

Chapter 1

A Dual Crisis of Identity

This book interprets Slavophilism as an attempt to deal with the question of Russia's national identity. The aim of this chapter is to furnish ground for understanding Slavophilism as a form of nationalism. It begins with a discussion of the literature on the rise of nationalism and the attempts that have been made to explain the emergence of Slavophilism. From this discussion two insights are derived. First, that a national identity originated in Russia not as a broadly shared sentiment among the people at large, or as a popular movement, but in a discourse on Russia's future among the educated elite. Second, that this discourse was the result, as well as the expression, of an identity crisis experienced by members of the educated class. The reasons for this crisis can be found in the social and political conditions of the educated class in Russia in the early nineteenth century and so the chapter proceeds to an account of these circumstances. The latter part of the chapter addresses the influence of Romanticism on Slavophilism. It establishes that Romanticism shaped the intellectual agenda at the time so as to bring certain issues to the forefront of debate. Yet, even more important, Romantic ideas, concepts, and language provided the material out of which a Russian national identity took form.

THE EDUCATED ELITE AND THE RISE OF NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Nationalism and Modernisation

Scholars have long emphasized the importance of the process of modernisation for the understanding of nationalism. Economic growth, industrialization, urbanization, democratization, the development of capitalism, the invention of the printing press, the process of vernacularization, and a growing and increasingly powerful middle class are factors, which have been described as crucial to the rise of nationalism.¹ However, because writers have different understandings of what nationalism is, they also have different theories of its emergence.

Ernest Gellner describes nationalism as a principle of congruence between the political and the national unit. Nationalism is rooted in the division of labour characteristic of industrial society. It is a consequence of a new form of social organisation, based on a literate high culture, which is co-extensive with an entire political unit and its population. According to Gellner, nationalism is really about participation in such a high culture. Historical contingencies determine which actors are central in promoting nationalism, but the principle is inherent in a certain set of social conditions and is part of the modernization process.² Gellner's interest lies in the structural conditions of nationalism, or rather, in the way nationalism structures society. For this reason, the ideology of nationalism, or the ways that social, political, or ethnic groups put nationalism to use, is of limited interest to him.

Benedict Anderson introduces more variables than Gellner into his theory of the rise of nationalism. Both social phenomena, such as capitalism and print technology, and cultural phenomena, such as the diversity of language and the erosion of religious truths, were central factors in the shaping of a national consciousness according to Anderson. Without capitalism, which assembled related vernaculars and created print-languages the new national communities would have been unimaginable.³ Anderson's account, therefore, makes capitalists, and the bourgeoisie in general, the foremost promoters of nationalism.

When it comes to applying Gellner's and Anderson's theories to the origins of Slavophilism, two problems present themselves. The first is obvious: Some of the elements of modernity were already present in Russia under Peter I, or at least under Catherine II, such as the erosion of religious truths, print technology, a literate high-culture, and the emergence of a national

consciousness. Yet, other indications, such as a strong middle class, economic growth, and democratization, were still to be seen. Serfdom and widespread illiteracy characterised the economy and society. A rapid and, at the same time, quantitatively significant industrial growth began in Russia only after 1855, while commercial institutions remained backward at least until 1860 and business institutions were poorly developed until the last decade of the nineteenth century.⁴ The second problem with Gellner's and Anderson's theories concerns the definition of nationalism. Had Russian nationalism focused on the nationality principle, it would logically have been an ideology that turned against the tsarist empire. Yet, anti-imperialism did not dominate the ideas of nationalists. Other things did.

Even if a direct link between modernization and the rise of nationalism is difficult to establish in the case of Russia, it is undeniable that a novel and distinct national identity arose among some elements of Russian society in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. To understand this development it is necessary to turn to theories of nationalism, which place greater stress on the importance of specific actors in the rise of nationalism.

Nationalism and Feelings of Backwardness

Many writers stress that the emergence of nationalism is linked not so much to modernity as to a discrepancy between modernity and traditional society, and to the feeling of backwardness this discrepancy often fosters. They use a socio-psychological explanation, where nationalism is said to be an outcome of a crisis of identity resulting from the exposure of traditional society to modernity. In such studies the focus is on the intellectuals, or, alternatively, on the middle class.

Eric Hobsbawm talks about a need for nationalism among intellectuals due to social changes. In his work on the invention of tradition, Hobsbawm argues that because of social change, new traditions were needed which could express social cohesion and identity when old traditions were no longer adaptable to the new social patterns. These new traditions were founded on the nation as the unifying element rather than a national church, a royal family, or other cohesive traditions or collective group-identities. Nationalism became a new secular religion, and the class that most needed this mode of cohesion, was the growing middle-class, which lacked other forms of cohesion.⁵

Liah Greenfeld argues in a similar way. She distinguishes three phases in the formation of specific nationalisms: structural, cultural, and psychological.

To begin with, the adoption of a national identity is necessarily preceded by a dissatisfaction with the existing identity of the concerned groups. The reason for this dissatisfaction is that the definition of the social order expressed by the traditional identity is inconsistent with the experience of the group members. Because of a change in the position and roles of influential social groups, a crisis of identity occurs. The inadequacy of the traditional identity of the involved groups creates an incentive to search for a replacement. A national identity is imported and adopted, partly due to its availability, partly because of its ability to solve this crisis. However, the imported idea has to be adjusted to the situational constraints of the actors and be reinterpreted to fit indigenous traditions. This explains variations between individual nationalisms.⁶

Greenfeld further argues that the importation of the national identity fosters envy and hatred (*ressentiment*) towards the source of the imported model, since the model is considered superior to the imitation. These feelings are based on the assumption of equality between model and imitator that is inconsistent with the actual inequality. *Ressentiment* can lead to “a transvaluation of values, whereby the originally supreme values are denigrated and replaced with notions which are unimportant, external, or antithetical to the original values.” However, Greenfeld argues, the new system of values is not a direct reversal of the original model. “The matrix of national identity evolves out of the transvaluation of values, which together with the original principles, modified according to the specific structural and cultural context, results in the unique character of any one nationalism.” Nevertheless, *ressentiment* felt by the group who imported the idea of the nation usually results in an emphasis on elements of indigenous traditions hostile to the principles of the original nationalism when they articulate the national consciousness of their particular society.

Applying her theory to Russia Greenfeld maintains that there, indigenous cultural resources were absent, or insufficient, so that *ressentiment* was the single most important factor in determining the terms in which national identity was defined.⁷ This explains why the Slavophiles gave much more attention to refuting Western values than presenting Russian ones, and why those values, which actually were presented, were portrayed as directly opposed to Western ones.

Anthony D. Smith also regards nationalism as a solution to a crisis of identity. But to Smith it is the model imported from the West, the scientific state, that creates the crisis. Yet, even if ideas rather than the social constraints of the actors, as in Greenfeld’s theory, instigate a crisis of identity, these ideas are part of the modernization process and it is the confrontation between, on the one hand, the traditional and cosmic world

view and, on the other, the modern and rational world view, which gives the intellectuals a “double loyalty.” Both systems demand absolute loyalty, since there cannot be two truths—one religious and one scientific. According to Smith there are three logical solutions to this dilemma. First, to preserve the traditional world view; second, to transfer loyalty to the scientific state, and third, to combine the traditional and the modern order in a new synthesis through reforming the religious culture and tradition of the society. It is the third solution that can best respond to the needs of the upper middle-class.⁸

Nationalism as the Solution to a Crisis of Identity

Historians and social scientists who have investigated the reasons for the appearance of Slavophilism have all employed the concept, if not the terminology, of an identity crisis. A common argument is that the Slavophiles formed their ideas as a reaction against the decline of the Russian nobility and the emergence of a middle-class. The Slavophiles belonged to noble families and so, the argument goes, their social position best explains their ideas and actions. They were simply afraid of losing their privileges and therefore presented a conservative, reactionary program to defend their class interests. In doing this, they were part of the same counterrevolutionary tendency that had tried to retain noble privileges in Western Europe. As Russian aristocrats, the Slavophiles were afraid that the bourgeois revolution would come to their country. This argument has been presented both as a purely Marxist one, and lately as a more loosely held socio-economic, structural argument related to the fixed position of social groups in different stages of the modernization process.⁹ Andrzej Walicki uses a long-established argument of a time lag between Russia and Europe, claiming that if a certain delay is taken into account, the social and political situation in Russia can be compared to Germany's during the counterrevolution, so that the Slavophile movement can be seen as part of the European counterrevolutionary movement.¹⁰

The major difficulty with this argument is that the Russian economy had not developed very far by the early nineteenth century. Consequently, it is doubtful to what extent class tension served as the catalyst of Slavophile ideas. To any attempt, such as this book, to take the Slavophiles' own words seriously, there is an additional problem; there is little in Slavophile writings that support the claim that their ideas were a reaction to the threat posed by the growing middle-class.

Another way to look at Slavophilism is to see it as a reaction, not to class tension, but to the bureaucratic state and the artificial culture of the Petersburg court. Slavophilism, then, becomes an expression of the “court and country” divide within Russia’s upper classes. Dominic Lieven writes that Slavophile thought reflected the alienation of part of the nobility from the bureaucratic regime, which they regarded as tyrannical, and un-Russian. In contrast, the Slavophiles presented a vision of the true Russia, which was based on the nation, the people, and the land. Although they accepted the monarchy, the Slavophiles’ emphasis on the nation made them hostile to the state.¹¹

In a similar way, Abbott Gleason points to the “ruralism” of the second part of the eighteenth century as an important factor behind the development of Slavophilism. This was a nostalgia for the safety and harmony of Russian country life, brought about by the loss of status and influence at court. It was a desire, expressed by members of the gentry, to escape the control and power of the state, and be released from the formal, superficial life at the Petersburg court. Gleason claims that a yearning for some kind of “spiritual wholeness” in opposition to the culture of St. Petersburg, is clearly evident in eighteenth-century Russian Freemasonry. But this yearning was not formulated in a coherent theory until the educated elite had separated themselves from the autocratic state, after the brutal crushing of the Decembrist uprising in 1825. Furthermore, an intellectual transformation was needed. The rural nostalgia could not be formed into Slavophile ideas until Romantic and counterrevolutionary concepts were available to members of the gentry.¹²

Lieven’s and Gleason’s presentation of Slavophilism, as a reaction to the Russian state and the social life of the court, captures an important development of the gentry’s self-perception. Slavophilism was in part an attempt to impose a distance between the educated elite and the government. Yet, what is lacking in this treatment of the Slavophiles is an explanation of the frequent comparisons of Russia with nations in the West, which is such a dominant theme in the work of the Slavophiles. Indeed, their writings are marked by nothing as much as an anxious assessment of Russia’s achievements as a nation. A definition of Slavophilism that restricts it to a country opposition against the Russian state does not explain why the Slavophiles paid so much attention to the problem of cultural and artistic imitation, and to the need for Russia to make a national contribution to humanity.

The Slavophiles’ concern with Russia’s standing compared to other nations has commonly been approached through an investigation of the

anti-Westernism, which forms a strong and persistent aspect of their writings. The Slavophiles reacted fiercely against Western rationalism and against the formalism, legalism, individualism, and atomism it was supposed to cultivate. In their view, the extolling of reason in the West had destroyed the harmony and integrity of the human personality. As a consequence, the unity of social life was destroyed by individualism and fragmentation.¹³ Kireevsky stated that “the distinctive character of Western culture in all its aspects [was] a fundamental striving toward personal and self-contained rationalism in thought, in life, in society, and in the motivating forces and forms of human life.”¹⁴ Industry was described as “the apotheosis of rationalism in action.” Since this form of rationalism was abstract and had nothing to do with the actual way of life, it gave rise to violence and oppression, sometimes disguised by formal democratic processes.¹⁵ Democracy was, Kireevsky held, founded on paper constitutions and regulations. It was an institution of formally reconciled interests, but it was deprived of brotherly spirit and love.¹⁶ Hence, its social order was damaged by a constant struggle of contending parties. The reign of the majority was the reign of the powerful, the “lawful dominion of a party preponderant in quantity of force.”¹⁷

The Slavophiles were certainly aware of the negative effects of modern industrialism and capitalism.¹⁸ Yet their critique of European conditions did not mean that they turned their backs on Europe. Indeed, by the 1840s, both socialists and conservatives in Russia believed it was their task to help Europe solve its social and political problems, and that a social consciousness had to be developed in order to curb unrestrained individualism, cultivated by unbridled liberalism.¹⁹ The Slavophiles presented the Russian peasant commune, the *obshchina*, as an alternative social and moral organisation, destined to save humanity from the proletarianization they had seen developing in the West.²⁰ Through its principle of land redistribution and the social obligation to help other members, the commune would eliminate poverty. According to Khomiakov, mutual help was much more effective if it was based on common benefit, instead of on involuntary contributions, as in the West.²¹ It was precisely the emphasis on the social character of human interactions, as opposed to the individual, which made the *obshchina* so popular among Russian social critics, who yearned for alternatives to egoistic individualism. And yet, it was crucial that the stress on communality should not restrict the freedom of the individual, who was described as “a part of, not apart from, the community.” Through the notion of the *obshchina* the Slavophiles applied the Christian belief in the brotherhood of man to social and economic conditions.²²

This sense of brotherhood was expressed in Russia's traditional system of customary law and in the practice of unanimous decision-making in the commune "with its judgement based on the voice of conscience, and on the truth of heart."²³ According to Khomiakov the custom of counting votes wrongly implied that "wisdom and truth always belonged to the greater number of votes, when actually very often a majority depends on chance." In contrast, the communal meeting was described as "a school for the people," which disseminated a healthy notion of legality and justice to its participants so that they could develop intelligent judgement.²⁴

Although the Slavophile critique of the West may seem to corroborate Greenfeld's claim about the importance of *ressentiment* in the formulation of a national identity, the idea that Russia had a mission to solve Europe's problems shows that anti-Westernism does not exhaust the contents of the Slavophile ideology or the national identity it proposed. Too much stress on anti-Westernism makes Slavophilism appear one-sided and antagonistic. In fact, a close reading of Slavophile writings, as is undertaken in this book, shows that their ideas about Russia's relationship to the West were far more complex than merely an expression of *ressentiment*.

The Identity Crisis of the Educated Elite in Nineteenth-Century Russia

The preceding discussion of the origins of nationalism suggests that the development of a national identity is the result of an identity crisis experienced by a key social group. Accounts of the origins of Slavophilism also stress that these ideas were the result of an identity crisis, whether it was due to a confrontation with the middle class, the Russian state, or the Western model of social development. In the following, Slavophilism is presented as an expression of an identity crisis within the educated elite, which was due to certain social and political developments in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Russia.

The backward state of the Russian economy resulted in a uniformity that naturally had an impact on the social organisation of Russia. The majority of hereditary nobles were not clearly delineated from other groups in society. Comparing the Russian with the Prussian gentry, Lieven notes that, unlike Prussian gentry, the Russian court and service aristocracy did not have deep local and provincial loyalties, or old traditions of public service in corporate institutions. Although the social consolidation of a landed nobility increased during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,

it was not institutionalized in autonomous corporate structures until the early twentieth century, and until the late nineteenth century, privileges and social mobility resulted almost exclusively from service. Since education, merit, and performance were the formal criteria for advancement, both newcomers and nobles of ancient lineage were in a similarly insecure social position.²⁵ As we shall see, these criteria, and the importance of service in defining the relationship of the nobility to official society, were important factors in the shaping of a specific elite identity.

If the nobility was not clearly delineated as a social group, the definition of the middle strata was extremely vague. Distinct middle-classes were virtually nonexistent until the late nineteenth century and the emergence of professional classes resulted primarily from state-directed occupational training and specialisation. The undifferentiated character of Russian society, lacking in autonomous corporate structures, economic security and local independence, can thus explain why there was no independent public sphere, separated from the state, in the beginning of the eighteenth century, and why a “political bourgeoisie,” associated with a civil society, was absent.²⁶ “If the *philosophes* wanted to reform early modern European societies along certain lines,” Nicholas Riasanovsky writes, “in Russia such a society had to be formed in the first place.”²⁷

The formation of Slavophilism coincided with the particularly oppressive regime of Nicholas I (1825–1855). Marquis de Custine, who visited Russia in 1839, described its government as “military discipline in place of civil order, a state of siege which has become the normal state of society.”²⁸ Others have portrayed Nicholas’s regime as a gendarmerie. Not even the nobility enjoyed security of person and property. The earliest guarantees against arbitrary search and arrest did not come to Russia until the judicial reform of 1864. The political and social life was more similar to the French eighteenth-century experience than to the situation in the contemporary West. There was absolutely no freedom of expression. In the absence of parliamentary government, a free press, or political parties, people met in salons, private clubs, and societies to participate in public discussion. Hence, independent public communication was located in the private sphere.²⁹ The lasting dependence on the state and the lack of any economic, political, or institutional base, provided the gentry with a weak sense of a distinct social identity. In its place, a feeling of cultural affinity emerged.

Already by the mid-eighteenth century, Russia possessed a socially diverse, self-conscious reading public. Both men and women, came together in theatres, libraries, social clubs, literary societies, private salons, and Masonic lodges. They defined themselves not by noble birth, nor by economic or

political power, but by culture, morality, civility, and virtue.³⁰ Through the universities, which also served as meeting-places for the reading public, the sons of the gentry and the middle classes, such as professionals and merchants, were subsequently brought together, joined in their taste for literature and philosophy.³¹ Calling attention to the existence of an educated public in early nineteenth-century Russia, it must be emphasised that this group constituted a small minority. Although it grew rapidly, the reading public remained a tiny minority of the Russian people. Lieven writes that by 1800, Westernized aristocrats lived as “islands in a noble world still often uncultured and obsessed with the traditional pursuit of rank and imperial favour.”³²

The educated public was a product of the cultural Westernization of Russia, introduced by Peter the Great. These Western innovations affected only the noble service class and neither the peasantry, the clergy, merchants nor artisans associated themselves with cultural Westernization. As a consequence, the noble service class came to distinguish itself from the masses by education, way of life, cultural values, and an affinity with the Western cultural community. Since titles meant little to the Russian nobility, social status was enhanced by skills in foreign languages and knowledge of Western literature and culture. Compared to their English or Prussian counterparts, Russian aristocrats were more culturally insecure and isolated. Through association with Western culture, they were given a sense of individual worth and dignity, but this also provided them with common values and roles. Hence, Westernization had a significant impact on the formation of a public identity for the educated elite, and this identity rested on the two ideas that brought them together—public service and culture. Members of the educated elite felt an obligation to serve their country by acting as its cultural leaders, disseminating Western culture and enlightenment.³³

However, the transformation of Russia, according to Western models, only stimulated the development of intellectual and cultural life and ignored all other aspects of social life. This one-sided process of modernisation led to frustration among the educated elite. The government wanted Russia to be regarded as a modern European state but such a state could not be created without an educated elite to carry out the tasks of modernization and to act as leaders of Russia’s cultural progress. While this image of a modern Russian power included a sophisticated cultural life, it definitely excluded any political transformation. As Raeff notes: “Unfettering civil society and promoting its progress was not part of the state’s programme, though it was a necessary consequence of its goals of Europeanization and modernization.”³⁴ The liberation of civil society gave rise

to demands for social and political changes, compatible with the modernization of cultural and intellectual life. These demands were increasingly raised following the Napoleonic wars, when the discrepancy between cultural and sociopolitical modernization became even more evident.

Taking part in the wars, Russian officers encountered the modern West and could therefore make direct comparisons with their own country. Filled with pride over Russia's victory and her role as the liberator of Europe, they could not help noticing that the conquered nations were in fact better off than their own. Many young officers were struck by the contrast between Russia's military and diplomatic achievements abroad and the apparent backwardness at home and it produced a feeling of embarrassment among them. Furthermore, sharing the experiences of war with ordinary peasants made officers aware that the lower classes were as loyal and devoted to their country as they were. Altogether, this heightened their consciousness of the need to reform Russian institutions and they felt obliged as an educated elite to improve the living conditions of the people.³⁵

This newly awakened social consciousness produced an enthusiasm for reform among members of the educated elite, which was emphasized by the tsar's repeated promises to make social changes. When Alexander I subsequently failed to fulfil his promises, reform-minded Russians were greatly disappointed. The tsar's reluctance, or inability, to introduce reforms eventually led some officers to conspire against the tsar in the Decembrist revolt of 1825.

All hopes for reform were shattered when the revolt against the autocracy was brutally crushed. After the defeat of the Decembrists, the educated elite became even more alienated and frustrated. They found themselves isolated from both the people and the state.³⁶ The new tsar, Nicholas I, excluded the gentry from participation in government, since they could no longer be trusted. At the same time, many members of the gentry turned away from service by choice. Whereas in the Napoleonic Wars "the highest form of idealism had been to serve in the army," after 1825 it was regarded as "a betrayal of all idealism and humanity." As a result of this change of attitude, young noblemen enrolled in the universities instead of choosing a military or bureaucratic career in the service of the state. Accordingly, Russia's cultural elite was no longer integrated into, but rather separated from, and, most importantly, in opposition to, official society. The notables of Russian culture were now associated with the universities, instead of the court.³⁷

Although consciously separated from the people, late eighteenth-century educated society had not distinguished itself from official society,

i.e., from the court and government. This was partly due to their dependence on the state, partly to the widespread belief in enlightened despotism. Riasanovsky argues that not even the Decembrists could entirely free themselves of the image of the enlightened ruler and state. By contrast, in the second quarter of the nineteenth-century, being a member of educated society implied being separated from the state and government.³⁸ The tsarist state, Lieven argues, alienated educated society by denying it the rights and freedoms to which it felt entitled as a group of civilized Europeans.³⁹ But the feelings of alienation had a deeper sociopsychological foundation as well. The process of Westernization had created an educated elite, a reading public with a common identity based on shared values and roles. Following the defeat of the Decembrist revolt, this identity and the roles it entailed were no longer in agreement with their perception of Russian reality; this naturally led to feelings of alienation and, in some cases, to a crisis of identity.

The gentry-intellectuals of the 1820s had inherited the concepts of public service and cultural leadership from the eighteenth-century Russian nobility.⁴⁰ These deep-rooted concepts, established in the Petrine era, implied not only service to the state, but also service to the people, and to the community as a whole.⁴¹ The Decembrist generation still saw their role as serving both the state and Russia. After the defeat of the revolt, most members of the educated public realized that serving the one meant working against the other. Their role of social criticism and commitment to the welfare of the people turned out to be incompatible with service to the state.⁴² Totally alienated from the state, these educated Russians “were left with ideas alone.” This was further aggravated by what Martin Malia calls “a qualitative overproduction of ‘humanism’” in Russia. Through the new civilian educational establishments, which were not in full operation until the 1830s, “free individuals” were created in a society based on “unreflective obedience,” where the possibilities for individual initiatives were very limited. The world of ideas thus became the only free sphere of activity. Using the arguments of German idealism to exalt this activity, gentry-intellectuals began to think of themselves as the embodied consciousness of the nation. Hence, the universities led the young westernized gentry into “a rootless ‘internal emigration’ with no home but its ideal visions.”⁴³

To conclude, the identity crisis of the educated elite was not caused by a clash between traditional identities and a modern state, proposed by some scholars as a common motivation behind nationalist feelings, but rather by a conflict between modern identities and a traditional state; between modern culture and traditional society; between an ideal and reality;

and between the educated elite and the mass of the people.⁴⁴ In short, the “honorable public” or “educated society” was westernized, while their country was not. As a consequence, the cultural and intellectual life of Russia stood in glaring contrast to its social, economic, and political life. That was why educated Russians came to devote themselves entirely to the world of culture and ideas. It was in the fields of philosophy and the arts that a contribution to public life was still possible. As cultural leaders, they hoped to find a role of public service that was separated from the state, but related to the nation, to Russia. When this possibility too was closed, due to a change in the intellectual context, their identity crisis became acute.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE INTELLECTUAL AGENDA

The educated elite in early nineteenth-century Russia experienced an identity crisis. So far I have dealt with the social and political reasons for this crisis. This account, however, provides no reason why the lack of cultural achievements was so disturbing to educated Russians. To do so, it is necessary to address the question of the influence of ideas on the origins of Slavophilism. Below, I argue that the transformation of the intellectual agenda was a very important factor in shaping the form of Slavophilism and the national identity it presented.

Culture and Ideas

Some cultural and intellectual historians explain the nation’s intellectual and cultural life with reference to certain perpetual characteristics of Russian culture and society. They describe Russia as having a special character, which is static and homogenous. In stressing cultural continuity, these arguments refute the modernization theories presented above. Commonly, scholars point to the impact of Eastern monastic thought and literature on the formation of an independent Russian culture. The fact that the rise of this new Russian culture coincided with the fall of Constantinople, the second Rome and the centre of the “true religion”, to the Turks in 1453, gave this new culture a unique character. Now Russia was isolated as “the sole repository” of the Orthodox Christian religion and the legitimate successor to Constantinople. Moscow was now considered as the Third Rome. According to Edie et al, all these events helped create a sense of distinctive national identity in Russia.

Being culturally isolated, Russia did not go through the reformation that produced the Protestant churches in the West. Hence, it never experienced the religious criticism necessary for the emergence of a secular culture independent of the Church. A strictly secular culture did not develop until the nineteenth century. What is more, Russia did not experience the Renaissance until the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, at least two centuries after Western Europe. Not until Peter the Great “cut a window into Europe” was Russian society introduced to Western culture on a wide scale. Therefore, Edie et al conclude, an understanding of the earliest attempts at formulating a genuine Russian philosophy requires that the specific characteristics of Russian spirituality are taken into account. One has to consider the Byzantine origin of Russian thought together with its religious soul. Two central features dominate Russian thinking, both deriving from Eastern Christianity and its monastic tradition: a theocratic conception of religion that focus on the mystery of liturgical worship rather than political activism, and an ascetic world-denying tendency.⁴⁵

Peter Christoff also points to specific characteristics of Russian culture as crucial to our understanding of Russian thought. This culture prevented bourgeois liberalism, the dominant ideology in mid-nineteenth-century Western Europe, to make any progress in Russia. Christoff claims that in Russia, a rural country with a weak, embryonic middle-class, the prerequisites for liberal arguments did not exist. “Western, particularly Anglo-Saxon individualism, deeply rooted in the Protestant ethic and eighteenth-century rationalism, was alien to the Russian historical heritage intellectually, morally, and culturally.” The characteristic social consciousness of the Russian was wholly incompatible with Western individualism and the principle of private property.⁴⁶

The most elaborated of the cultural explanations is probably Boris Uspenskii’s and Iurii Lotman’s semiotic approach.⁴⁷ These authors assert that there is a dualism in Russian culture. They argue that in Western thought there is a three-fold-system with a neutral sphere in the middle, while in Russia there is only black and white. This dualism, or binary model, is manifested in the fact that in the Orthodox Church, there is no purgatory. This left Russians with two opposite poles—one good and one evil. It has characterized Russian culture since the Christianization of Kiev in 988 until today. This dualism leads to a continuous struggle between the two poles, so that every new period in the history of Russian culture is oriented toward a break with what preceded it. Following this theory, Slavophilism can be seen as a reaction against the Russian eighteenth-century elite with its pronounced admiration for Western Enlightenment thought, and for

everything Western in general. If admiration and imitation constituted one pole, rejection and distinctiveness was the basis of the other.⁴⁸

There is no denying the importance of Russian cultural history for understanding Russian ideas. Indeed, the Slavophiles themselves referred to it as the basis of Russian nationality. But the specific character of Russian culture cannot explain why the Slavophiles formulated their ideas at the particular time they did, nor why they assumed a specific form.

However, not all intellectual and cultural historians see Slavophilism and the Russian national identity as expressions of permanent cultural features. Many argue that the intellectual agenda had been transformed in the early nineteenth century so as to make it possible for a coherent theory of Russian nationality to emerge in the form of Slavophilism. In the literature on Slavophilism and Russian intellectual history, two influences on Slavophile thought have been stressed. First, certain ideas which originated in Russia in the late eighteenth century, and second, ideas which originated in the Romantic movement and in German idealism.

Native Sources

It is sometimes claimed that a Russian national consciousness was already developed in the eighteenth century. The main argument is that much of eighteenth-century thought was concerned with issues of national identity and values. Hans Rogger argues that on occasion Catherine II had been forced to "claim otherness as a value." The publicist N. I. Novikov provides another example. At the end of the eighteenth century, he wrote that it was no disadvantage for Russia to be less enlightened, or technically advanced, than the West. On the contrary, the very backwardness of Russia, in this formal sense, prevented the negative aspects of progress from destroying valuable human virtues. These qualities would ensure that "when the time came and the need arose, Russia would prove her equality in every way."⁴⁹ But it was Denis Fonvizin's letters from Europe which, according to Rogger, constituted the first significant attempt made by an educated Russian to address the problem of Russia's relationship with Europe. Although it did not question Western culture as such, Fonvizin's comparison between the two cultures was, nonetheless, a critical assessment of certain aspects and phenomena of Western society. It was not until critical questions about life in the West were posed that a reassessment of Russian culture was made possible. In 1778, Fonvizin proclaimed a thesis based on such a reappraisal. His point was that the very backwardness of Russia was

a possible indication of her ultimate superiority over the rest of Europe. Russia had the ability to develop, avoiding the mistakes made by the more advanced countries.⁵⁰

Fonvizin and Novikov instigated a search for a Russian national character that could prove Russia was not inferior to other nations. By the end of the century, the question of what the features of this character were was posed with greater urgency. However, Rogger emphasizes that, not until the formulation of Slavophilism and Westernism, was an attempt made to determine the essence of Russia and the West. The isolated comments of Fonvizin and Novikov should not be interpreted as “a fully developed nationalist theory” or as “a Slavophilism *avant le mot*.” His point is that, while the prevailing mood of the century was decidedly cosmopolitan, there were other statements of “the antithesis between mind and heart, form and substance, Russia and Europe,” which seem to anticipate later contrasts made between Russia and the West. Hence, one might assume there was a certain continuity in the Russian intellectual environment and that Russian nationalism had native sources to rely on. Rogger points to striking similarities in the thinking of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to confirm this argument.⁵¹ Iurii Stennik makes an even stronger case, arguing that the imitation of everything Western provoked a reaction among the Russian nobility in the eighteenth century and that Slavophilism was a continuation of these thoughts.⁵² A national consciousness might have existed in Russia already in the eighteenth century, but the fact remains that a coherent theory about the identity of the Russian nation was yet to be worked out.

The ideas of Romantic nationalism were not introduced into the Russian cultural debate until Admiral Alexander Shishkov did so in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Scholars have called him the spiritual ancestor of the Slavophiles and have argued that there are numerous parallels to Shishkov’s works in their linguistic studies.⁵³ In line with Romantic thought, Shishkov held that the distinctive genius of a people could be discovered in its language, which, therefore, had to develop organically. Hence, he was opposed to dominant French influences in the Russian language. But he did not confine his criticism to linguistics. Like the Slavophiles, Shishkov was also critical of the foundations of Western culture, which he found barren and unimpressive. Reason had ruined mankind through the selfishness and ambition it fostered. Fortunately, the peasants had preserved the language and values that had once been common to all layers of Russian society and the duty of the Russian writer was to develop this national culture. Alexander Martin argues that, despite his criticism of Western culture, Shishkov cannot be considered a xenophobe.

Like the Slavophiles, he expressed his respect for foreign cultures, but wanted Russia to be her original self. Although many of Shishkov's ideas are similar to those of the Slavophiles, he differed from them in his admiration for both Peter I and Catherine II. Shishkov did not believe that Russia's national identity had been sacrificed when they had transferred European practices to Russia.⁵⁴

A more contemporary source of native influence on the Slavophiles was that of Peter Chaadaev, who himself was under the sway of the new Romantic philosophy. Nicolas Zernov maintains that Chaadaev was the first one to realize the humiliation of Russia's imitation of the West which, in his view, was due to the total insignificance of her national culture.⁵⁵ Gleason attributes Kireevsky's evolution towards Slavophilism to the influence of Chaadaev. Given that the very purpose of Slavophilism was to refute the notion of Russia as culturally bankrupt, it seems likely, he argues, that Kireevsky was impressed by Chaadaev's general line of argumentation, amounting to a description of Russia as free from all tradition and from a past.⁵⁶ Nikolai Lossky presents some of Chaadaev's ideas that are close to those of the Slavophiles, though expressed by him before the latter had elaborated their theory. They concern imitation, Russia's national mission and contribution to mankind: "If only Russia understood her mission, she ought to take the initiative in putting all generous ideas into practice, for she is free from Europe's ties, passions, ideas and interests. Russia is too great to pursue a national policy; her task in the world is the politics of mankind."⁵⁷

Chaadaev is only one example of a Russian intellectual, who became fascinated by the world of Romanticism at the time of the formulation of Slavophilism. In fact, Romantic and Idealistic thought completely dominated intellectual life in Russia between the 1820s and the 1840s.⁵⁸

German Romanticism and Idealism

In the previous section, we learned that the Russian educated elite experienced a crisis of identity as a result of the uneven modernisation of their country, and that Slavophilism was a response to this identity crisis. However, this account does not provide us with the full picture of the formulation of Slavophile thought. By looking at the influence of Romantic ideas on Russian intellectuals, it is possible to find out why the identity crisis took the form of a cultural crisis, and why certain issues were brought to the forefront of debate. It was the transformation of the intellectual agenda

instigated by Romanticism, which intensified the identity crisis of the educated elite. With the critique of cosmopolitanism, launched by the Romantics, Russia's educated public lost its *raison d'être*. What gave them purpose as Westernized, educated Russians was their role as cultural leaders. Hence, questioning the basis of this culture, indeed the outright denial of its existence, affected them badly. Moreover, by looking at Romantic thought we are also able to understand how the formulation of Slavophilism could solve this crisis, since Romantic ideas and concepts constituted the main source out of which a Russian national identity was formed.

Many scholars have pointed at the Romantic influence on Slavophilism. Riasanovsky even argues that it is wrong to talk about the influence of Romantic ideas on the Slavophiles. Rather, "spiritually the Slavophiles were a part of the Romantic movement" and should, accordingly, be treated as one of the groups of Romantic intellectuals that spread all over nineteenth-century Europe. Slavophile thought represented a Russian version of the Romantic ideology of the age. An analysis of their ideas establishes beyond any doubt their Romantic origin. The central Romantic concept of organism, for example, permeates their thought.⁵⁹ It is of course ironic that the Slavophiles used Western Romanticism to criticize the West. The reason for this was that Russia borrowed ideas from the West with a certain time lag. At the point when Romantic ideas were adopted by Russian thinkers, they had already been replaced by new ideas in the West, at odds with the old ones.⁶⁰

The main arguments concerning the impact of Romanticism deals with the originality of Slavophile thought. Some scholars try to trace Slavophile ideas back to their German origins in order to define them properly. Others stress the Russian, or Eastern uniqueness of their ideas. Christoff is one of the few scholars who argues for the patristic influence on Slavophilism. He claims that Kireevsky was attracted to the hesychastic tradition and that St. Isaac Syrus was one of the principal Orthodox sources of Kireevsky's doctrine of the wholeness of the spirit. Christoff's main point is that the focus on Western Romanticism misses other, perhaps more important, influences. He suggests that what made Slavophilism original, indeed what made it into a new intellectual current, was not its attachment to Romanticism, found in Kireevsky's early writings, but rather the Christian philosophical meaning, into which this Romanticism was eventually transformed. Furthermore, the fact that both Kireevsky and Khomiakov developed their Russian philosophy in contrast to Western thought is a strong indication of their determination to elaborate their own Russian Orthodox philosophy rather than trying to adapt Western ideas.⁶¹

The determination not to adapt foreign ideas was of course in itself a foreign, Western idea, and Christoff does not altogether disregard Romantic influences. He writes that although Khomiakov's theology and ideas about the nature and structure of the Church were inspired by the early Church Fathers, his social thought was encouraged by the theory of organism and by Western Romanticism in general. Furthermore, the concept of an old, decaying West, which played a central role in Slavophile thought, was actually a prominent feature of Western Romanticism.⁶² There are a few scholars, who deny the influence of German thought altogether. Henry Lanz claims that Slavophilism was not "a Russian distortion of German idealism." To him it was not even a reaction against modern European rationalism. It was merely "a modern continuation of a religious tradition which has been dominating Russian life since the time of Saint Vladimir." According to Lossky the philosophy of Kireevsky and Khomiakov was indeed a response to German rationalistic thought. But the attempt to overcome this philosophy was not formed by Western Romanticism, but by a Russian interpretation of Christianity based upon the works of the Eastern Church Fathers.⁶³

I agree with the scholars who attach importance to German Romanticism in order to understand Slavophilism, but establishing the origin of ideas does not tell us anything about what the Slavophiles tried to say with these concepts. The sole existence of ideas, original or not, does not make us understand why they were used in a certain place, at a certain time, and in a certain way. What I am concerned with here is how the Slavophiles themselves presented their ideas and the context they tried to relate to in doing so. It is my contention that Slavophile thinking was formed by the predominant "language," or "ideology," of the day and that this language to a great extent was made up of German Romanticism and idealism. The Slavophiles did not formulate their ideas in isolation, but saw their work as a contribution to thinking both in Russia and in the West. Hence, they had to relate to the intellectual world educated Russians lived in, which was very much a European Romantic world. Consequently, an in-depth understanding of Romanticism is essential, not in order to find similarities or differences in concepts, but to follow the Slavophile arguments and to figure out why they were presented in a certain way. In this way, we can better understand what they said with their ideas, and so make sense of them.

Romanticism did not only have an intellectual impact. It had a psychological impact as well. It both created and filled a need among Russian intellectuals for a role and a function connected to their nation. Romanticism

made them realize that the long-lasting practice of imitation had led to an acute lack of a national cultural contribution.⁶⁴ But it also provided them with the task of being interpreters of their nation. Hence, the same set of ideas served to formulate the problem and provide the solution at the same time. The transformation of the intellectual agenda meant that the question of the nation's cultural achievements and its stature in relation to other nations became of primary importance. Slavophilism originated in a discussion of these questions.