

A PARTING OF WAYS? THE KREMLIN LEADERSHIP AND RUSSIA'S NEW-GENERATION NATIONALIST THINKERS

IGOR TORBAKOV
UPPSALA UNIVERSITY

Abstract: This article focuses on what appears to be a turning point in the complex relationship between the political leadership of post-Soviet Russia and the new generation of Russian nationalists, who are increasingly setting the tone in the nationalist movement. My objective is to explore how this nationalist “New Wave” critiques the Russian nationalist tradition – not least the relationship between Russian nationalism and the Russian state – and to discuss nationalists’ views on how Russian nationalism should be reinvigorated so that it can become a truly influential popular movement. I argue that the moral and political revulsion of nationalist thinkers at the Kremlin’s attempt to masquerade as a nationalist force marks a crucial watershed in contemporary Russian history – namely, a definitive parting of ways between the new-generation democratic-oriented Russian nationalists and the Kremlin leadership.

Russia’s annexation of Crimea, and in particular the Kremlin’s rhetoric justifying this move, threw into the sharp relief, yet again, the question that has been hotly debated ever since the Soviet Union’s breakup: Where does Russia (as a national community and as a state) begin and where does it end? In all of Russian President Vladimir Putin’s recent speeches, especially those related to Ukraine and the simmering conflict in the country’s two eastern provinces, a murky notion of the *Russkii Mir* (Russian World) figures prominently. “We will always defend ethnic Russians in Ukraine,”

Igor Torbakov is Senior Fellow at the Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Uppsala University, Sweden. E-mail: igor.torbakov@ucrs.uu.se.

said Putin, adding that Moscow's protection will be extended also to "that part of the Ukrainian people who feel they are linked by unbreakable ties to Russia – not only by ethnic but also cultural and linguistic ties; who regard themselves as part of a broader Russian World." Russia is highly concerned, in Putin's ambiguous formulation, about the wellbeing and security of all those people – "not necessarily ethnic Russians, but those who regard themselves as Russian" and who constitute the "so called broader Russian World."¹ But what are the concrete political contours of the *Russkii Mir* project? How does it relate to the formulation of Russian nationhood enshrined in the Russian Federation's Constitution? Has the Kremlin launched a kind of Russian *irredenta* – a gathering of the Russian (ethnic) lands? Or is Putin pursuing what essentially is an empire-building policy? Is Vladimir Putin a bona fide Russian nationalist and what kind of nationalist is he – a champion of Eurasianism or a builder of a national *Russkii* state? And finally, what do nationalist ideologues (largely belonging to the national-democratic wing of Russia's fractured nationalist movement) make of the Kremlin's tackling of the "national question"?

This article intends to explore these questions, focusing specifically on what appears to be a turning point in the complex relationship between the political leadership of post-Soviet Russia and Russian nationalism.² Indeed, Vladimir Putin once famously said that both he and his protégé Dmitry Medvedev are staunch "[Russian] nationalists, in the good sense of the word."³ Yet this statement as well as Putin's programmatic disquisition on the "national question" were met with incredulity (if not outright scorn) on the part of the new generation of Russian nationalists, who are increasingly setting the tone – at least intellectually – in the nationalist movement. This nationalist cohort is a loosely organized group (a network community) of intellectuals (mostly trained in the humanities disciplines) that is formed around several nationalist-minded publications – the "thick journals," such as *Moskva* (particularly in 2009-2010 when the historian Sergei Sergeev was its chief editor) and *Voprosy natsionalizma*,

¹ Vladimir Putin, "Vystuplenie na soveshchanii poslov i postoiannykh predstavitelei Rossii," July 1, 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/46131>.

² For a good analysis of recent trends within the Russian nationalist movement, see Emil' Pain, "Ksenofobiia i natsionalizm v epokhu rossiiskogo bezvremen'ia," *Pro et Contra* 18, no. 1-2 (2014): 34-53; Emil' Pain and Sergei Prostavkov, "Mnogolikii russkii natsionalizm: Ideino-politicheskie raznovidnosti (2010-2014)," *Polis*, no. 4 (2014): 96-113.

³ See Denis Dymokin, "Putin Warns West: Medvedev Is No Softer," *Reuters*, March 8, 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/03/08/us-russia-germany-idUSL0854488120080308>; Lionel Barber, Neil Buckley, and Catherine Belton, "Interview transcript: Dmitry Medvedev," *Financial Times*, March 24, 2008, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/f40629a8-f9ba-11dc-9b7c-000077b07658.html#axzz3g49KmwoO>. Putin even asserted that he is "Russia's top nationalist." See "Zasedanie mezhdunarodnogo diskussionnogo kluba 'Valdai,'" October 24, 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/news/46860>.

as well as a number of websites such as www.apn.ru and www.rusplatforma.org.⁴ This group comprises such nationalist ideologues and writers as Oleg Kil'dyushov, Konstantin Krylov, Aleksandr Khramov, Oleg Nemensky, Mikhail Remizov, Aleksandr Samovarov, Pavel Svyatenkov, Sergei Sergeev, and Valery Solovei. The late philosopher and geopolitician Vadim Tsymbursky was sympathetic to this group and published his studies in their media outlets. The article's objective is to explore how this nationalist "New Wave" critiques the Russian nationalist tradition – not least the relationship between Russian nationalism and the Russian state – and to discuss nationalists' views on how Russian nationalism should be reinvigorated so that it can become a truly influential popular movement. I argue that the moral and political revulsion of nationalist thinkers at the Kremlin's attempt to masquerade as a nationalist force marks a crucial watershed in contemporary Russian history – namely, a definitive parting of ways between the new-generation democratic-oriented Russian nationalists and the Kremlin leadership. This development has several important implications for Russia as well as for Russia's neighbors in Eurasia. It may improve the chances that Russia can find a balancing point between liberal political ideals and nationalism, thus encouraging the development of a genuinely inclusive and democratic nation-state. It just as easily may stimulate attempts to change Russia's current state borders (the land grab in Crimea is of course one such glaring example) – something that could have unpredictable repercussions.

Debating Russian Nationalism

How to be Russian? This seemingly quaint question was posed by Andrzej de Lazari, a renowned Polish scholar and one of the best specialists in Russian intellectual history, who used it also as a title of his recent article. But the question is not that quaint after all.⁵ De Lazari tells the following story. In 2002, he organized in Moscow a conference on mutual (mis)perceptions of the Poles and the Russians under the title "The Polish and the Russian (*Russkaya*) Souls: From Adam Mickiewicz and Alexander Pushkin to Czeslaw Milosz and Alexander Solzhenitsyn." On the eve of the conference's opening day, he received a call from the Polish Embassy.

⁴ The analysis of the activities of two leading *political* organizations of Russian nationalists with "national-democratic" leanings – the National-Democratic Alliance and the National-Democratic Party – as well as of their intellectual production (posted on the websites www.nazdem.info and www.rosndp.org respectively) is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁵ It appears that some Russian analysts are no less perplexed by this question than the Polish professor. "It is not at all clear who belongs to Russians," notes the St. Petersburg political scientist Dmitry Lanko. "To be German, one has to have German parents. To be French, one has to be born in France. To be American, one has to have a U.S. passport. But what is needed to be Russian?" See Dmitry Lanko, "Sootchestvenniki kak natsional'nyi mif," *Neva*, no. 8 (2009), <http://magazines.russ.ru/neva/2009/8/loa8.html>.

In the course of the conversation, a Polish diplomat pointed out that de Lazari chose a politically incorrect title for the conference and it would be better to rephrase it as “The Polish and the *Rossiiskaya* Souls.” De Lazari strongly disagreed, arguing that, first, in the serious scholarly literature one would not find such a notion as *rossiiskaya dusha*, and, second, he was not interested in the misperceptions and stereotypes of the Poles that might be harbored by the peoples of the Caucasus or by the peoples of Siberia.⁶ His arguments appeared to have prevailed, and a Warsaw publisher brought out a book based on the conference proceedings under the original heading.⁷

What de Lazari’s story illustrates so vividly is that there is an inherent tension between the notions of *Russkii* and *Rossiiskii*, which implies that the relationship between the ethno-cultural and the political understandings of Russianness is highly problematic.⁸ And this, of course, is precisely the kind of stuff out of which nationalism – both as an ideology and a political movement – has grown in Europe and in the world at large. Thirty years ago, Ernest Gellner advanced the following, now famous, definition of nationalism. “Nationalism,” Gellner contended, “is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent ... Nationalist sentiment is the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of the principle, or the feeling of satisfaction aroused by its fulfillment. A nationalist movement is one actuated by a sentiment of this kind.”⁹ Put another way, nationalism is a demand for national self-determination (a thesis most eloquently highlighted by Elie Kedourie¹⁰) that has to lead to the formation of a nation-state.

Let us now look at Russian history using the Gellnerian analytical prism.¹¹ For several centuries in north-eastern Eurasia there has existed a

⁶ Andrzej de Lazari, “Kak byt’ Russkim?” *Evropa: Zhurnal Pol’skogo instituta mezhdunarodnykh del* 8, no. 3 (2008): 161-166.

⁷ Andrzej de Lazari, ed., *Pol’skaia i russkaia dusha: ot Adama Mitskevicha i Aleksandra Pushkina do Cheslava Milosha i Aleksandra Solzhenitsyna* (Warsaw: PISM, 2004).

⁸ Geoffrey Hosking, for example, bluntly states that “there were really two kinds of Russianness, *russkii* (ethnic, Orthodox) and *rossiiskii* (imperial, Europeanized, largely secular).” See Geoffrey Hosking, “The State and Russian National Identity,” in Len Scales and Oliver Zimmer, eds., *Power and the Nation in European History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 197. See also Sven Gunnar Simonsen, “Raising ‘The Russian Question’: Ethnicity and Statehood – Russkie and Rossiya,” *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 2, no. 1 (1996): 91-110; Nikolai I. Tsimbaev, “Rossiia i russkie (Natsional’nyi vopros v Rossiiskoi imperii),” *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta*, Series 8 (History) 5 (1993): 23-32.

⁹ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 1.

¹⁰ Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (Oxford, UK; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993).

¹¹ Some scholars (e.g. Alexei Miller) argue that Gellner’s formula of nationalism “does not work” in the Russian case where “imperial nationalism” adopted the Russian Empire in its entirety as its “own” state. See Alexei Miller, “The Romanov Empire and the Russian Nation,” in Stefan Berger and Alexei Miller, eds., *Nationalizing Empires* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2015), p. 311. Gellner’s critics contend that he was mostly preoccupied with the nationalism of non-imperial peoples, did not specifically study imperial nationalism and

vast and powerful country variously called the Tsardom of Muscovy, the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and the Russian Federation. This state entity is populated by people who call themselves “Russians” and who have always constituted a significant bulk of its denizens – their numerical strength ranging from being an overwhelming majority to comprising slightly less than half of the entire population in certain periods. Yet “Russia” has never become a nation-state. How, then, is Russian nationalism to be assessed within this context? Should not the feelings of the “Russians” be aroused because of the violation of nationalism’s key political principle? And if they were not, what accounts for this mysterious Russian quiescence?

The analyses of Russian nationalism vary significantly. Throughout the past century and a half, the bulk of Western popular literature and quite a few scholarly works portrayed Russian nationalism as a formidable, menacing and ugly phenomenon. “The prevailing media image of Russian nationalism,” noted Geoffrey Hosking, “is that of a powerful and repugnant force, an overbearing imperial regime borne aloft by virulent chauvinism and inflamed by anti-Semitism.” Hosking’s colleague and compatriot Robert Service agrees, adding that “nationalism in Russia is [often] presented as the straightforward, constant, uncontested ideology of Russian rulers and their subjects from time immemorial.”¹²

Then there is a diametrically opposite view. It would appear that, influenced by some of the recent theorizing on nations and nationalism, a number of scholars are inclined to completely dismiss Russian nationalism as a significant force in Russian history. Some commentators suggest that the history of Russian nationalism is, metaphorically speaking, a page out of *Waiting for Godot*. Not unlike the mysterious protagonist of Samuel Beckett’s absurdist masterpiece, Russian nationalism is much talked about and endlessly awaited, but, at the end of the day, it fails to arrive. Russian nationalism, these commentators argue, has never existed as a mass popular movement. To be sure, there might have been discontent,

in general had a distaste for empires as polities antithetical to the spirit of modernity. In fact, Gellner’s view of empire was far more nuanced and complicated than his critics would allow. (For more on this, see Krishan Kumar, “Once More and for the Last Time: Ernest Gellner’s Later Thoughts on Nations and Empires,” *Thesis Eleven* 128, no. 1 (2015): 72-84.) More importantly, though, Gellner’s definition of nationalism highlighting the inherent tension between the “national territory” and the space of political control seems to be applicable in the Russian case. In the political imagination of Russia’s imperial nationalists (from the Decembrists to Petr Struve) the vast and culturally diverse Romanov Empire emerged as a “nation-state” (or at least one in the making), while for Russian ethnic nationalists (such as Alexander Solzhenitsyn) Russia’s “national body” was languishing under the oppressive burden of the “anti-national” empire. Both types of Russian nationalism sought to make political and national units congruent.

¹² Geoffrey Hosking and Robert Service, eds., *Russian Nationalism Past and Present* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), p. 1, 199.

frustration, a sense of national grievance, xenophobia. There surely have been Russian nationalists – but not nationalism as an influential political force.¹³ The American historian David Rowley seems to have brought this argument to its extreme. It makes no sense, Rowley contends, to use the term “nationalism” when analyzing modern Russian history. Proceeding from the Gellnerian definition, Rowley asserts that over the last three hundred years, Russian governing elites were trying to preserve the empire, not to form a Russian nation-state, while Russian ideologues, instead of embracing a secular, particularist ideology, were preoccupied with elaborating the universalist, messianic and imperialist discourse of national identity. As a result, Russia failed to develop a nationalist movement.¹⁴

Other critics, who believe that Russian nationalism can be safely written off as a notable social force, argue that, historically, nationalism was successful when it pursued either of two objectives: social modernization (ultimately achieving a welfare state) or the creation of a new state. Since Russian nationalism (both past and present) pursued neither of these two goals, these critics contend, it is useless and lacks strategic potential.¹⁵

This article takes a more nuanced view on this tangled subject. Demonizing Russian nationalism obscures its historically controversial and fragile nature. On the other hand, the fact that a nation-state failed to emerge in Russia does not mean that Russian nationalism should be dismissed as an insignificant factor in Russian modern history. On the contrary, it has been present throughout most of the Russian imperial and Soviet era, at times playing a more prominent political role, at times finding expression in fields other than politics (above all, in literature and art), but always reflecting a desire to create a state of, for and by the Russian people. Thus, it would be more productive to follow Richard Wortman’s advice and try to make sense of Russian nationalism as a space of endless contestation.¹⁶ This never-ending struggle pitted the Russian powers-that-be against various segments of the country’s intellectual class, with each actor striving to represent the Russian people. Historians demonstrated that this struggle saw all kinds of alignments whereby certain

¹³ See Igor Chernyshevsky, “Russkii natsionalizm: nesostoiavsheesia prishestvie,” *Otechestvennyye zapiski*, no. 3 (2002), http://magazines.russ.ru/oz/2002/3/2002_03_15.html; Anatol Lieven, “The Weakness of Russian Nationalism,” *Survival* 41, no. 2 (1999): 53-70.

¹⁴ David G. Rowley, “Imperial vs. National Discourse: The Case of Russia,” *Nations and Nationalism* 6, no. 1 (2000): 23-42.

¹⁵ Boris Dubin and Lev Gudkov, “Svoeobrazie russkogo natsionalizma,” *Pro et Contra* 10, no. 2 (2005): 6-24; Alexander Verkhovsky, “Future Prospects of Contemporary Russian Nationalism,” in Marlene Laruelle, ed., *Russian Nationalism and the National Reassertion of Russia* (London: New York: Routledge, 2009): 89-103.

¹⁶ Richard Wortman, “Natsionalizm, narodnost’ i rossiiskoe gosudarstvo,” *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, no. 3 (2001): 100-105. See also the revised version of this article: “The Russian Empire and the Russian Monarchy: The Problem of Russian Nationalism,” in Richard Wortman, *Russian Monarchy: Representation and Rule* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013): 221-232.

groups of Russian ideologues would seek to ally themselves with the Russian authorities against other groups of Russian political thinkers in the endless process of debating the meaning of Russianness and the desirable contours of the Russian national homeland.¹⁷

Maintaining Ambiguity

Russia's 1993 Constitution, while noting Russia's multiethnic diversity, characterizes it as a "democratic federation" and a "civic nation" where all citizens, irrespective of their ethnic origins, enjoy equal rights across the entire territory of the state. According to the spirit (if not precisely to the letter) of the fundamental charter, present-day Russia is a nation-state just like any other: Russia's nation is *rossiiskaya* and its members are called *rossiyane*. Valery Tishkov, the long-serving former Director of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology at the Russian Academy of Sciences (1989-2015), argues as much, saying there is basically no difference between Russia and any other long-established nation-state – say, France, Sweden or the United States.¹⁸ "*Rossiiskii* self-consciousness and the all-embracing *rossiiskii* patriotism have already emerged," Tishkov asserted in a 2011 interview. "They have become the principal forms of our [national] identity."¹⁹ According to Tishkov's logic, a *rossiiskii* nation has been built *ergo* a *rossiiskii* nation-state exists. But does it? There appears to be a problem here: to make a declaration that a given country is a nation-state does not necessarily mean that it really *is* a nation-state, meaning that it is perceived as such by the majority of its citizens. The thing is that contemporary scholarship, following the lead of Ernest Renan, considers nationhood as largely a subjective phenomenon, reflecting the "will to live together." Nations, as Benedict Anderson tells us, are "imagined communities." Yes, agrees Rogers Brubaker, adding the important point that nations can be imagined in different ways. "Not only are different nations imagined in different ways," argues Brubaker, "but the same nation is imagined in different ways at different times—indeed often at the same time, by different people."²⁰ This crucial insight helps us to better understand the current situation in Russia where different images of "Russia" are

¹⁷ See Alexei Miller, *Imperiia Romanovykh i natsionalizm* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2006).

¹⁸ Valery Tishkov, "'Natsiia natsii' i vyzovy vremeni," *Strategiia Rossii*, no. 8 (2011), http://sr.fondedin.ru/new/fullnews_arch_to.php?subaction=showfull&id=1314789725&archive=1314876917&start_from=&ucat=14&; idem, "Rossiiskii narod i natsional'naia identichnost,'" *Rossia v global'noi politike*, no. 4 (2008), http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/n_11152.

¹⁹ Lidiia Grafova, "Ot kakikh russkikh nado zashchishchat' russkikh," *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, November 2, 2011, <http://www.rg.ru/2011/11/01/mezhnac-otnoshenia-site.html>.

²⁰ Rogers Brubaker, "In the Name of the Nation: Reflections on Nationalism and Patriotism," *Citizenship Studies* 8, no. 2 (2004), p. 122.

proliferating. At the moment, there is no agreement within the country on a number of absolutely crucial issues: Can today's Russia indeed be considered a full-fledged nation-state? If not, should it strive to become one? Do Russia's current state borders coincide with the boundaries of the "nation" or do they – as in the case of Crimea – need to be adjusted? What kind of nation should Russia choose to become – *rususkaya* or *rossiiskaya*, and what do these notions actually mean?²¹ Whatever discursive realities are advanced by the Russian Constitution, Russian national identity remains highly contested, and the building of the Russian nation appears to be a work-in-progress.

The peculiarities of Russia's nation-building and the vagaries of Russian nationalism are best understood in historical context. I cannot agree more with Anthony Smith who argues that "the central question in our understanding of nationalism is the role of the past in the creation of the present."²² Historically, two major factors militated against the formation of a sense of Russian nationhood – ethno-cultural diversity and social stratification. In Russia, which has long been regarded as the proverbial land of extremes, these two factors were extremely pronounced. Thus any discussion of Russian nationalism would inevitably revolve around two key issues – the historical role of empire and the difficulty of achieving societal cohesion.

Remarkably, the historiographical tradition of seeing empire as the defining factor of modern Russian history was laid down by Russians themselves. It was none other than Count Sergei Witte, Russia's Prime Minister from 1903 to 1906, who forcefully warned against underestimating the significance of the imperial nature of the Russian state. "The mistake we have been making for many decades," Witte wrote in his memoirs, "is that we have still not admitted to ourselves that since the time of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great there has been no such thing as Russia; there has been only the Russian Empire."²³ Following Witte's authori-

²¹ See the discussion in the themed issue "Nation-building" of the journal *Pro et Contra* 11, no. 3 (2007): 6-72.

²² Anthony D. Smith, "Gastronomy or Geology? The Role of Nationalism in the Reconstruction of Nations," *Nations and Nationalism* 1, no. 1 (1995), p. 18.

²³ Sergei Yu. Vitte, *Vospominaniia*. In 3 Vols. (Moscow: Sotsekgiz, 1960) 3, p. 274-275. The view that Witte was arguing against – one that conceived of Russia as a culturally homogeneous *Russkii* state, similar to national states such as France and Sweden and fundamentally different from the Austrian and Ottoman empires – was famously advanced by Moscow University's history professor Mikhail Petrovich Pogodin. "Just look at Russia at its present moment of existence," wrote Pogodin in the 1840s. "Occupying an expanse unlike that ever occupied by any other monarchy in the world... it is populated primarily by tribes speaking a single language and consequently sharing a single mode of thought, professing a single faith, and like parts of an electric circuit, quivering from a single touch... Even the contemporary European states, small as they are, cannot demonstrate that kind of wholeness, and while they occupy an incomparably smaller space, they consist of many more heterogeneous parts." See

tative admonition, a number of leading Western scholars, most notably Hans Rogger, Roman Szporluk and Geoffrey Hosking, have argued that in the Russian case it was precisely the fixation on empire-building that seriously impeded nation-building.²⁴ But “empire” is a controversial and ambiguous notion, which, as one prominent student of empire aptly put it, “has been a rapidly moving target over the twentieth century.”²⁵ How are we to understand “empire” and distinguish between empire and nation-state? Two approaches have been predominant in the recent literature on the subject. Comparative historical research on empire represented by the works of such scholars as Ronald Suny and Michael Doyle has tended to emphasize *objective, structural* relationships of political dominance and control.²⁶ This school of thought usually describes empire as a composite state in which a metropole dominates a periphery to the disadvantage of the periphery.

But other researchers such as Terry Martin and Mark Beissinger call on historians and political scientists to adopt a *subjective approach* to empire.²⁷ The objective approach, they argue, overlooks the fact that the very use of the term “empire” is “a claim and a stance.” Thus empire should be understood not only as a type of a political regime but also as a system of attitudes and perceptions that are formed both inside and outside a particular state and that can change over time. Indeed, until the end of the 19th century, empire was generally considered to be the highest form of polity. However, by the end of the 20th century, this attitude had undergone a radical transformation, now basically implying the inevitable decline of the imperial political system. Within the framework of the subjective approach, “the most important dimension of any imperial situation is perception.” Empire and nation-state differ from each other not because the former would resort to violence and exploitation and the latter would not; the real difference lies elsewhere – “whether politics and policies are

M.P. Pogodin, *Istoriko-kriticheskie otryvki* (Moscow: A. Semen, 1846), p. 2.

²⁴ Hans Rogger, “Nationalism and the State: A Russian Dilemma,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 4, no. 3 (1962): 253-264; Roman Szporluk, “After Empire: What?” *Daedalus* 123, no. 3 (1994): 21-39; idem, “Dilemmas of Russian Nationalism,” *Problems of Communism* 38 (July-August 1989): 15-35; Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); idem, *Russia and the Russians* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

²⁵ Mark R. Beissinger, “The Persistence of Empire in Eurasia,” *NewsNet* 48, no. 1 (2008), p. 2.

²⁶ Ronald Grigor Suny, “The Empire Strikes Out: Imperial Russia, ‘National’ Identity, and Theories of Empire” in Ronald G. Suny and Terry Martin, eds., *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001): 23-66; Michael W. Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986).

²⁷ Terry Martin, “The Soviet Union as Empire: Salvaging a Dubious Analytical Category,” *Ab Imperio*, no. 2 (2002): 94-95; Mark R. Beissinger, “The Persisting Ambiguity of Empire,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 11, no. 2 (1995): 149-184; Idem, “Situating Empire,” *Ab Imperio*, no. 3 (2005): 89-95.

accepted as ‘ours’ or rejected as ‘theirs.’”²⁸

Now, a third approach has recently been advanced, which I find helpful. It proposes to move beyond objective definitions and subjective perceptions and focus instead on the concrete practices – in other words, analyze *what exactly the rulers do*.²⁹ If rulers tolerate diversity and manage multiethnicity through the policies of differentiation, employing the services of the multiethnic institute of domination (say, the nobility, the top imperial bureaucracy or the communist party elite), they rule over empire; if rulers strive toward higher homogenization and start employing “nationalizing” practices, they seek to build a nation-state.³⁰

Such an analysis demonstrates that both the pre-1917 Imperial Russia and the USSR were pursuing contradictory policies, vacillating between imperial/colonial and nationalizing practices. By the mid-19th century the Romanov Empire appeared to begin moving away from the traditional practices of differentiation that characterized the imperial policy of the previous three centuries toward a “nationalizing project” of sorts (i.e. destruction of the cultures, customs and languages of local communities) modeled on the policies of such European nation-states as France, Britain, Germany and Italy.³¹ However, until Imperial Russia’s collapse in 1917, there remained an ambiguity as to which parts of the empire might constitute the core area where the “Russian nation” would emerge³²; there was also no consensus on what would constitute the Russianness at the base of the new national state – language, religion, and citizenship were all possibilities.³³

²⁸ Beissinger, “The Persisting Ambiguity,” p. 155.

²⁹ Peter A. Blistein, “Nation and Empire in Soviet History, 1917-1953,” *Ab Imperio*, no. 1 (2006): 197-219.

³⁰ For a more comprehensive discussion of similarities and differences between empires and nation-states, see Krishan Kumar, “Nation-states as Empires, Empires as Nation-states: Two Principles, One Practice?” *Theory and Society* 39, no. 2 (2010): 119-143; Stefan Berger and Alexei Miller “Building Nations In and With Empires – A Reassessment,” in Berger and Miller, eds., *Nationalizing Empires* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2015): 1-30.

³¹ Sviatoslav Kaspe, “Imperial Political Culture and Modernization in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century,” in Jane Burbank, Mark von Hagen, and Anatoly Remnev, eds., *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700-1930* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007): 455-493.

³² On the attempts to define the “imperial center,” see Leonid Gorizontov, “The ‘Great Circle’ of Interior Russia: Representations of the Imperial Center in the Nineteenth and Earlier Twentieth Centuries,” in Burbank et al., eds., *Russian Empire*, 67-93.

³³ For a thoughtful analysis of the relationship between nationalism and empire in the late imperial period, see Alexander Semyonov, “Empire and Nation in Russian Liberal Thought,” in Ivan Zoltan Denes, ed., *Liberty and the Search for Identity: Liberal Nationalisms and the Legacy of Empires* (Budapest; New York: Central European University Press, 2006): 329-344; Vera Tolz, “Russia: Empire or a Nation-State-in-the-Making?” in Timothy Baycroft and Mark Hewitson, eds., *What is a Nation? Europe 1789-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 293-311; Juliette Cadiot, *Le laboratoire imperial: Russie—URSS, 1860-1940*

Arguably, the Soviet Union's nationality policy was even more incoherent, although it represented a radical departure from Russian imperial practices.³⁴ The former empire was reconstituted as a Soviet federation of *national republics (states)* and smaller territorial units based on ethnic principle. Remarkably, the Soviets found an unorthodox way of dealing with multiethnicity – they opted for a federation in which each “ethnic minority” was turned into an “ethnic majority” or “titular nationality” within its own specifically delineated administrative territory. By territorializing ethnicity, the Soviets de jure bestowed the status of nation onto all the “subjects of the federation,” crucially, with just one exception – the Russians. But there were major inconsistencies: while the regime's introduction of the entry specifying nationality (based on ethnic origin) in each person's passport as well as the policy of *korenizatsiya* (“indigenization” – strengthening national identities among some non-Russian ethnic groups and creating, almost from scratch, such identities among others) appear to be similar to the classic imperial differentiating practices, the Sovietization (the attempts at forging the supra-national “Soviet people” – the kind of community that most national states aspire to mold) bears a striking resemblance to nationalizing practices. Ultimately, both Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union failed to resolve the “empire vs. nation” dilemma as these two polities were pursuing the incompatible goals of cultivating difference and sameness simultaneously.³⁵

For the Russians (and Russian nationalism), the implications of this ambiguous policy were enormous. The Russians' ambivalent position as both the subjects of the multinational Russian state and persons of a particular nationality (which was at times considered the core nationality and a state-bearing people but nevertheless just one out of many) generated two rival national identities – *rossiiskii/sovetskii* (pertaining to the state) and *russkii* (relating to ethnicity). This rivalry, for its part, has been the source of the perennial tension between the two main expressions of Russian nationalism – a statist and territorial one (*rossiiskii/sovetskii*), and an ethno-cultural one (*russkii*). Notably, identifying with a continental

(Paris: CNRS Editions, 2007).

³⁴ Ronald Grigor Suny, “‘Don't Paint Nationalism Red': National Revolution and Socialist Anti-Imperialism,” in Prasenjit Duara, ed., *Decolonization: Perspectives from Now and Then* (London: Routledge, 2004): 176-198; Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Jeremy Smith, *Red Nations: The Nationalities Experiences In and After the USSR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

³⁵ Ronald Grigor Suny, “The Contradictions of Identity: Being Soviet and National in the USSR and After,” in Mark Bassin and Catriona Kelly, eds., *Soviet and Post-Soviet Identities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 17-36; Pål Kolstø, “Faulted for the Wrong Reasons: Soviet Institutionalization of Ethnic Diversity and Western (Mis)interpretations,” in Karl Cordell et al, eds., *Institutional Legacies of Communism* (New York: Routledge, 2013): 31-44.

(Eurasia-wide) Russian state, the proponents of the *rossiiskii/sovetskii* version of Russian nationalism rendered their identity virtually “placeless” – “the continental citizen knows no locality.”³⁶ Seeing the entire multiethnic state as their natural homeland implies that the territorial nationalists’ *rodina* (native land) is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere in particular. This situation was accurately described in a popular Soviet-era song with its lines: *Moy adres ne dom i ne ulitsa /Moy adres Sovetskii Soyuz*. (My address is neither a particular street number nor an apartment building; my address is the entire USSR.) The downsides of this arrangement for the Russians are wittily analyzed by Yuri Slezkine who used the metaphor of the “USSR as a communal apartment,” which he borrowed from the 1920s Soviet party functionary Juozas Vareikis. In this gigantic Soviet *kommunalka*, Slezkine says, each nationality got a room of its own and happily went about organizing its national life. The Russians, however, were left without their own room. They occupied the hallway, the kitchen, and the bathroom, and got in everyone else’s way. The Russians were thus the only non-nation in the USSR. But the “Soviet nation” didn’t emerge either.³⁷ As Slezkine notes, “the apartment was not larger than the sum total of its rooms.”³⁸ No wonder, the tension between *ruskii* and *rossiiskii/sovetskii* was destined to remain high.

Yet the same fault line was also the result of Russia’s perennial inability to bridge the gap between its upper and lower social strata. The failure to achieve at least a moderate level of societal cohesion led to the bifurcation of Russian identity into its two rival versions of *ruskii* and *rossiiskii*, and frustrated the formation of the all-embracing nationalist ideology. The split occurred early on and predated the Petrine reforms as the two quite opposite “imagined communities” began congealing around *gosudarstvo* (state) on the one hand and *zemlia* (local peasant community) on the other.³⁹ The aggressive Westernization of high culture and of the way of life of the Russian nobility launched by Peter the Great dramatically deepened the chasm between Russia’s elites and the *narod*. The former and the latter came to define Russianness in differing ways. The elites’ outlook was unmistakably *rossiiskii*: they exalted the Empire’s vastness and diversity, the military strength of the Russian state and its great power status within the “European Concert.” For its part, the *narod*’s outlook was

³⁶ David D. Laitin, *Identity in Formation: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 308.

³⁷ See Zbigniew Wojnowski, “The Soviet People: National and Supranational Identities in the USSR after 1945,” *Nationalities Papers* 43, no. 1 (2015): 1-7.

³⁸ Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (1994), p. 435.

³⁹ Ladis K.D. Kristof, “The State-Idea, the National Idea and the Image of the Fatherland,” *Orbis* 11 (Spring 1967): 238-255; idem, “The Geopolitical Image of the Fatherland: The Case of Russia,” *The Western Political Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (1967): 941-954.

russkii, which was well encapsulated in the idea of the “Holy Rus.” “The peasants imagined a holy community of true tsar’ and people, a community standing in opposition to the ‘other’ of the gentry.”⁴⁰ Symptomatically, speaking about this deep social and cultural rift, Hosking characterizes it as being “almost ethnic,”⁴¹ and Leonid Luks argues that within Russia there were “two distinct states that had little in common ever since the start of Europeanization.”⁴²

Two concepts – one of Russia as a peripheral European empire advanced by Dominic Lieven,⁴³ and the other of “internal colonialism” as it has been reinterpreted and applied to Russia by Alexander Etkind⁴⁴ – elucidate both the Russian elites’ erratic attempts at turning “peasants into Russians” and the reasons why they miserably failed. In the age of European nation-states, which saw the vigorous dismantling of all kinds of pre-modern social privileges and barriers, and the emergence of modern urban civilization, the Russian dynastic empire, with its outdated estates system and the boundless sea of illiterate rural population, simply lacked the social power to create a proper milieu in which an all-embracing Russian nationalism could be born. Vasily Klyuchevsky, Russia’s leading 19th century historian, portrayed Russia’s social backwardness and peripheral character in his trademark aphoristic manner. “In the Europe of kings, Russia was a decisive force,” one of Klyuchevsky’s notebook entries reads. “In the Europe of nations, Russia is but a thick log that is caught in an eddy.”⁴⁵

But the fact that, socially, Russia was lagging behind Europe does not mean that nationalism had no role to play in the Russian Empire. Drawing on the authoritative Russian historiographical tradition, Etkind

⁴⁰ Hugh D. Hudson, “An Unimaginable Community: The Failure of Nationalism in Russia during the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 26, no. 3 (1999), p. 299. Some historians who analyzed the formation of a popular ‘anti-statist’ consciousness suggested that a myth of “Holy Rus” had a subversive potential. Thus Michael Cherniavsky argued that the rift between peasants and nobility was mainly a social one: “put most simply, collective identity is a class phenomenon.” See Michael Cherniavsky, “Russia,” in Orest Ranum, ed., *National Consciousness, History and Political Culture in Early-Modern Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), p. 135; Simon Dixon, “The Past in the Present: Contemporary Russian Nationalism in Historical Perspective,” in Hosking and Service, eds., *Russian Nationalism*, p. 149-178.

⁴¹ Geoffrey Hosking, “Can Russia Become a Nation-State?” *Nations and Nationalism* 4, no. 4 (1998), p. 450.

⁴² Leonid Luks, “Was the Emergence of Russian National Identity Merely a Historical Accident?” *Nationalities Papers* 39, no. 1 (2011), p. 135.

⁴³ Dominic Lieven, “Imperiia, istoriia i sovremenny mirovoi poriadok,” *Ab Imperio*, no. 1 (2005): 75-116; idem, *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals* (London: John Murray, 2000).

⁴⁴ Alexander Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia’s Imperial Experience* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011).

⁴⁵ Vasily Klyuchevsky, *Tetrad’ s aforizmami* (Moscow: EKSMO, 2001), p. 406.

invokes the thesis that “Russia was a country that colonized itself.” One important implication of this “internal colonization” was that Russia acted both as the subject and the object of the colonization process: notably, among those who were “colonized” were not only the borderland peoples but also millions of ethnic Russian peasants living in the Russian heartland. Being simultaneously a colonizing power and a colonized country had an impact on the development of Russian nationalism. Again, we see a bifurcation along the familiar lines. “As in India,” Etkind perceptively notes, “nationalism in Russia took two competing forms, rebellious and anti-imperial on the one hand, official and pre-emptive on the other.”⁴⁶

It was, in fact, the modernization ruthlessly conducted by the Soviet Union’s Communist leadership that turned the USSR into a literate, industrialized and urban society, thus creating the necessary social preconditions for the development of nationalism. And nationalism did develop – more successfully among those tenants of the Soviet *kommunalka*, who had a clearly defined living space, that is, their own national “rooms.” When the power of the central Soviet institutions crumbled, the “communal apartment” witnessed a nasty scene: “the tenants of various rooms barricaded their doors and started using the windows, while the befuddled residents of the enormous hall and kitchen stood in the center scratching the backs of their heads. Should they try to recover their belongings? Should they knock down the walls? Should they cut off the gas? Should they convert their ‘living area’ into a proper apartment?”⁴⁷

Twenty five years on, most of these Russian dilemmas are not resolved. Like the former Soviet Union, the present-day Russian Federation is founded on the basis of ethnonationalism (which equates ethnos with nation). Having preserved ethnic federalism in the form of ethno-territorial autonomies, Russia’s federative nature is understood as the federation of *national* territories. This principle is reflected in the language of Russian legislation. Remarkably, the 1993 Constitution speaks not of the multiethnic *rossiiskaya nation*, but of the *multinational rossiiskii people*. This Soviet legacy prompted some commentators to conclude that “for some time to come, Russia will be a residual empire rather than a ‘nation state.’”⁴⁸ So the various options that the Russian tenants of the Soviet communal apartment were mulling back in 1992 are still pertinent. In fact, they represent different ways of defining the “Russian nation.”

There are five such ways of conceptualizing Russian nationhood that can be grouped into two main categories, depending on their main

⁴⁶ Etkind, *Internal Colonization*, p. 19.

⁴⁷ Slezkine, “The USSR,” p. 452.

⁴⁸ Geoffrey Hosking, *Rulers and Victims: The Russians in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 402-403.

organizing principle – a statist/territorial one or an ethno-cultural one.⁴⁹ The statist approach offers two ways of defining the Russian nation. Still rather numerous champions of Russia's "imperial mission" argue that the notion of Russianness is forever blended with the notion of empire: there can be no true Russia without the Russian-led multiethnic Eurasian empire.⁵⁰ The "greater Russia" is thus defined by the territory of the former empire or at least by a significant chunk of its territory. The other statist/civic option is to stick with the current territory of post-Soviet Russia and its ethno-federal arrangement, seeking to build what the advocates of this policy call a *mnogonatsional'naya grazhdanskaya natsiya rossiiyan* (*rossiiskii* multiethnic civic nation). For their part, ethnic nationalists suggest three ways in which Russian nationhood can be defined today. They conceive Russia either as a community of ethnic Russians, or a community of Eastern Slavic peoples, or as a community of Russian speakers.⁵¹

The analysis of the Russian leadership's concrete nation-building practices over the past twenty plus years demonstrates that the Kremlin's policies were extremely ambiguous, vacillating at different times between all the above options.⁵² Oxana Shevel has suggested that the way out of

⁴⁹ Recently, a number of leading students of Russian nationalism argued for the need to question the relevance of traditional ideological "watersheds" of the Russian nationalist movement, including the distinction between "imperial" nationalism and "ethno-cultural" nationalism. They contend that these represent the "ideal types," whereas in reality the fault-lines are blurred and there could be any number of various constellations. (See Marlene Laruelle, "Rethinking Russian Nationalism: Historical Continuity, Political Diversity, and Doctrinal Fragmentation," in Laruelle, *Russian Nationalism*, p. 33, 41-44.) Writing in the same edited volume, Alexander Verkhovsky asserts that "the old dilemma of ethnic versus imperial nationalism is gradually falling into disuse. The Russian Empire is no longer a compelling goal, but neither is the idea of Russia as a civic nation. Neither civic nor even imperial, today's Russian nationalism is instead almost exclusively ethnic." However he concedes that in Russia there has emerged an informal "two-party system" – "the moderate nationalism of the government and the radical nationalism of the populists." The governing elites are predominantly *gosudarstvenniki* (statists), while the populists are mostly ethnic nationalists. (See Verkhovsky, "Future Prospects," p. 89, 100.) As my focus is precisely on how the new generation of Russian ethnic nationalists challenges what they regard as the anti-national imperial state, I hold that the distinction between statist/imperial nationalism and ethno-cultural nationalism is still quite pertinent.

⁵⁰ V.I. Terekhov, "Rossiia: neizbezhnost' imperii," *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta*, Series 8 (History), no. 5 (1993): 52-57.

⁵¹ Hosking, "Can Russia Become a Nation-State?"; Vera Tolz, "'Homeland Myths' and Nation-State Building in Postcommunist Russia," *Slavic Review* 57, no. 2 (1998): 267-294; idem, "Forging the Nation: National Identity and Nation Building in Post-Communist Russia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 50, no. 6 (1998): 993-1022; Oxana Shevel, "Russian Nation-building from Yel'tsin to Medvedev: Ethnic, Civic or Purposefully Ambiguous?" *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 2 (2011): 179-202.

⁵² Petr Panov, "Nation-building in Post-Soviet Russia: What Kind of Nationalism Is Produced by the Kremlin?" *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 1, no. 1 (2010): 85-94; Peter Rutland, "The Presence of Absence: Ethnicity Policy in Russia," in Julie Newton and William Tompson, eds., *Institutions, Ideas and Leadership in Russian Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan,

the Russian nation-building conundrum might be found through the dexterous deployment by the powers-that-be of the notion of *sootchestvenniki* (compatriots). Being vaguely defined in Russian legislation, this notion, Shevel argues, could help Russia's governing elites to continue pursuing their policy of choice – namely, perpetuating the ambiguity of its stand on the nation-building dilemmas and at the same time seeking to gain maximum benefit from its ambivalent position.⁵³

Putin and the *Russkii Mir*

There is no question that the Kremlin leadership would love to indefinitely postpone the solution of the intractable problem of how precisely Russian nationhood should be defined. They seem perfectly content with the highly ambiguous status quo. However, Russia's domestic developments as well as its continuing involvement in the armed conflict in Ukraine are limiting the ruling elites' room for maneuver. Following the December 2011 parliamentary election, which caused unprecedented public protests, Russian elites have witnessed a progressive erosion of the legitimacy of the authoritarian political regime they had built over the last two decades.⁵⁴ The acute deficit of public trust is caused by the pervasive sense of alienation. Its main sources are, on the one hand, rampant corruption and unbridled rent-seeking of the bulk of Russia's bureaucratic class and, on the other, the significant spike in interethnic tension, particularly in the large urban centers which attract the flows of incoming migrant workers from the non-Russian regions of the country (as well as outside Russia proper). At the same time, Russia's annexation of Crimea and its persistent efforts to destabilize the Kyiv government through its support of the separatist enclaves in Ukraine's south-eastern provinces compelled the Kremlin to employ in its propaganda a particularly inflammatory rhetoric whereby a special emphasis is placed on ethnic kinship with the members of the "broader *Russkii Mir*" across the border.⁵⁵

2010): 116-136; Viacheslav Morozov, *Rossia i drugie: identichnost' i granitsy politicheskogo soobshchestva* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2009); Vera Tolz, "The Search for a National Identity in the Russia of Yeltsin and Putin," in Y. Brudny, S. Hoffman and J. Frankel, eds., *Restructuring Post-Communist Russia* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 160-178; George W. Breslauer and Catherine Dale, "Boris Yel'tsin and the Invention of a Russian Nation-State," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 13, no. 4 (1997): 303-332.

⁵³ Shevel, "Russian Nation-building." See also Alexander Kozin, "'The Law of Compatriot': Toward a New Russian National Identity," *Russian Journal of Communication* (2015), DOI: 10.1080/19409419.2015.1082439.

⁵⁴ For a comprehensive discussion of recent political trends in Russia, see Kirill Rogov, ed., *Osnovnye tendentsii politicheskogo razvitiia Rossii v 2011-2013 gg.: Krizis i transformatsiia rossiiskogo avtoritarizma* (Moscow: Fond 'Liberl'naiia missiia,' 2014).

⁵⁵ Marlene Laruelle, "Russia as a 'Divided Nation,' from Compatriots to Crimea," *Problems of Post-Communism* 62, no. 2 (2015): 88-97; Yuri Teper, "Official Russian Identity Discourse in Light of the Annexation of Crimea: National or Imperial," *Post-Soviet Affairs* (2015),

The combination of domestic and external developments appears to have prompted the Russian leadership to spell out where they stand on the “national issue” and in particular on the Russian (*russkii*) question. As Putin himself readily acknowledged, for Russia, given the country’s linguistic, cultural and ethnic diversity, the “national question” is of utmost importance. In a programmatic article headlined “Russia: The National Question” and published in *Nezavisimaya gazeta*,⁵⁶ Russia’s “national leader” sought to prove his nationalist credentials and persuade the voters, above all, Russian nationalists, that the kind of nationalism he champions is best suited for Russia.

Yet Putin’s lengthy essay (as well as his subsequent speeches and interviews on the subject) has only proved that he is well behind the curve: the set of principles that Putin advanced in his article boil down to an eclectic amalgam of the dated tenets of “imperial” (“civilizational”) nationalism,⁵⁷ the promises to strictly regulate labor migration and some rhetoric borrowed from the vocabulary of Russian ethnic nationalists meant to demonstrate that he is one of their own kind. For Putin, Russia is a “unique civilization” where the model of nation-state is inapplicable, the more so, he asserted, that this model is currently in deep crisis worldwide. While he repeatedly called Russia a “multiethnic country,” he also argued that the Russians are a “state-forming people” whose “great mission” is to “unite and bind” the unique civilization. While a multitude of various ethnic groups reside in Russia, Putin contends that “we are one people” – the creators of a specific “state-civilization (*gosudarstvo-tsvivilizatsiya*)” where “there are no national minorities” and all residents are united by “common culture and common values.” Putin does not specify, though, what is the nature of these “common binding values.” As Aleksandr Verkhovsky aptly noted, “our ‘civilization’ itself remains a rather murky notion: the only thing which is really important about it is that it does exist.”⁵⁸ The bottom line of Putin’s thesis is this: “historic Russia” (in the form of the Soviet Union, which had basically been the reincarnation of the Russian Empire) tragically perished in 1991 due to the irresponsibility and voluntarism of top Soviet policymakers, including the Russian ones. The

DOI: 10.1080/1060586X.2015.1076959. For a cogent analysis of the *Russkii Mir* project, see Marlene Laruelle, *The ‘Russian World’: Russia’s Soft Power and Geopolitical Imagination* (Washington, D.C.: Center on Global Interests, 2015).

⁵⁶ Vladimir Putin, “Rossiia: natsional’nyi vopros,” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, January 23, 2012, http://www.ng.ru/politics/2012-01-23/1_national.html

⁵⁷ See Emil’ Pain, “Imperskii natsionalizm (Vozniknovenie, evolutsiia i politicheskie perspektivy v Rosii),” *Obshchestvennye nauki i sovremennost’*, no. 2 (2015): 54-71; idem, *Mezhdru imperiei i natsiei: Modernistskii proekt i ego traditsionalistskaia al’ternativa v natsional’noi politike Rossii* (Moscow: Fond ‘Liberal’naia missiia,’ 2003).

⁵⁸ Aleksandr Verkhovsky, “Etnopolitika federal’noi vlasti i aktivizatsiia russkogo natsionalizma,” *Pro et Contra* 18, no. 1-2 (2014), p. 21.

bulk of “historic Russia” was salvaged and reconstituted as the present-day Russian Federation. This largest remnant of the unique Russian civilization created over the thousand-year period should be preserved at all costs, and the political system that Putin is now presiding over is the best instrument available to secure the state’s integrity. No major changes are desirable, and preserving the status quo is the best guarantee for the country’s long-term stability. (Notably, the Kremlin treats the seizure of Crimea not as a brazen violation of the status quo propped up by international law but as righting the wrongs of the past and the “restoration of justice.”)⁵⁹

Although the circumstances forced Putin to speak out, his position remains ambiguous, representing a mixture of the statist, ethnic and neo-imperial discourses. He appears to reject the idea of Russian nation-state in favor of the concept of the “unique civilization.” At the same time, however, he almost never uses the term *rossiiskii*, whereas the term *russkii* is scattered all over the place in his *Nezavisimaya gazeta* piece and in the triumphant March 18, 2014 “Crimea speech.” Furthermore, as the Ukraine crisis unfolded and the armed conflict broke out in the country’s east, the notion of *Russkii Mir* has become a mainstay of Kremlin official statements. But make no mistake: Putin’s deepest instinct is a statist one: like most Russian rulers past and present, he is a typical *gosudarstvennik* (champion of a strong state). Throughout Russian history, statisticians have tended to hold a pragmatic view of nationalism, seeing it mostly as an instrument to strengthen state institutions and bolster the authority of the ruling class.⁶⁰ This tendency to manipulate and instrumentalize nationalist sentiment can be clearly seen in Nicholas I’s ideology of “Official Nationality,” Alexander III’s “Russian National Myth,” Stalin’s “National-Bolshevism,” as well as in the most recent efforts of Russian authorities to harness Russian nationalism in order to boost their eroding popularity and broaden their social base.⁶¹ The Kremlin leadership is perfectly aware

⁵⁹ See Vladimir Putin, “Obrashchenie Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii,” March 18, 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/20603>

⁶⁰ It gradually dawned even on Aleksandr Dugin, one of the most ardent supporters of the Russian president’s recent policies, that Putin’s approach to nationalism is essentially a pragmatic and instrumentalist one. “Before, we could have an illusion that Putin himself is a Eurasian patriot, a defender of Orthodox identity,” Dugin said. “His hesitation now [to invade Ukraine] is a sign that he has followed this line by some pragmatic calculations, by some realistic understanding of politics.” See Paul Sonne, “Russian Nationalists Feel Let Down by Kremlin, Again,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 4, 2014, <http://online.wsj.com/articles/russian-nationalists-feel-let-down-by-kremlin-again-1404510139>.

⁶¹ Nicholas Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959); Andrei Zorin, “Ideologiia ‘Pravoslviia-Samoderzhaviiia-Narodnosti’: Opyt rekonstruksii,” *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie* 26 (1996): 86-101; Peter Waldron, “The Legacy of Count Sergei Uvarov,” in Michael Branch, ed., *Defining Self: Essays on Emergent Identities in Russia Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2009), p. 211-223; Alexei Miller, “‘Official Nationality’? A Reassessment

of the fact that the collapse of the Soviet Union did not lead to the eradication of imperial relations. So long as genuine federalism in the Russian Federation is absent, the state will remain, in its essence, an imperial entity. Such a quasi-imperial state – a “mini-empire” or a “rump empire” as some commentators call it⁶² – can be ruled only undemocratically, keeping both Russian ethnic nationalism and ethnic nationalisms of non-Russians in check. Notably, Putin lashed out against the slogan “Russia for the Russians” and simultaneously warned that any attempts to set up region-based political parties would not be permitted.⁶³ Such statements indicate that force will be necessary to maintain his vision of a “unique Russian civilization.”

But how forceful can Putin be, if a large number of nationalists are not behind him? True, following the seizure of Crimea, Russia saw an unprecedented upsurge of patriotic sentiment and Putin’s approval rating ran sky-high.⁶⁴ There was talk about the beginning of the “Russian Spring” and the *reconquista* aimed at the gathering of the lost parts of *Russkii Mir*.⁶⁵ As a sizeable proportion of Russian nationalists came to believe that Putin started fulfilling important items of their program, the anti-government sentiment within the nationalist movement dropped significantly.⁶⁶ Yet the Kremlin’s obvious reluctance to launch a full-scale invasion of eastern

of Count Sergei Uvarov’s Triad in the Context of the Politics of Nationalism, 1820-1850,” in Branch, ed., *Defining Self*, p. 224-243; Richard Wortman, “National Narratives in the Representation of Nineteenth-Century Russian Monarchy,” in Wortman, *Russian Monarchy*, p. 152-169; Jorg Baberowski, “Stalinizm i natsiia: Sovetskii Soiuz kak mnogonatsional’noe gosudarstvo, 1917-1953,” *Ab Imperio*, no. 1 (2006): 177-196; Erik Van Ree, “The Concept of ‘National-Bolshevism’: An Interpretative Essay,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 6, no. 3 (2001): 289-307; David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002); Veljko Vujacic, “Stalinism and Russian Nationalism: A Reconceptualization,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 23, no. 2 (2007): 156-183; Verkhovskiy, “Etnopolitika federal’noi vlasti,” p. 20-23.

⁶² Emil’ Pain, *Raspuitsa: Polemicheskie razmyshleniia o predopredelennosti puti Rossii* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2009), p. 111. Remarkably, the term “rump empire” appears to have been first introduced by Arthur Moeller van den Bruck when he characterized, in his 1923 treatise *Das dritte Reich*, the postimperial Weimar Germany: “The Revolution left us to live in a Rump Empire whose mutilated shape we do not recognize as the German Empire of the German Nation.” See Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, *Germany’s Third Empire* (London: Arktos Media Ltd., 2012), p. 217.

⁶³ Putin, “Rossiia: natsional’nyi vopros.”

⁶⁴ Vladimir Erolov, “Crimea Helped Putin Hijack the Nationalists,” *Moscow Times*, April 13, 2014, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/crimea-helped-putin-hijack-the-nationalists/497956.html>

⁶⁵ Marlene Laruelle, “Russian Nationalism and Ukraine,” *Current History* (October 2014): 272-277; idem, “The Three Colors of Novorossiia, or the Russian Nationalist Mythmaking of the Ukrainian Crisis,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* (2015): 1-20, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2015.1023004>.

⁶⁶ Pain, “Imperskii natsionalizm,” p. 58.

Ukraine caused much disappointment within Russia's radical nationalist milieu.⁶⁷ Valery Solovei, a historian and nationalist politician, concedes that immediately "after Crimea" some segments of Russian patriotic forces harbored a "poorly grounded hope" that the Kremlin leadership had embarked on a genuine "pro-Russian" course, and they gave Putin a "credit of trust." But as they began to sense that Putin had let them down, Solovei argues, the bulk of Russian nationalists have returned to the ranks of the anti-Kremlin opposition.⁶⁸ Indeed, it was naïve to believe, echoes another nationalist intellectual, the historian Sergei Sergeev, that an "anti-national" polity such as the contemporary Russian Federation could be so easily transformed into a "Russian national state." "Only a national state like the [19th-century] Prussia or Piedmont can carry out national irredenta," contends Sergeev, adding that "it is impossible to do beyond one country's borders what is not being done within them." Sergeev is convinced that the Kremlin has skillfully used Russian nationalists in its geopolitical gambit but is not going to pursue the nationalist agenda. For him, the only way for Russian "national democracy" to save whatever is left of its former prestige is to immediately distance itself from the Kremlin's policies.⁶⁹ Emil' Pain, one of the leading students of nationalism in Russia, appears to have arrived at the same conclusion. The nationalist movement will continue to develop in Russia, Pain argues. It will strive to stay independent of the Kremlin, evolving, "on the basis of anti-imperialist and pro-democratic ideology, into a genuine opposition to the powers-that-be."⁷⁰

Russian Nationalist Desires for Democracy

What the Kremlin leadership appears to have been slow in grasping is the dramatic transformation of the Russian nationalist movement that had taken place over the past several years.⁷¹ Three developments in particular stand out. First is the sharp rise in Russian ethnic sentiment that is partially reflected in the growing popularity of the slogan "Russia for the Russians." It would be an oversimplification to dismiss it as the manifestation of primitive xenophobia. Second, although the Russian nationalist movement remains deeply divided, some younger and better educated

⁶⁷ Sonne, "Russian Nationalists Feel Let Down by Kremlin"; Fred Weir, "With Ukrainian Rebels on the Ropes, Some Russians Ask: Where Is Putin?" *Christian Science Monitor*, July 7, 2014, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2014/0707/With-Ukraine-rebels-on-the-ropes-some-Russians-ask-Where-is-Putin-video>.

⁶⁸ See Aleksei Polubota, "Razocharovanie patriotov," *Svobodnaia pressa*, July 8, 2014, <http://svpressa.ru/politic/article/91987/>.

⁶⁹ Sergei Sergeev, "'Novorossiya' kak problema russkogo natsionalizma," *Ural*, no. 1 (2015), <http://magazines.russ.ru/ural/2015/1/14se.html>.

⁷⁰ Pain, "Imperskii natsionalizm," p. 67.

⁷¹ Pain, "Ksenofobiia i natsionalizm"; Nicu Popescu, "The Moscow Riots, Russian Nationalism and the Eurasian Union," *EU Institute for Security Studies Brief Issue* 42 (2013): 1-4.

nationalist thinkers have drifted away from worshipping the authoritarian state towards accepting the values of democracy. They now call for the merger of nationalist and democratic principles and advocate the forming of a broad national-democratic movement to fight the ruling autocratic regime. Finally, the new generation of Russian nationalists argues for the need to repudiate all the residual elements of imperial, messianic and neo-Eurasianist doctrines and concentrate, as the late Alexander Solzhenitsyn suggested, on the “rebuilding” of Russia.⁷² The Russia they talk about is post-Soviet Russia within its present borders, and some of them are prepared to see Russia’s territory shrinking rather than expanding in the future.

It is this group of young Russian nationalists, who style themselves as the “Third Wave” of the Russian nationalist movement⁷³ that, to my mind, presents the most serious challenge to Russia’s powers-that-be on a badly fragmented nationalist front.⁷⁴ Remarkably, the main focus of their

⁷² On Solzhenitsyn’s nationalist views, see Michael Confino, “Solzhenitsyn, the West, and the New Russian Nationalism,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 26, no. 3-4 (1991): 611-636.

⁷³ Sergei Sergeev, “Rusizm”: tret’ia volna,” *Politicheskii klass*, no. 6 (2008), http://www.intelros.ru/intelros/reiting/reiting_09/material_sofi/8625-rusizm-tretya-volna.html. Two previous “waves” of Russian nationalism – the so-called “Russian Party” of the late Soviet era and neo-Eurasianism of the 1990s -- are discussed in Aleksandr Baigushev, *Russkaia partiia vnutri KPSS* (Moscow: Algoritm-Kniga, 2005); Nikolai Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia: Dvizhenie russkikh natsionalistov v SSSR, 1953-1985* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2003); Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Wayne Allensworth, *The Russian Question: Nationalism, Modernization, and Post-Communist Russia* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998); Stephen Carter, *Russian Nationalism: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1990); John Dunlop, *The Faces of Contemporary Russian Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Marlene Laruelle, ed., *Russian Nationalism and the National Reassertion of Russia* (London; New York: Routledge, 2009); idem, *In the Name of the Nation: Nationalism and Politics in Contemporary Russia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); idem, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

⁷⁴ This section of the essay draws on numerous writings of the “third wave” nationalists; these include Sergei Sergeev, *Prishestvie natsii?* (Moscow: Skimen, 2010); idem, “Russkoe i russko-sovetskoe,” *Voprosy natsionalizma*, no. 12 (2012): 93-101; idem, “Natsiia est’ poniatie politicheskoe,” *Voprosy natsionalizma*, no. 9 (2012): 114-129; idem, “Natsiia v russkoi istorii,” *Moskva*, no. 6 (2009): 141-159; idem, “Dvorianstvo kak ideolog i mogil’shchik russkogo natsiostroitel’stva,” *Voprosy natsionalizma*, no. 1 (2010): 26-48; idem, “Zametki o natsional’nom,” *Logos*, no. 1 (2007): 203-209; idem, “Pamiati Vadima Tsyumburskogo,” *Moskva*, no. 5 (2009): 168-171; Tatiana Solovej and Valery Solovej, *Nesostoiavshaiasia revoliutsiia: Istoricheskie smysly russkogo natsionalizma* (Moscow: Feoriia, 2009); Valery Solovej, *Krov’ i pochva russkoi istorii* (Moscow: Russkii mir, 2008); idem, *Russkaia istoriia: novoe prochtenie* (Moscow: AIRO-XXI, 2005); idem, “Russkie kak etnoklass,” *Voprosy natsionalizma*, no. 1 (2010): 57-66; Mikhail Remizov, *Opyt konservativnoi kritiki* (Moscow: Pragmatika kul’tury, 2002); idem, “Piat’ prichin byt’ russkim,” *Ekspert*, no. 36 (2011), <http://expert.ru/expert/2011/36/pyat-prichin-byit-russkimi/>; idem, “Russkii natsionalizm kak ideologiya modernizatsii,” *Logos*, no. 1 (2007): 195-202; idem, “Natsiia: konstrukt ili real’nost’,” *Voprosy natsionalizma*, no. 1 (2010): 6-11; Pavel Svyatenkov, “Natsionalisty

writings is on the complicated relationship that Russian ethnic nationalism had with the Russian (imperial) state. They hold that this relationship needs to be thoroughly reinterpreted. Here are their key theses. The Russian state in all its historical forms (imperial, Soviet and post-Soviet) has been – and remains – anti-national. Throughout Russian history there existed an eternal contradiction between the mass of Russian people (who served as a principal human resource for empire-building) and a largely cosmopolitan imperial elite. The contradiction between the *narod* and the elites seen by the common folk as the “other” generated the internal tension that would periodically burst out onto the surface during the periods of Russian *smuta* – the recurrent “time of troubles.” Both in the 1917 Revolution and in the 1991 political upheaval there was an element of Russian national revolt against the empire. In both cases, it was a combination of the cultural and social protest against the rulers whose outlook on the fundamentals of social life sharply differed from that of the Russian masses. (Interestingly, the possibility of such a clash was forecast as early as 1839 by Marquis de Custine who prophesied that one day in Russia there would be a “revolution

vykhodiat iz politicheskogo podpol'ia,” APN.ru, April 24, 2013, <http://www.apn.ru/publications/article28998.htm>; idem, “Putin predlagaet Rossii to, chto razrushaet Evropu,” APN.ru, January 24, 2012, <http://www.apn.ru/publications/article25774.htm>; idem, “Vozmozhna li rossiiskaia identichnost’,” *Voprosy natsionalizma*, no. 3 (2010): 3-6; idem, “K voprosu o natsii,” *Voprosy natsionalizma*, no. 1 (2010): 12-16; idem, “Imperii i ee impertsy,” APN.ru, June 23, 2006, <http://www.apn.ru/publications/article9903.htm>; Konstantin Krylov, *Russkie vopreki Putinu* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2012); idem, “Natsiia kak sub'ekt konflikta,” *Voprosy natsionalizma*, no. 3 (2010): 7-23; idem, Natsionalizm kak predmet issledovaniia, *Voprosy natsionalizma*, no. 1 (2010): 3-6; Oleg Kil'dyushov, “Nashe delo – pravoe,” *Moskva*, no. 10 (2008): 169-175; idem, “Po sledam nashikh vystupenii,” *Logos*, no. 1 (2007): 156-176; idem, “Russkii natsionalizm kak problema rossiiskoi obshchestvennosti,” *Logos*, no. 2 (2006), <http://magazines.russ.ru/logos/2006/2/ki12.html>; Aleksandr Khramov, “Natsionalizm i modernizatsiia,” *Voprosy natsionalizma*, no. 1 (2010), 30-45; idem, “Rossiiskaia Federatsiia kak nasledie Lenina—Stalina,” *Voprosy natsionalizma*, no. 4 (2010), 18-38; Oleg Nemensky, “Nasledie i vybor,” APN.ru, January 24, 2012, <http://www.apn.ru/publications/article25775.htm>; idem, “Russkaia zemlia kak bazovoe poniatie geopolitiki Rossii,” *Russkie.org*, January 14, 2011, <http://www.russkie.org/index.php?module=fullitem&id=20489>; idem, “Russkii mir i russkaia zemlia: territorial'nyi aspekt russkoi identichnosti,” *Russkie.org*, March 5, 2008, <http://www.russkie.org/index.php?module=fullitem&id=12160>; idem, “Panrusizm,” *Voprosy natsionalizma*, no. 3 (2011): 34-43; idem, “Voobrazhaia natsiiu,” *Voprosy natsionalizma*, no. 2 (2010): 6-10; idem, “Natsionalizm gorodskoi i sel'skii,” *Voprosy natsionalizma*, no. 1 (2010): 49-56; idem, “Russkoe budushchee: v zashchitu etnonatsionalizma,” APN.ru, June 18, 2007, <http://www.apn.ru/publications/article17274.htm>; Aleksandr Samovarov, *Ostanutsia li v Rossii russkie?* (Moscow: Iauza, 2010); idem, *Nuzhno li nam vozvrashchat'sia v SSSR? Russkii projekt* (Moscow: Iauza, 2009); Vadim Tsymbursky, *Ostrov Rossiia: Geopoliticheskie i khronopoliticheskie raboty, 1993-2006* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2007); “Rossiia: natsional'noe gosudarstvo ili imperiia? ‘Kruglyi stol’ zhurnala ‘Moskva,’” *Moskva*, no. 5 (2008), 155-180; “Est' li u Rossii natsional'naia elita? ‘Kruglyi stol’ zhurnala ‘Moskva,’” *Moskva*, no. 1 (2010): 152-168; “Russkii vopros segodnia. ‘Kruglyi stol’ zhurnala ‘Moskva,’” *Moskva*, no. 12 (2010), 149-162; “Russkii vopros v sovremennoi Rossii. ‘Kruglyi stol,’” *Moskva*, no. 2 (2012), 130-145; “Krakh mul'tikul'turalizma: chto dal'she? Kruglyi stol ‘Voprosov natsionalizma,’” *Voprosy natsionalizma*, no. 8 (2011), 23-49.

of the bearded against the beardless.”⁷⁵ Likewise, in Etkind’s analysis, the noble cause of the internal colonization, which was supposed to bring the fruits of civilization to the benighted subjects of the Russian Empire, is wittily called a “shaved man’s burden.”⁷⁶ There is also an interesting paradox: in both cases (that is, in 1917 and in 1991), the Russians managed to destroy the “anti-national” state but they did it under “cosmopolitan” slogans (internationalist communism in 1917, and universal values in 1991), and as a result ended up under imperial rule again.

Now, what did the young Russian nationalists get right in their critique of Russian nationalist tradition? Three main things should be noted here. First, they clearly see the objective anti-imperial role of Russian ethnic nationalism – again, not unlike Etkind, who, drawing on postcolonial writings, argues that Russian nationalism existed in two rival forms, one of which was anti-imperial and rebellious. Objectively, Russian nationalism undermined imperial loyalty in two ways. In the empire’s borderlands, Russian nationalism stimulated the rise of other ethnic nationalisms, while in the Russian core lands it was striving to make traditionally unconditional Russian loyalty to the state conditional – predicated on the Russian national character of the ruling regime. This is precisely the reason why both tsars and Communist commissars were wary of Russian ethnic nationalists. Second, the “third wave” nationalist thinkers correctly note that the objective anti-imperial role of Russian nationalism has never been properly understood by nationalists, nor would they draw logical conclusions from it. The thing is that, subjectively, Russian nationalists always wanted the impossible: they were longing for a Russian national state that at the same time would remain an empire. Thus they ended up having contradictory relations with the state: they both challenged it and relied on it for support, being unable to give up the empire which they perceived as the most precious creation of the Russian people.⁷⁷ Finally, the young nationalist thinkers conclude, again correctly, that historically, Russian nationalism had a contradictory (and at times, hostile) attitude toward democracy. The objectively democratic character of nationalism as the ideology championing self-determination and people’s sovereignty would almost never prompt Russian nationalists to rise against the authoritarian

⁷⁵ Marquis de Custine, *Letters from Russia* (London, 1854), p. 455. Quoted in Hosking, “Can Russia Become a Nation-State?” p. 451.

⁷⁶ Alexander Etkind, “Bremia britogo cheloveka, ili Vnutrenniaia kolonizatsiia Rossii,” *Ab Imperio*, no. 1 (2002): 265-299.

⁷⁷ I think Hosking has nicely summarized what he sees as a paradox of Russian national identity: “It cannot completely unfold itself *in* the Russian-Soviet state; it however also fears that it will not be able to live on *without* the state.” See Geoffrey Hosking, “Russischer Nationalismus vor 1914 und heute: Die Spannung zwischen imperialen und ethnischen Bewusstsein,” in Andreas Kappeler, ed., *Die Russen: Ihr Nationalbewusstsein in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Köln: Markus Verlag, 1990), p. 182.

political system. The explanation is simple: any attempt to realize full sovereignty for the Russians in the multiethnic land-based empire would inevitably lead to other ethnic groups within the state seeking to exercise the same right. The result would be multiple secessions and the end of the imperial state, which Russian nationalists believed was “theirs” too.⁷⁸

The main conclusion that the representatives of the nationalist “third wave” have made is that they have to whole-heartedly embrace ethnic nationalism against the statist, pre-emptive and ultimately phony nationalism of the Kremlin elites. Thus they resolutely reject the *rossiiskii* definition of the Russian nation as a mere cover-up for the residual imperial situation. Furthermore, they argue, *rossiiskii* is basically a hollow notion: it is redundant for ethnic Russians and unsatisfactory, if not outright suspicious, for those with a different ethnic identity. However, they are also quick to add that, in principle, they are in no way against the idea of a civic nation. Nation as a community of citizens is the ultimate goal, but it can be achieved, they argue, only through mobilization of ties based on ethnic solidarity.

However, unlike more radical nationalists whose views border on racism, the group’s championing of ethnic nationalism comes with three important reservations. First, the overwhelming majority of the young nationalist thinkers propose to define ethnos in cultural and political rather than in biological or narrowly religious terms (although there is no complete consensus on this within the group). Put another way, they uphold the more inclusive “[Mikhail] Katkov tradition” with its emphasis on culture, language and respect for the state’s laws against the “[Ivan] Aksakov tradition” with its exclusivist equating of Russianness and Orthodoxy.⁷⁹ Second,

⁷⁸ The argument that the Russian Empire could be governed only autocratically was clearly formulated by Prince Aleksandr Andreevich Bezborodko (who was of Ukrainian origin) in the 1799 memorandum to Emperor Paul I: “Russia is an autocratic state. Its size, the variety of its inhabitants and customs, and many other considerations make it the only natural form of government for Russia. All arguments to the contrary are futile, and the least weakening of the autocratic power would result in the loss of many provinces, the weakening of the state, and countless misfortunes for the people.” See Marc Raeff, ed., *Plans for Political Reform in Imperial Russia, 1730-1905* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 70.

⁷⁹ The opposition between these two schools of thought was noted and commented on already in the early 1860s. In September 1863, Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin registered the upsurge of patriotic sentiment among the Russian youth caused by the Polish Uprising. Russia’s young people, noted Saltykov, were burning with desire to uphold the “cause of the Russian people,” proudly proclaiming that “we are Russians.” This was all good and well, the writer said sarcastically, but it would be very helpful if these young people were better instructed as to what precisely was the “cause of the Russian people.” It is a moot question, he added: “there is nothing specific on this issue in Russia’s laws, and the learned specialists are constantly contradicting one another and engaged in mutual strife over this matter,” as Aksakov advanced one set of ideas and Katkov the other one. See M.E. Saltykov-Shchedrin, *Sobranie sochinenii*. In 20 vols. (Moscow, 1965) 6, p. 119. For a more detailed discussion of Katkov’s and Aksakov’s interpretations of the notion of “nation,” see Aleksei Miller, “Istoriia poni-

they argue for the need to de-emphasize the specifically ethnic dimension of Russian nationalism and focus instead on the social dimension. The growth of ethnic sentiment, Russian nationalist ideologues argue, is a response to the challenges of social disintegration that occurred in the wake of the Soviet breakup and was further aggravated by the “anti-national” policies of the Putin regime. The pernicious consequences of these policies include the lack of confidence in state institutions, the growing gap between the ruling elites and the people, social atomization, and the crisis of major mechanisms of socialization, such as the army and schools. Finally, they fully embrace democracy and contend that the Russian national state can be viable only if it is democratic.⁸⁰ Their analyses of the imperial and Soviet governance practices convinced them that neither under the Romanovs nor under the Communists have the Russians had a state as a system of civic institutions. What they did have was a mere assemblage of the “networks of personal dependence.”⁸¹ The latter was incapable of bridging various social, religious and ethnic divides and fostering a strong sense of loyalty based on the concept of citizenship among the country’s multiethnic populace. Thus, neither before 1917, nor between 1917 and 1991, did there occur in Russia what Jurgen Habermas calls a merger of *Volksnation* and *Staatsnation*. Consequently, Russia never saw the emergence of a qualitatively new national community – a modern national state in which national identity forms a cultural context that fosters the growth of civic activity. This unequivocally pro-democracy stand of the “third wave” nationalist thinkers is precisely what brought young nationalists and young liberals together and united them at the 2011-2012 anti-Putin rallies. It is the common understanding of both groups that notwithstanding the existence of the formal democratic institutions in the present-day Russian Federation (such as the Constitution, elected president, parliament, local legislative assemblies), the significant majority of Russians do not identify with them, suspecting, quite rightly, that these institutions are a mere façade that camouflages the recreation of the post-Soviet “networks of personal dependence.” Note, for example, the rather positive reception by

atija natsiia v Rossii,” in Denis Sdvizkov and Ingrid Schierle, eds., *‘Poniattia o Rossii’: K istoricheskoi semantike imperskogo perioda* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2012): 7-49; Andreas Renner, “Defining a Russian Nation: Mikhail Katkov and the ‘Invention’ of National Politics,” *Slavonic and East European Review* 81, no. 4 (2003): 659-682.

⁸⁰ This stand clearly echoes the one of the Georgian liberal political thinker Ghia Nodia, who in early 1990s, in his debate with Francis Fukuyama, was arguing that “there is a necessary and positive link between nationalism and democracy.” “Whether we liked it or not,” Nodia asserted, “nationalism is the historical force that has provided the political units for democratic government. ‘Nation’ is another name for ‘We the People.’” See Ghia Nodia, “Nationalism and Democracy,” in Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, eds., *Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict, and Democracy* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. 6, 7.

⁸¹ See Geoffrey A. Hosking, “Patronage and the Russian State,” *Slavonic and East European Review* 78, no. 2 (2000): 301-320.

Russian nationalists of Mikhail Khodorkovsky's article entitled "Between Empire and National State: Nationalism and Social Liberalism."⁸² In his comment on Khodorkovsky's piece, Sergei Sergeev contends that "today the interests of [Russian] nationalists and liberals coincide in the most important respect. Their mutual goal is the destruction of the dominant power structure that now is beyond public control. This structure is both *anti-national* (since it creates all kinds of obstacles to the formation of the Russian nation as an independent political subject) and *anti-liberal* (since it grossly infringes on the rights and liberties of Russian citizens)."⁸³ It would appear then that the new-generation nationalists came to understand that the "effective national idea cannot be based only on the reference to ethnicity alone; it should always have political and social content."⁸⁴

In this sense, an interesting ideological struggle is going on over how to interpret the slogan "Russia for the Russians." Some nationalists and liberals now insist that it is not actually a xenophobic battle cry targeting the "dark-skinned" folk from the Caucasus and Central Asia. At its core, they contend, this slogan is deeply national-democratic as it calls for reclaiming Russia by all its citizens, and for this to happen, it has to be taken away from the Putin clique and their subservient "United Russia" party.⁸⁵ The Putinists are, to use a popular definition, a bunch of "crooks and thieves" – they are predators who plunder Russian resources and the Russian people, and thus they are both anti-national and undemocratic.⁸⁶

⁸² Mikhail Khodorkovsky, "Mezhdū imperiei i natsional'nym gosudarstvom: Natsionalizm i sotsial'nyi liberalizm," *Novaya gazeta*, June 15, 2012, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/53088.html>.

⁸³ Sergei Sergeev, "Natsionalizm i liberalizm," *Rusplatforma.org*, July 1, 2012, <http://rusplatforma.org/publikacii/node/724/>.

⁸⁴ Leonid Fishman, "O 'russkom mire' i besperspektivnosti 'nedonatsionalizma'," *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, no. 1 (2015), p. 262.

⁸⁵ Remarkably, not long before he passed away in 2011, Dmitry Furman, Russia's prominent political thinker and well-respected liberal public intellectual, wholeheartedly supported such an approach. In his article tellingly headlined "From *Rossiiskii* Empire toward *Russkii* Democratic State" and published in the liberal journal *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, Furman unequivocally stated that "Russia should be reinterpreted as a national *Russkii* state." He went on: "Today the words 'Russia for the Russians' are perceived as an outlandish xenophobic slogan. But they should be viewed as a statement of a banal truth. Russia for the Russians – well, for whom else? Russia for the Russians, Poland for the Poles, Ukraine for the Ukrainians, and Chechnya for the Chechens. In no way does this [slogan] imply the negation of the rights of other [ethnic groups] to their 'national homelands.' On the contrary, it presupposes such a right... 'Russia for the Russians' is the antithesis to 'the Russians for Russia' – the state in which the Russians pay with their freedom, blood and wellbeing for the ability to lord over other peoples. The thing is, though, that it's not the Russians as a people but rather their rulers who happen to be ethnic Russians that are real oppressors. 'Russia for the Russians' – is a democratic Russia, the state that is an instrument for achieving public good." See Dmitry Furman, "Ot Rossiiskoi imperii k russkomu demokraticeskomu gosudarstvu," *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, no. 5 (2010), <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2010/5/fu3.html>.

⁸⁶ As the political analyst Andrei Piontkovsky remarked during a high point of popular stir-

One important implication of the young Russian nationalists' embracing of democracy is that, unlike the statist/"imperial" nationalists, they appear not to be hell-bent on preserving the "territorial integrity" of today's Russian Federation at all costs, always resorting to raw force against any "nationalist sedition" in non-Russian regions. By contrast, according to their view, the creation of the democratic Russian national state might make the redrawing of the existing Russian state borders in certain cases inevitable. Some of the leading nationalist ideologues, such as Valery Solovei, foresee the secession of Northern Caucasus, Russia's classical imperial possession, as well as the possible loss of other non-Russian territories "during our lifetime." Solovei argues that many Russians have long stopped perceiving Northern Caucasus as an "inalienable part of Russia. It is perceived as an alien entity. A psychological alienation is but a prelude to political separation."⁸⁷ Remarkably, this view appears to be shared by some liberal-minded commentators, including the prominent economist Vladislav Inozemtsev, who see the impoverished republics of Northern Caucasus as "a hindrance to [Russia's] national development."⁸⁸

Failed Projects

The intellectual activity of the new cohort of Russian nationalists is a fascinating (and still ongoing) episode in the evolution of *russskii* nationalism and in the history of the latter's uneasy relationship with the *rossiiskii* state. The vision of Russian democratic national state advanced by the

ring in Moscow in early 2012, all Putin's attempts to lure Russian nationalists are destined to fail, as the "train has left the station." It's too late, Piontkovsky said. The nationalists have turned against Putin. "They know Putin is a crook and a thief." See Will Englund, "In Moscow, a Throwback to Soviet Vitriol," *Washington Post*, February 1, 2012, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/in-moscow-a-throwback-to-soviet-vitriol/2012/02/01/gIQALEUnhQ_story.html.

⁸⁷ Valery Solovei, "Natsionalizm pobedit tol'ko v soiuzе s ideei demokratii," *Nazdem.info*, June 23, 2010, <http://nazdem.info/texts/132/>. Notably, the liberal thinker Furman fully agreed, saying that "no future problems can be resolved on the basis of the principle of 'one and indivisible' Russia." In fact, in his analysis Furman went further than Solovei; he expressed his position in no uncertain terms. Russia, Furman believed, faces a "dilemma: either the break-up of the [Russian] mini-empire and a new 'shrinking' of Russia or the new failure of democracy, suppression of separatism, and the building of yet another 'vertical of power.'" See Furman, "Ot Rossiiskoi imperii." For a detailed and sympathetic analysis of Furman's political ideas, see Perry Anderson, "One Exceptional Figure Stood Out," *London Review of Books* 37, no. 15 (2015): 19-28; idem, "Imitation Democracy," *London Review of Books* 37, no. 16 (2015): 19-28.

⁸⁸ Inozemtsev cited in Alexander Bratersky, "Ultrationalists on the Rise," *Moscow Times*, July 6, 2012, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/ultrationalists-on-the-rise/461672.html>. It would be proper to add here that the now-famous slogan "Stop Feeding the Caucasus!" was coined by the self-styled "national-democrat" Aleksei Navalny. For a good analysis of Navalny's political outlook, see Marlene Laruelle, "Alexei Navalny and Challenges in Reconciling 'Nationalism' and 'Liberalism,'" *Post-Soviet Affairs* 30, no. 4 (2014): 276-297.

“third wave” of Russian nationalists does present a serious challenge to the stale image of the “unique Russian civilization” disseminated by the Kremlin. Russian nationalists’ sharp criticism of the “anti-national regime,” their hatred of corrupt and predatory “oligarchs,” their stressing the importance of social problems rather than the ethno-cultural aspects of identity, and their readiness to exploit and further agitate popular nationalist stirring make this particular version of Russian ethnic nationalism a truly subversive political force.⁸⁹ They make no secret that they are going to be a dominant force in post-Putin Russia and are convinced that the next Russian revolution will be a nationalist one.⁹⁰

At this point, two questions need to be asked: 1) did the “third wave” nationalists succeed in resolving the *russkii*—*rossiiskii* dilemma? 2) Is their vision of “Russia” feasible or even desirable? The answer to both questions is a resolute No. Both the Kremlin’s “project” and the nationalist “project” are unsuitable as blueprints for building a truly viable multiethnic civic nation in Russia, although for different reasons. As I have noted above, the official way of defining “Russia” is highly ambiguous – it is neither strictly “ethnic” nor genuinely “civic.” The Kremlin purposefully blurs distinctions between *russkii* and *rossiiskii*, and between citizens and non-citizens, depending on political conjuncture and the concrete goals it strives to achieve at the moment. By manipulating the notions of *sootchestvenniki* and *Russkii Mir* the Kremlin leadership might designate as *russkii* basically whomever it likes on the vast expanses of the former empire – and even farther afield. In this sense, official nationalism is inclusive and open, even super-open as some analysts note.⁹¹ But this openness is, of course, a flipside of its residual imperial nature: it privileges loyalty to the state (and the state-sponsored sense of Russianness), and neglects “civic virtues.” Instead of promoting the development of horizontal civic ties, self-government, all kinds of institutions that together make up civil society, official nationalism champions a version of Russian *Sonderweg* with its component elements of unique civilization, special mission and historical destiny.⁹² But “servitors of the (imperial) state” cannot become

⁸⁹ Some analysts note that the Kremlin feels extremely uncomfortable with the emerging modern nationalists who seem ready to embrace democratic principles. According to Pavel Salin, an expert with the Center for Current Politics, “authorities are afraid of Western-style nationalism.” See Bratersky, “Ultrationalists.”

⁹⁰ A prominent Russian liberal-minded foreign policy expert confirms that a marked shift has taken place in Russia away from the “imperial visions” and towards “nationalization.” “Russia is not turning imperial, it is turning nationalist,” argued Dmitry Trenin at a recent discussion at London’s Chatham House. “That’s a different thing for a post-imperial nation.” See Trenin’s remarks in *Russia, Ukraine and the West: Is Confrontation Inevitable? Transcript: Q&A* (London: Chatham House, June 25, 2014), p. 13.

⁹¹ Panov, “Nation-building in Post-Soviet Russia,” p. 93.

⁹² For a detailed discussion of *Sonderweg* ideology in Russia and Germany, see Emil’ Pain, ed., *Ideologiia ‘osobogo puti’ v Rossii i Germanii: istoki, sodержanie, posledstviia* (Moscow:

true citizens, and without the latter Russian civic nation is unthinkable.

By contrast, ethnic nationalist thinkers do not even bother to tackle the *russskii*—*rossiiskii* dichotomy: they pronounced it completely artificial, throw the *rossiiskii* part out, and prefer to talk only about the *russskii* state. However broad their definition of Russianness might be, it still remains exclusive: among the multiethnic Russian citizenry there will always be a sizeable minority which will not fit into this definition and, more important, will not want to fit in. The weakest point of the ethnic nationalists' definition of "Russia" is the lack of clarity of how their "Russia" is going to treat non-Russians. Making references to various UN documents to prove that by virtue of ethnic Russians' sheer numerical strength (around 80 per cent of Russia's population) Russia should be characterized as a monoethnic state is simply unhelpful. After all, there still are around 20 per cent of non-Russians living in compact areas in the territories where their forebears have resided for centuries and which are designated as their national homelands by the Russian Constitution. True, the new cohort of ethnic nationalists did embrace democracy. But one might suspect – and with good reason at that – that they want "the democracy of the ethnic majority," which would help them to impose their will on those who for whatever reasons are not included into the *russskii* in-group. Protection of minority rights does not figure prominently in their concept. However, to believe that the workings of democracy (one man, one vote) will do the trick – again, mostly because ethnic Russians constitute an overwhelming majority – is naïve. Any attempt to implement "the democracy of the ethnic majority" into practice in a multiethnic state is a recipe for disaster. Recent scholarship demonstrated that ethnic cleansing, genocide and other such crimes occurred precisely in democracies which were understood as the power of the ethnic majority.⁹³ Ethnic nationalists say that in relations with non-Russians the ultimate goal is to get them to perceive Russian interests as their own interests as well. However, there is no clear explanation how to achieve this. Also, ethnic nationalists are vague on how they are going to proceed toward a civic nation once the stage of "ethnic mobilization" is reached. Ultimately, the "*russskii* project" advanced by ethnic nationalists appears to be impractical. Soviet practices left a heavy imprint on the people's consciousness, having made it excessively ethnocentric – this is characteristic of both ethnic Russians and non-Russians alike. The vision of "Russia" which ethnic nationalists are promoting cannot fail to be perceived as one that leads towards ethnicization of national community. For this reason it will be rejected by Russia's non-Russian minorities.

Tri kvadrata, 2010).

⁹³ See Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Conclusion

Will it ever be possible to reconcile the notions of *russkii* and *rossiiskii* within a genuinely democratic Russian civic nation? Some of the best Russian liberal thinkers are racking their brains trying to solve this problem.⁹⁴ The analysis of their noble efforts is beyond the scope of this paper. Just one concluding remark will be in order. All liberal-minded intellectuals who are involved in the elaboration of the civic *rossiiskii* project are well aware of the constraints they have to deal with. The most formidable constraint is, of course, the Soviet institutional legacy – the territorialization of ethnicity whereby certain areas are designated as the “property” of a titular ethnic group. “In my view,” contends the historian Aleksei Miller, “the establishment of a nation-state in Russia, which inherited from the USSR a system built on the institutionalization and territorialization of ethnicity, is an impossibility.”⁹⁵ Second is what some analysts call the “inertia of meanings.” The terms and definitions we are using now (like *russkii* and *rossiiskii*), they explain, have been used in previous epochs, with different connotations, by scores of Russian bureaucrats and intellectuals, and all these old discourses inevitably impact on contemporary debates. The persistence of earlier interpretations makes the introduction of new interpretations of the long-used notions more difficult.⁹⁶ Finally, the project of the *rossiiskii* civic nation has to compete with rival projects, and as this entire discussion has demonstrated, there is no shortage of them. Remember the wisdom of Richard Wortman’s conclusion: Russian nationalism is a space of *endless contestation*.

It would seem, then, that the struggle over how to define “Russia”

⁹⁴ See Aleksei Miller, ed., *Nasledie imperii i budushchee Rossii* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2008).

⁹⁵ Alexei Miller, “Nation and Empire: Reflections in the Margins of Geoffrey Hosking’s Book,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 13, no. 2 (2012), p. 428. There is intriguing evidence that in the late Soviet period the Kremlin leadership was toying with the idea of dismantling ethnofederalism. The late Arkady Vol’sky, a high-ranking Soviet government and party official, described in his memoirs how one day in the early 1980s he was summoned by Yuri Andropov, then the top Soviet leader. Andropov charged Vol’sky with the task of crafting a new institutional design for the USSR. According to Vol’sky, Andropov told him: “Let’s get rid of the division of the country according to the national principle. Please submit a plan how to organize ‘states’ in the Soviet Union... Draw a new map of the USSR.” Vol’sky was reminiscing how hard he worked to fulfill Andropov’s order, and finally put together a new “design” whereby the Soviet Union would comprise 41 “states.” But by the time the plan was ready, Andropov was dying in the Kremlin clinic. See [Arkady Vol’sky], “Chetyre genseka. Arkady Vol’sky o Brezhneve, Andropove, Chernenko i Gorbacheve. Vospominaniia,” *Kommersant*, September 12, 2006, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/704123>. Some Russian historians suggest that Andropov was the last leader who was powerful enough to carry out such a reform. See Aleksei Miller’s remarks in “Proekty stroitel’stva natsii v sovremennoi Rossii: ogranicheniia, problemy, protivorechiia,” *Liberal.ru*, February 15, 2007, <http://www.liberal.ru/articles/1348>.

⁹⁶ See Olga Malinova’s remarks in “Proekty stroitel’stva natsii.”

and “Russianness” will continue for some time. “What does it mean to be Russian or non-Russian in post-Soviet Russia?” ask Stephen Norris and Willard Sunderland in the introduction to their masterful gallery of portraits of Russia’s “people of empire.” “It is hard to make out clear answers to these questions,” they confess, “because we are in the moment ourselves.”⁹⁷ The jury is still out as to whether Professor de Lazari will ever be able to get a definitive answer to his one-million-dollar query, How to be Russian?

⁹⁷ Stephen M. Norris and Willard Sunderland, “Introduction: Russia’s People of Empire,” in *Russia’s People of Empire: Life Stories from Eurasia, 1500 to the Present*, ed. Stephen M. Norris and Willard Sunderland (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012), p. 12-13.

