern social "caste-ness" of the peasantry as a reinforcement of the would-be nation's foundation. The emancipation was like staging a rediscovery of the masses of the people by a dedicated handful of nationally minded bureaucrats and intellectuals, a kind of encounter of the state and the people.

The rhetoric of the 1861 emancipation was a sort of test of nationalistic logic made by bureaucrats within the agrarian sphere, beyond — *for the time being* beyond — the realm of interethnic collisions. And it was the Polish uprising (in the official terminology, rebellion) that flared just two years later, in 1863, and the ensuing Russifying policy that embodied the imagery of the peasantry "awakened from sleep" most visibly. The populist discourse became a political tool the authorities used against the Polish nobles, many of whom initiated, joined, or sympathized with the uprising.

¹² Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 195-196.

FIGHTING "POLONISM"

The whole campaign of Russification was intended to reassert the "Russianness" of the Western provinces (as distinct from the Kingdom of Poland, the Polish core-area, that was not incorporated in the Russian nation's "imagined territory"). "Russianness" was associated with roots, antiquity, authenticity, soil, the mass of the people, and, ultimately, with life and the "truth" (*pravda*); "Polishness," or Polonism, with a degenerate and exploitive elite, deceitful splendor, superficiality, and, ultimately, falsehood and death. The campaign revolved around the opposition of the internal and the external, that is, of the massive social body of the "Russian" and Orthodox peasantry and the rootless and immoral aristocracy.¹³

However, this type of discourse threatened to undermine the traditional, legitimistic foundations and mechanics of the Romanov empire. There was a seeming paradox: the militantly anti-elitist rhetoric was maintained by a regime with very weak institutional linkages to its subjects, devoid of techniques of face-to-face encounter with them.¹⁴ Even after the peasant emancipation and other Great Reforms the imperial authorities were unable to dispense with pre-modern, elite-based modes of governance. For instance, they had to delegate important administrative functions to the local nobility or clergy, instead of the expansion of the professional bureaucracy. The peasant emancipation was just a step in the direction of the face-to-face encounter between the state and the vast majority of the population. A dramatic lack of competent and efficient lesser officials (as well as the lack of confidence in their emergence) prevented the government from more interventionist policies in many areas and compelled the higher bureaucracy to reconcile itself with the privileges of traditional elites.

In the western provinces, the nationalist and the statist priorities clashed. That is why the nationality policy in this region after 1863 was

¹³ Mikhail Dolbilov, "The Stereotype of the Pole in Imperial Policy," *Russian Studies in History*, 44: 2 (2005), pp. 45-90.

¹⁴ I borrow the notion of "face-to-face" encounter between the state and the subject/citizen from: Yanni Kotsonis, "'Face-to-Face': The State, the Individual, and the Citizen in Russian Taxation, 1863-1917," *Slavic Review* 63: 2 (2004), pp. 221-246.

a Russification of the mental mapping,¹⁵ rather than of the actual ethnopolitical space.

To justify their anti-elitism and harsh measures against the Polish nobility in the Western provinces, the imperial authorities had to perpetuate the extralegal order of administration there. This implied not only the maintenance of martial law, but also cherishing the larger vision of the region being constantly menaced by “Polonism.” The officials preferred to think of the Western region as an arena of their own exploits in the struggle against the superficial, but omnipresent and elusive “Polonism.” They were interested in exaggerating the Polish threat; “Polonism” became a kind of eternal enemy. Ultimately, this tended to reinforce, not dispel, the notion of the Western region as a borderland, a periphery of the empire, not a part of the Russian core-area.

The ways the Russifiers grounded and reasoned their claims that the region was “Russian from time immemorial” were sometimes sophisticated, but always overloaded with symbolism and lacking in pragmatism. Let me introduce just one example. In accordance with the representation of the Polish aristocracy as remnants of the Rzeczpospolita and a social corporation that outlived the republic, the official rhetoric applied the Gothic metaphor of “vampire” to the Polish insurgents. This trope can be found in contemporaneous verse (e.g., by Fedor Tiutchev), journalist writings, and even bureaucratic memoranda. For instance, the historian and journalist Mikhail Pogodin played on the readership’s susceptibility to Gothic pictures: “Our enemies have no names. Their whereabouts are unknown. They do not even have a body. They are shadows that are emitted at night from some hell-like world and disappear at sunrise.”¹⁶ The Polish “vampires” were described as sucking Russian blood and exhausting the Russian nation’s vitality. What was crucial about this bizarre myth-making was the direct relation of the “vampire” metaphor to the contest over the territory. Referring to a seminal idea of Katherine Verdery, the Russian-born American philologist Olga Maiorova suggests

¹⁵ On the importance of mental mapping for the “nationalization” of the Russian Empire, see: Alexei Miller, “The Empire and the Nation in the Imagination of Russian Nationalism,” in *Imperial Rule*, ed. Alexei Miller and Alfred J. Rieber (Budapest, New York, 2004), pp. 9-26.

¹⁶ M. P. Pogodin, *Pol'skii vopros. Sobranie rassuzhdenii, zapisk i zamechani. 1831-1867* (Moscow, 1867), p. 146.

that the trope served as a proof of the Russian claim to the region, since the image of the vampire foreigner drinking the blood of another people, to quote Verdery, can be taken as “a creative inversion of the idea that proper burial ... must occur in one’s own (national?) soil.”¹⁷ The metaphor depicted Poles as uprising insurrectionists, because they could find no rest in the Russian earth; the Russian soil rejected them.

“BENEVOLENT SEGREGATION”

Such a high degree of symbolization negatively affected the pragmatic agenda of Russification and the ways of dealing with diverse ethnocultural groups. What exactly was thought to be the foundation of the Russian domination in the region? Numerically, the rural Eastern Slav (Belarusian, Ukrainian) population—officially called “Russian”—constituted a decisive majority. In most cases, “Russianness” was equated in the official categorization with the Orthodox faith, but in the case, for example, of the Belarusian peasants of Catholic faith (a minority among Belarusians) the bureaucrats understandably switched to applying the ethnic, not confessional, criterion of being Russian.¹⁸ Thus, not only symbolic embellishments, but also statistical devices were much in use by the Russifiers. Their statistics and taxonomies strove to make considerable ethnolinguistical distinctions barely visible. “Russianness” became a loose sociocultural category, not so much inclusive as elusive, even able to embrace ethnic Lithuanians, on the ground of their social characteristics as peasants rooted in native soil and relatively immune to Polish assimilationist efforts.¹⁹

¹⁷ Olga Maiorova, “‘A Horrid Dream Did Burden Us’: Connecting Tiutchev’s Imagery with the Political Rhetoric of His Era,” *Russian Literature* LVII (2005), pp. 113-114. The quotation comes from: Catherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies* (New York, 1999), p. 106.

¹⁸ On the imperial “ethnostatistics” in the region, see: Darius Staliūnas, “Nationality Statistics and Russian Politics in the Mid-Nineteenth Century,” *Lithuanian Historical Studies* 8 (2003), pp. 95-122. On the Belarusian case, see: Theodore Weeks, “‘Us’ or ‘Them’? Belarusians and Official Russia, 1863-1914,” *Nationalities Papers* 31: 2 (2003), pp. 211-224.

¹⁹ Mikhail Dolbilov, “Prevratnosti kirillizatsii: Zapret latinitsy i biurokraticheskaia rusifikatsiia litovtsev v Vilenskom general-gubernatorstve v 1864-1882,” *Ab Imperio* 1 (2005),

However, the ideological statement that Eastern Slav peasants were “Russians” could not annul the perceived fact that this population lacked a clear ethnoconfessional identity. The quantitative predomination of the population officially called “Russian” was effectively counterbalanced by the Polish cultural and economic presence. In a sense, the “Russians” were at the same time a majority and a minority.

The “Russianness” of the Eastern Slav peasantry was celebrated by the Russifiers as a treasure nearly lost, stolen by the Poles. Regaining it was the officials’ noble mission. Yet, Russifiers saw this Russianness as a very fragile treasure. The Russification campaign relied on rhetoric, imagery and symbolism, rather than institutions and social practices, and this proved to be quite consequential for the Russian nationalist mode of thinking. The Russifiers were afraid, so to speak, of stirring the supposedly Russian and loyal peasants to unpredictable action, making them more receptive to diverse influences. Beyond the amendments to the agrarian legislation favorable to the peasants and the consolidation of primary education in Orthodox religion, the Russifiers did relatively little to integrate the local peasantry into larger social and institutional structures.

What we see here is the notion of benevolent insulation, segregation of the Orthodox rural populace, shielding the masses from the detrimental influences of the traditional elites (Polish *szlachta*, Catholic clergy). The authorities were reluctant to foster modern nation-building institutions such as a mass secular press, a network of secularized primary schools, or upward social mobility. Their misgivings about what historians have regarded as powerful engines of modern assimilation are indicative of their ambivalence. Take, for example, their attitude toward proposals about a university in Vil’na. Although cognizant of the role of universities in the European assimilation processes, they never gave serious attention to the issue, because they were sure that in any circumstances, even under police surveillance, “Polonism” would creep into the university curricula and teaching. They even rejected the proposal to establish a Medical Academy — even medicine was considered a conduit of Polish propaganda. Nor was *zemstvo* self-government introduced in the western provinces, for the same reason.²⁰

pp. 255-296.

²⁰ Dolbilov and Miller, *Zapadnye okrainy*, pp. 245-248; Kimitaka Matsuzato, “The Issue of

A similar segregationist pattern is observed in the officials' dealing with the non-Russian groups whose loyalty to the Russian throne they hoped to reassert. The Jews, who constituted one-sixth of the entire population of the region and a majority in many cities, are the case in point.

The complexities of the Jewish question on the Russian Empire's Western periphery²¹ can be better understood if we take into account two perspectives of Russifying policy after 1863 – the Russification of ethnically and confessionally diverse *population* and that of the *territory*, the land. In the first perspective, the Jews emerged as aliens, *inorodtsy*, to an even greater degree than Muslims in the Empire's eastern regions. The cultural alienation and otherness of orthodox Jews were striking in the eyes of bureaucrats, who customarily described them in terms of "fanaticism" and "superstition." As early as the 1840s, under Nicholas I, the imperial government established separate state-run schools for the Jews, in which Jewish boys were taught both secular and Judaic subjects by Russified Jewish teachers.²² Of primary importance was the principle of gradual spread of enlightenment within a given ethnic group by Russified co-ethnics. By means of these schools the authorities sought to move some Jewish subjects, step by step, closer to the secularized values of Russian culture and incorporate them in the Russian civilizational space (the "selective integration," coined by Benjamin Nathans), rather than assimilate the Jewish population or convert it to Greek Orthodoxy.

However, the task of Russifying the territory of western provinces, made so crucial for the authorities by the challenge of the 1863 Polish uprising, came to reshape the bureaucratic perception of the region's ethnic heterogeneity. It implied a heavy accent on mental mapping and symbolic reconquering of the region as an inseparable part of the "Russian land from times immemorial." Symbols and spectacular signs of the Russian presence were given priority over step-by-step assimilationist efforts. In this perspective, there appeared a tendency to circumvent

Zemstvos in Right Bank Ukraine, 1864-1906. Russian Anti-Polonism under the Challenges of Modernization," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 51: 2 (2003), pp. 218-235.

²¹ Indispensable in the field are the following works: John D. Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question, 1855-1881* (Cambridge, 1995); Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale. The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley, 2002).

²² Michael Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews. The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia, 1825-1855* (Philadelphia, 1983).

gradual acculturation of the non-Russian groups, including Jews, by imposing on them Russian-language education, banning indigenous languages from public sphere (often without soberly assessing the state's potential for assimilation). As one local official of the Ministry of Education optimistically wrote in 1869:

“...Lithuanians, Latvians and even Jews are eager to get Russified (*obruset'*), all of them understand and nearly all speak Russian. But even if there are those among them who do not speak Russian, then it is they who are obliged to learn the language of Government, not vice versa. All these small peoples (*narodtsy*) are not some pagans and savages (*ne kakie-nibud' dikari iazychniki*), while we are not missionaries among savages. We need not come down to their dialects and notions; rather, we should make them get up to our level (*podniat'sia k nam*)...”²³

The label *aliens, inorodtsy*, seemed to be out of place in the “ancient Russian land,” and separate educational institutions, such as the Jewish schools, as well as the very principle of instruction of non-Russians by their Russified co-ethnics, became associated with separatism.

After 1863, instead of separate schools, the administration in the Empire's west began to encourage Jews to send their children to the general educational institutions, such as gymnasia. However, drawing Jewish children into gymnasia soon resulted in a new dynamic of bureaucratic Judeophobia. Paradoxically, the seeds of forthcoming segregationist policy were to be found in relative success of the state's efforts to integrate Jews.²⁴ The enthusiasm the educated Jews showed at the prospect of the enlightenment of their coreligionists quickly aroused suspicion and anxiety among the Russifiers. The rapid success of Jews in education rendered the Russophone Jew a highly suspicious figure

²³ Manuscript Division of the Russian National Library at St. Petersburg, f. 52, d. 28, l. 1-2 v.

²⁴ For two analyses (from the ethnolinguistical and ethnoconfessional perspectives, respectively) of how the segregationist mood was gathering strength in the 1860s' “Jewish policy” in the North-Western region, see Darius Staliūnas, “In Which Language Should the Jews Pray? Linguistic Russification on Russia's Northwestern Frontier, 1863-1870,” in *Central and East European Jews at the Crossroads of Tradition and Modernity*, ed. J. Šiaučiuonaitė-Verbickienė and L. Lempertienė (Vilnius: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 33-78; M. Dolbilov, “‘Ochishchenie iudaizma': Konfessional'naia inzheneriia uchebnogo vedomstva (na primere Severo-Zapadnogo kraia),” *Arkhiv evreiskoi istorii* 3 (Moscow, 2006), pp. 166-205.

in the eyes of bureaucrats. No longer was he associated with loyalty and reliance. Instead, his linguistic skills were considered one more reason for mistrust. Such a Jew was regarded as a dangerous stranger, an unwelcome newcomer in a Russian milieu or an agent of the Jewish separate nation-building, whose knowledge of Russian would only give him greater access to the cultural and intellectual resources needed for this undertaking.

Here again the logic of segregationism was at work. First, the nationalistic drive helped broaden the contexts within which the imperial officials perceived the nationality issues. But this recontextualization backfired on the practice of assimilation. The fear of indigenous nation-building as an unintended result of Russification proved to be stronger than the eagerness to integrate and assimilate. The palliative was to prolong cultural isolation of these ethnic and ethnoreligious groups.²⁵

HOW DID THE NATIONALISTIC RHETORIC BECOME AN OBSTACLE TO EMPIRE-BUILDING?

In the cases of the Eastern Slav Orthodox peasantry as well as the Jews, the Russifiers came to take an obviously defensive stance, in contrast to their own militant nationalistic rhetoric of integration. No doubt, in terms of institutionalized nation-building, the urge to conserve the

²⁵ Generally, the formation of Russified elites in non-Russian ethnic or ethno-confessional groups was at once the goal and the fear of the Russifiers in different regions of the empire. It was exactly the educational level and activism on the part of such elites' members that prompted the doubts of the Russifiers about whether Russification had turned into a formulation of a modern mindset that could also promote indigenous nation-building. Robert Geraci has brilliantly described this phenomenon regarding the Russifiers' vision of the Tatars. The case of the Vil'na *maskilim* (proponents of the Haskalah [Jewish Enlightenment]), who fell out of favor of the Vil'na authorities by the early 1870s, is remarkably similar to a far later case, that with the *jadids* whom the imperial bureaucrats, in alliance with the conservative Muslim clergy (a counterpart of the *maskilim*'s antagonists, *mitnagdim*, defenders of rabbinical orthodoxy in Judaism), began to persecute in the 1910s. See: Robert Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca, London, 2001), pp. 150-152, 291-292, et passim. About the phenomenon of Russification rejected by the Russians, see also: Aleksei Miller, *Imperiia Romanovykh i natsionalizm: Esse po metodologii istoricheskogo issledovaniia* (Moscow, 2006), pp. 65-66.

imperial status quo thwarted the assimilationist aspirations. However, the rhetoric did matter, and words might have meant and weighed no less than deeds. The nationalistic rhetoric was effective enough to reciprocally weaken some of the empire-building trends.

One of the latter was the evolution of confessional policies, especially toward the Roman Catholic church. The importance of the issue of confessional belonging even as late as mid-nineteenth century was brought into focus of the studies of Russian empire relatively recently. As a number of scholars point out now, the Russian empire was a "confessional state" in the sense that, despite assigning Greek Orthodoxy the status of "ruling faith," there was an alliance between the state and different creeds, of course, with Orthodoxy at the top of the hierarchy.²⁶ In other words, the state had to rely on the clergy of both Orthodox and non-Orthodox faiths as agents of the state at the grassroots level, unreachable by the professional bureaucracy. The clergy, irrespective of confession, kept metrical records (not accidentally, such a modern institution as civil marriage remained in fact a taboo for the authorities until early twentieth century), participated in the government's effort to maintain public order and morality, promulgated imperial manifestos and decrees, etc. Essentially, the authorities regarded the individual as a loyal imperial subject insofar as he was a member of a confession recognized by the state.

This imperial system of religious tolerance required that the recognition of a given confession by the state, granting it a certain freedom in ritual terms, be accompanied by an intensification of bureaucratic intervention, control and regulation, including matters of public ritual and manifestations of religiosity. As Robert Crews argues, the state, albeit not trying to convert everyone to the Russian Orthodoxy, sought to create an "orthodoxy in each of the tolerated faiths."²⁷ The deeper the bureaucratization of a given confession, the more privileged it was, Orthodoxy being the telling example.²⁸ What about the Roman

²⁶ See, e.g.: Robert Crews, "Empire and the Confessional State: Islam and Religious Politics in Nineteenth-Century Russia," *American Historical Review* 108: 1 (2003), pp. 50-83; Paul Werth, "Schism Once Removed: Sects, State Authority, and the Meanings of Religious Toleration in Imperial Russia," Miller and Rieber, *Imperial Rule*, pp. 85-108.

²⁷ Crews, "Empire and the Confessional State," 83.

²⁸ This dialectic of control and freedom was not entirely unique to the Russian empire in

Catholic church in Russia in particular? For all the dogmatic and cultural divergences between Greek Orthodox and Catholic churches and even the close relationship of the Polish national consciousness to Catholicism, the imperial authorities in the first half of the nineteenth century afforded Catholicism a relatively high position in the imperial hierarchy of confessions.²⁹ By the mid-nineteenth century, the dialectics of empire-building implied the necessity of further regularizing and disciplining the Catholic church: the Russian empire followed the path of the so-called Josephinism – the Enlightenment-inspired church policy exemplified in the measures of Joseph II Habsburg in the 1770s-80s³⁰ and, to a lesser degree and with less success, of Catherine II in Russia.

However, the emergence of a nationalistic vision impeded this trend. In the context of the Polish-Russian confrontation, Catholicism looked like not a neutral confession, but a “political heresy” (to quote one of the Russifiers).³¹ Catholic clerics came to be viewed as leaders of the Polish national movement; the equation of Catholicism with “Polonism” became by the mid-1860s quite commonplace in official documents, periodicals, private correspondence. Instead of disciplining and therefore relegitimizing the Catholic religiosity, the officials launched what was in fact a campaign of denigration of Catholic faith. It included, among other measures, political persecution of Catholic clergy and mass conversions of the rural Catholic population to Orthodoxy (driven by

nineteenth century Europe. As C. Thomas McIntire has shown, by 1810 Napoleon created in France a “quadrilateral establishment of religion.” The four state-recognized creeds were the Catholic Church of France, the Reformed and Lutheran churches, and Judaism: “All four religions accepted the paradox of membership in the religious establishment as the way to increase their religious liberty. The neglect or exclusion of other religions served to define the system.” See: C. Thomas McIntire, “Changing Religious Establishments and Religious Liberty in France. Part I: 1787-1879,” in *Freedom and Religion in Europe and the Americas in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Richard Helmstadter (Stanford, 1997), pp. 254-260, the quotation is from p. 259.

²⁹ Leonid Gorizontov, *Paradoksy imperskoj politiki: Poliaki v Rossii i russkie v Pol'she (XIX – nachalo XX v.)* (Moscow, 1999), pp. 81-82.

³⁰ See, e.g., Samuel T. Myovich, “Josephism at Its Boundaries: Nobles, Peasants, Priests and Jews in Galicia, 1772-1790” (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1994).

³¹ Mikhail Murav'ev, “Zapiski ob upravlenii Severo-Zapadnym kraem i usmirenii v nem miatezha, 1863-1866,” *Russkaia starina* 6 (1902), p. 503.

offers of material incentives and benefits).³² The ways such conversions were contrived and carried out are indicative of the Russifiers' thinking. Since there was very little hope of getting converts spiritually attached to their new church, officials implicitly admitted that in some cases religious indifference or, rather, a lack of religious fervour would be more desirable than a spontaneous, "hot" religiosity. The protagonist of Dostoevsky's novel *Idiot* (written in the late 1860s), Prince Myshkin, said that Roman Catholicism was a worse thing than atheism. Dostoevsky was hardly original putting this saying into the mouth of Myshkin; before the publication of *Idiot* the Russifiers of the Western region who dealt with Catholics used to find solace in this piece of political "wisdom." In broader terms, nationally minded initiators of this anti-Catholic campaign (to which the higher authorities in St. Petersburg had to put an end by the late 1860s) unwittingly contributed to the erosion of the "confessional state's" foundations.

MUTUAL RUSSIAN-POLISH INFLUENCES

The potential of the Russian nationalistic rhetoric of the 1860s is clear from analysis of the mutual influences of the Polish and Russian nation-building projects, a sort of exchange and dialogue between them. Obviously, the Polish uprising gave a strong impetus to Russian nationalist thinking. But the latter was not just an enforced, imitative and unimaginative response to the Polish challenge.³³ Russian images of

³² Mikhail Dolbilov, "The Russifying Bureaucrats' Vision of Catholicism: the Case of Northwestern krai after 1863," in Andrzej Nowak, ed., *Russia and Eastern Europe: Applied "imperiology"/Rosja i Europa Wschodnia: "imperiologia" stosowana* (Krakow, 2006), pp. 197-221; Mikhail Dolbilov and Darius Staliunas, "Obratnaia uniiā: Proekt prisoedineniia katolikov k pravoslavnoi tserkvi v Rossiiskoi imperii, 1865-1866," *Slavianovedenie* 5 (2005), pp. 3-34.

³³ In her recent study of temporal modes of thinking about Eastern European nationalism(s), Maria Todorova has criticized (polemizing, among others, with Benedict Anderson and Miroslav Hroch) the so-called "allochronic discourse" that depicts nationalisms in Eastern Europe as lagging behind, imitating or unilaterally borrowing from the more "authentic" nationalisms in the west of Europe. Instead of this approach, Todorova suggests "the idea of relative synchronicity within a *longue durée* development," designed to analyze the relationship between the Western and Eastern European nationalisms in terms of interaction, interinfluence, and dialogue. See Maria Todorova, "The Trap of Backwardness:

Polonism, albeit saturated with enmity, affected Polish self-perceptions. Most recently, the Polish historian Andrzej Nowak, taking part in the scholarly discussion on whether the Rzeczpospolita was an empire, made the point about a retrospective “imperialization” of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth partitioned by Russia, Prussia and Austria in the second half of the eighteenth century. According to Nowak, the Rzeczpospolita was not an empire even in its best time, but the nineteenth-century Polish nationalist elites, seeking to mobilize compatriots to fight for national independence, elaborated an attractive narrative about the Poland of the past, emphasizing the features of territorial grandeur and missionary expansionism.³⁴ From the opposite perspective, Russian nationalists, especially those involved in Russification campaigns in the contested western borderlands, contributed to this myth-making. In order to dramatize their efforts to “awaken” the local “Russian” people from their “fatal sleep,” Russifiers talked about the liberation from the “Polish yoke.” Such a portrayal of Polonism exaggerated the assimilationist powers of the Polish elites and, independently of the Russifiers’ intentions, maintained the notion of old Poland as a great empire with a long-lasting and far-reaching legacy.

Another example of such “dialogical” influence relates to the role of Catholic clergy in the Polish national movement. Actually, a considerable majority of clergy stood loyal to the imperial authorities and preached obedience; those who shared in thinking about national independence, had their own (apolitical and inspired by Catholic theology) vision of how to attain this goal. However, the imperial mythology presented

Modernity, Temporality, and the Study of Eastern European Nationalism,” *Slavic Review* 64: 1 (2005), pp. 140-164. Todorova’s innovation may prove to be useful also for further reconceptualization of Russian nationalism. For instance, in this perspective the post-1863 Russian policy of persecuting Catholicism emerges as part of the contemporaneous pan-European tension between the state and the Catholic church (*Kulturkampf* in Germany being a telling example), rather than as a passive reaction to the Polish uprising or a product of an allegedly static “Russian Orthodox mentality,” hostile toward Catholics.

³⁴ Andrzej Nowak, “From Empire Builder to Empire Breaker, or There and Back Again: History and Memory of Poland’s Role in Eastern European Politics,” in Nowak, *Od imperium do imperium. Spojrzenia na historię Europy Wschodniej* (Krakow, 2004), pp. 367-375. See also his “Between Imperial Temptation and Anti-imperial Function in Eastern European Politics: Poland from the Eighteenth to Twenty-first Century,” in K. Matsuzato, *Emerging Meso-Areas in the Former Socialist Countries: Histories Revived or Improvised?* (Sapporo, 2005), pp. 247-284.

Catholic clergymen as one of the most perilous enemies and oppressed them out of proportion to their actual involvement in the national movement. It is this vision's inversion that provided the Catholic clergy an honorable place in the narrative of the Polish nation's martyrdom. Even those Polish nationalists who detested the Church's apolitical attitudes refrained from attacking the clergy. Some historians even argue that moral insults and political reprisals against Catholic clergy in the Russian and German empires were the only thing saving Poland from wide-spread de-Christianization in the nineteenth century.³⁵

CONCLUSION

The practice of the Russification campaign in the Western, Polish-influenced provinces of the Russian Empire, that is, the crusade against "Polonism," left a remarkable and lasting imprint on the Russian nationalist mindset. That campaign was distinguished by a striking contrast between militant populist and assimilationist rhetoric and elitist mistrust of modern institutions and practices of governance. The supposedly loyal "Russian" peasants were regarded as an "authentic" mass of people, the foundation of a would-be nation in need of protection from detrimental influences, rather than a partner in a common nation-building enterprise. Lofty images of "Russianness" were not so much an incentive to mobilize the nationally-minded population as a referent framework for the self-identification of narrow groups of bureaucrats and intellectuals. This was a kind of assimilationist striving that was very likely to give way to a fear of counterassimilation. The obsession with "contagion" and "corruption," reified in ambivalent Russification measures, would survive well into the twentieth century, manifesting itself in the mentality and, alas, activities of later generations of Russian/Soviet nationalists.³⁶

³⁵ See, for example, Brian Porter, "Thy Kingdom Come: Patriotism, Prophecy, and the Catholic Hierarchy in Nineteenth-Century Poland," *The Catholic Historical Review* 89: 2 (2003), pp. 213-239, esp. 223.

³⁶ Cf. the Soviet policy toward the diaspora nationalities (including the Poles), based on the a priori equation of membership in one of these national groups with political disloyalty: Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, London, 2005), esp. pp. 297-302. With regard to the same subject, Yuri Slezkine

The russifying bureaucrats' nationalism was relatively good at mental mapping, not at assimilationist and integrationist practices as such. This discrepancy meant that proponents of Russification could not avoid thinking of themselves as a minority in a culturally alien milieu. Paradoxically, the "Russian" city of Vil'na was for them both the motherland and *chuzhbina*, a foreign country. Being an embattled minority became an attribute of the russifying bureaucracy, a sign of their noble mission. Symptomatic are the very words with which they referred to themselves: "handful" (*gorst' russkikh liudei*), "minority," "a little circle" (*kruzhok*). It would be interesting to trace how this self-portrait affected a broader Russian nationalist consciousness.

observes: "Starting in the mid-1930s ... as the fear of contagion grew and the nature of the enemy seemed harder to determine, it became painfully obvious to the professionally paranoid that the opposite of inspirational influence was hostile penetration..." See his *The Jewish Century* (Princeton, Oxford, 2004), p. 274. The imperial obsession with the "Polonism" seems to have anticipated such fears.