

Russian Nationalism in Western Studies: Misadventures of a Moribund Paradigm

ALEXANDER YANOV

Not many would disagree—especially after the Bush-Putin meeting at the castle of Brdo in June 2001—if I were to say that the destiny of our world still depends in great part on what future Russia, the second nuclear superpower, chooses for herself. Disagreement will arise, however, the moment I spell out the difference between her alternative futures in much the same way as it is formulated in today's Moscow.

One of these putative futures lies in what might be called “a federation within a federation,” that is, the Russian federal republic as a member of the emerging European one. To express the same thought in broader and more generic terms, that is a future in which Russia adds to its national identity another, supranational as it were, European identity.¹ The other future lies in a Russian *Sonderweg*. As expressed by one of its leading ideologists, this means that “Russia cannot follow the way taken by any other nation or civilization.”²

It must be added, however, that while some of the *Sonderwegers*, if I may so name them, swear not to rest until “the great Russian state is restored to the borders of 1991,”³ others may be satisfied just by the “gathering” of all ethnic Russians under one national roof. What all *Sonderwegers* fully agree on, though, is that Russia's destiny lies not with Europe but with Eurasia, and that her immediate political task is not federation building but nation building.

The “Correlation of Forces”

In Moscow, the choice is clear-cut. There are Russian Europeans, as Count Witte once called his co-thinkers—liberals, like Vladimir Ryzhkov or Sergei Ivanenko, who naturally stand for Russia's European future; and there are *Sonderwegers*, conservatives and nationalists (which in Russia is usually the same thing), like Gennady Zyuganov or Alexander Dugin, who just as naturally stand for her Eurasian future.

Alexander Yanov is the author of seventeen books, including *The Russian New Right* (1978) and *The Russian Challenge* (1987). Retired since 1991, he was last a professor of political science at the City University of New York Graduate School.

The former are not satisfied with the current, unreliable “window on Europe,” like the one Peter I chopped open in his day. After all, history proved that such a window may very well one day slam shut in their faces, as it did in 1917. They insist, therefore, that this time the wall separating Russia from Europe must come down for good. The nationalists, on the other hand, see individualistic “Roman-German” Europe as spiritually alien to the collectivist and Orthodox Rus’, and any union with it as a death sentence for the true Russian identity. The two visions of the future are, as we see, irreconcilable.

The problem is that both Russian Europeans and Sonderwegers are minorities in today’s Russia. Both are fighting for the indeterminate majority that consolidates itself around Putin. The majority may agree to either of the two visions, but only as long as it would secure for Russia a future as a “leading global power,” in the words of one of the ideologists of the Putin majority, Sergei Markov. Or, as Putin himself once expressed it, “Russia will either be a great power or she will not exist at all.”⁴

It’s rather obvious that Russian Europeans are at a certain disadvantage in this fateful fight, if only because a European federative future does not seem easily reconcilable with the thirst for the status of a global power or with the imperative of centralized state building (the “vertical of power,” in current Russian parlance) that follows from it. Nevertheless, Russians have become painfully aware of the risks of going it alone in the world. The Eurasianists can offer Russia only the most dangerous of allies, China. Putin frequently describes Russia as a “European” country; what is more, he makes a big point of this, enough to convince Gerhard Schroeder—to cite only one example—that this is a key part of his political identity.

This is how the “correlation of forces,” as they used to say in the cold war days, looks on the ground in post-Soviet Russia at the beginning of the third Christian millennium.

The Question

Perhaps for the first time in four centuries, since what I call the autocratic revolution of 1564, the Russian Europeans these days are equal in strength to the Sonderwegers. This is verified in numerous polls, where often the Europeans are the stronger party, although the balance between the two sides shifts depending on the wording of the alternatives. To this “subjective” factor there corresponds, on the “objective” side, a tremendous advance in the education, urbanization, and differentiation of Russian society. That means that the chances of Russia’s joining Europe are now better than ever. And yet, in the fight for the future the odds are still against the Russian Europeans. To prevail over the Sonderweg crowd and deal with the myth of “Russia the global power” that inspires the political center, they need as much help from the international intellectual community as they can get. Unfortunately, Western scholarship on Russian nationalism is not the place I would recommend that they look for it.

The question that I ask in this article is *Why?* Why is it that Western scholarship favors the nationalists’ vision of Russia’s future rather than the one of Russian Europeans? For favor it indeed it does, as we shall see. To be sure, this must

be related to the general meaning of nationalism in Western studies, as well as to the dominant interpretation of the origins and nature of Russia's statehood. Thus it will be necessary to touch, albeit tangentially, on those subjects as well.

The Ultraconservative View

It appears that Western ultraconservatives are quite straightforwardly siding with Russian nationalists. For instance, one of the most prominent of them, Richard Pipes, will tell you that it is indeed nation building that is the immediate task of today's Russia,⁵ and that, accordingly, nationalism, "which the West has put behind itself and which it has now turned into a reactionary doctrine, is distinctly progressive at the stage of history at which Russia happens to find itself."⁶

I would not want to focus too much on the patronizing tone of these remarks, particularly since the ultraconservatives mean well. In reality what they have in mind for Russia is not nation building at all, but the building of democratic institutions, complete with civic dignity, "a feeling of community and solidarity" in Pipes's own words, and, most important, of tolerance of other nations, religions, and cultures—in other words, what my intellectual mentor Vladimir Sergeevich Solovyev called "patriotism" or "national self-awareness." But he also insisted that such awareness has nothing to do with nationalism, and that, moreover, it is its exact antithesis.

If this distinction was fundamentally important for Solovyev a century ago, it is even more serious now that nationalism is associated not so much with "community and solidarity" as with force, violence, ethnic cleansing, and war. At least I have never heard anyone seriously question the conclusion of the British historian of war Michael Howard, that "from the very beginning the principle of nationalism was almost indissolubly linked, both in theory and in practice, to the idea of war." To be sure, it is not a novel conclusion; it only adds the confirmation of a brilliant student of war to what has long been known among diplomatic historians. Add to this that "in nation-building as in revolution, force [has always been] the midwife of the historical process,"⁷ and it becomes clear that nation building is incompatible with Russia's European future. It brings to mind, rather, Milosevic's Serbia. Europe would not agree to have in its midst a mega-Serbia like Russia, engaged in violence and war in the name of community and solidarity.

Yet, there is no way to be sure whether even those powerful arguments could change the ultraconservative's view of the progressive meaning of Russian nationalism. As far as I know, they may still be convinced that inasmuch as Russia happens to find herself at the wrong stage of history, all the joys (and wars and violence) of nation building are still what the doctor ordered for her.⁸

The (Possible) Liberal Alternative

One might think that even if some conservatives could swallow such a brutal conclusion, it would be difficult for liberal scholars to accept it. Certainly at first glance a European future for Russia, not nation building, is preferable in liberal eyes. If nothing else, the German example speaks for it powerfully. Indeed, whenever the Germans engaged in nation building, they invariably ended up with the

suicidal Sonderweg idea (“Germany isn’t Europe, she is special, she is the best”), the very same one that has always inspired the Russian nationalists.

To such a degree was this true that even in 1962 A. J. P. Taylor found that “[i]t was no more a mistake for the German people to end up with Hitler than it is an accident when a river flows into the sea.” No wonder the great historian was passionately convinced that nation building was forever contra-indicated for the Germans. Moreover, it led him to the risky conclusion that “only a divided Germany can be a free Germany.”⁹ By no means was he alone in this conclusion. In 1984 Giulio Andreotti, the Italian prime minister, made a much-quoted public statement to the same effect: “Pan-Germanism must be overcome. There are two German states and there should be two.” Francois Mauriac’s *bon mot*, “I love Germany so much that I am glad that there are two of them,” says it all. But Taylor went even further on the limb, stating that precisely because of the nature of its nationalism, “German history [as a nation] had run its course.”¹⁰

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Even so, I wouldn’t envy any student of Taylor who tried to challenge him along the conventional lines that some of my own students tried: “What is there to be so exercised about? After all, nationalism is just a neutral term without any ideological content.” The old man knew German history like the palm of his hand. It would be easy for him to show a repeated pattern of inability on the part of German elites to resist the temptation of Sonderweg—which is the ideological content of imperial nationalism—just as it is for me to prove an analogous pattern in Russian history.

Be that as it may, it was the Germans themselves who proved Taylor wrong. How? By renouncing Sonderweg once and for all after World War II and by balancing their national identity with a supranational, European identity. To be sure, Russia is different from Western Europe (although not to the degree that Pipes tries to present it). But Germany was different, too. Yet, she made it. This proves at least theoretically that Russian Europeans are right in their endeavor. Such things do happen in history.

True, empire building and autocracy were Russia’s path for the last four centuries. But the liberal alternative to empire in a multiethnic state (with an ethnic majority traditionally vulnerable to the idea of Sonderweg) must still be federation, not nation building. Or to be more precise, federation building *is* nation building for a European Russia, not only intranationally, but also extranationally, for it is the best way to balance her national identity with a supranational one.

There is nothing new about this liberal alternative to empire in Russia. It was advanced in the 1820s by the Decembrists: “Only federative arrangements,” insisted Sergei Trubetsky in his constitutional project, “are capable of combin-

ing the majesty of the people and the liberties of citizens.”¹¹ Thank God, this alternative has been revived in post-Soviet Russia, and nobody in Moscow, except the Sonderwegers, finds anything wrong with it.

As to its international dimension, it is hard to see why one should be required to renounce the emotional affirmation by President Bush at Brdo that Russia must be integrated into Europe, or the more specific affirmation of President Clinton in July 2000 that “[w]e have to do whatever we can to encourage Russia . . . to become indeed a full member of Europe. This means that no doors should be closed to Russia—neither the doors of NATO nor those of the European Union.”¹²

Not tomorrow, to be sure; not next year; perhaps in ten years or fifteen this will occur. But all the requirements to become a full member of a substantively integrated Europe should be specified in detail now, so that Russia gets a clear national purpose, one that is understandable by any of her citizens. In this way, instead of slowly sinking into nonexistence, to cite the Moscow philosopher Vadim Mezhuiev,¹³ she just as slowly sinks into Europe while European norms and standards penetrate her everyday life.

Such could have been a liberal alternative (or a sober conservative one, if you will) to the nation building that is prescribed by Western and Russian ultraconservatives. Yet, it isn't.

Confusion

Why? Since that is the subject of this essay, we will soon discuss it in much greater detail. For now let me just say that too much stands in the way—too many old clichés related to the meaning of both nationalism and Russian history itself; an entire paradigm, one may say, stands in the way. In this sense Geoffrey Hosking is definitely correct when he writes in the introduction to his much praised book *Russia: People and Empire* that “we need a new interpretative approach to the history of Russia.”¹⁴ However, we need it precisely because without a new approach we are hardly able to explain the unexpected correlation of forces between the champions and the opponents of Russia's European future.

It is from this angle that I am inviting the reader now to take a closer look at the new approach proposed by Hosking. I will begin with a very simple question: Why is it that the term *ruskii* is employed in Russia's struggle for the future as a powerful weapon by the proponents of empire and Sonderweg, while the term *rossiiskii* is written on the banners of those who fight for European Russia? The difference means nothing to a foreign ear (both terms are translated into English as the same word, “Russian”), but still it goes to the heart of the matter. “In that way,” explains Hosking, “the Russian language reflects the fact that there are two kinds of Russianness.”¹⁵ If what is meant is that the difference between Russian Europeans and Sonderwegers is a testament to the fundamental dualism of Russia's political tradition, I am in agreement.

But the next thing we learn from the author's new approach hopelessly confuses anyone who has any idea of the actual correlation of forces in post-Soviet Russia: In Hosking's view, *ruskii* stands “for the people and *rossiiskii* for

empire"¹⁶—not for the federation, as, say, Vladimir Ryzhkov or any other Russian European is using it today, not for the arrangement that alone for Trubetskoy could combine “the majesty of the people and the liberties of citizens,” but for the empire that they passionately reject. Moreover, if we accept Hosking’s premise, then it is Alexander Dugin—who heads the Eurasian movement, who preaches “anti-American revolution,” and who of course swears by the term *russkii*—who appears to be “for the people,” whereas Ryzhkov and the Russian Europeans stand precisely for what they hate.

That is not to mention that in order for Russia to become *russkii*, instead of *rossiiskii*, borders would have to be redrawn or peoples transferred en masse, at the expense of one nationality or another, or all of them. Such seems to be the only way out of the logical trap into which Hosking has worked himself.

How did he manage to get into this trap? It is not very difficult to figure it out. It is enough to look at the epigraph to his introduction: “*Rus*’ was a victim of *Rossia*” (Georgy Gachev). Since *russkii*, according to him (or rather to Gachev, a nostalgic contemporary Slavophile), “derives from *Rus*’;” and *rossiiskii* “comes from *Rossia*, a latinized version probably first used in Poland,” the roots of Hosking’s confusion become clear. *Rus*’ is indigenous, while *Rossia* is alien, foreign. “*Rossia* uprooted the Russian people,” he continues to quote approvingly from Gachev, “enticed them away from *Rus*’.”¹⁷

For Gachev, a staunch proponent of the Russian Sonderweg, it is natural to express his preferences in such an exotic way: “foreign” is, a priori, bad for him. But for a liberal Western scholar to make Gachev’s philological speculations the foundation of his “new approach” seems, one would think, exceedingly strange.

Two Attempts at Revision

To be sure, conventional approaches to the history of Russia are so thoroughly compromised by the events of the last decade that any attempt at their revision is welcome. Moreover, it is clear that without such a revision we would be unable to explain either the current correlation of forces in the Russian political arena or why there exists no liberal alternative to the ultraconservative view on the meaning of Russian nationalism, no alternative capable of helping Russian Europeans rather than the heralds of the Eurasian empire. That is why Hosking is right and the question of the origins and nature of Russia’s statehood is directly relevant to our subject. It is only that to confine one’s revision to revisiting the moth-eaten contents of the old Slavophile trunks seems to defeat its purpose, precisely because Slavophilism, with its adoration of pre-Petrine *Rus*’, was the forefather of Russian nationalism, the embodiment of Sonderweg, and what needs now to be explained is the relative weakness of the striving for Sonderweg in today’s Russia and the unexpected strength of the European idea.

This suggests that the European roots of Russia’s statehood must be stronger than allowed by conventional wisdom—strong enough to survive the four centuries of her wandering in the imperial desert accompanied by massive terror. It is especially obvious if one compares the situation in post-Soviet Russia with that in traditional Asiatic empires (to whose realm conventional approaches relegate

Russia), such as Iran or China, which are still in captivity to their respective Sonderwegs even now.

This correlation of forces mattered to me when I worked on my own revision of conventional approaches (I am speaking of my latest book, *Rossii: U istokov tragedii, 1462–1584*, which is scheduled to see the light in Moscow this fall). There is, for instance, evidence of serious attempts at Orthodox Church reformation and Europeanizing reforms in preimperial and preautocratic Russia, from the fifteenth to the second half of the sixteenth century. The evidence has been unearthed by a remarkable cohort of Soviet historians of the 1960s, such as N. E. Nosov and A. A. Zimin. In light of the surprising strength of the Europeanist out-

look today, it deserves a serious second look.

“The very principle of nationalism is indissolubly linked to war, and nation building to violence.”

Those historians’ work strongly suggests, for instance, that there might have been an extraordinary European century in the history of Russia, one defined by a fierce competition between the powerful Orthodox Church and the state—a competition in the course of which the Church celebrated

spectacular victories over the state, and personally over Grand Prince Ivan III for many decades (he reigned from 1462 to 1505).

Up to now the great struggle between secular and ecclesiastical powers was considered the exclusive domain of medieval Europe. It was certainly unheard of in any Asiatic empire, including the Byzantine from which Russia was traditionally supposed to have borrowed its church-state arrangements. In fact, it was precisely because of this assumption that Arnold Toynbee described Russia’s political tradition as totalitarian.¹⁸ And yet here it was, that European epochal fight between church and state, right there at the very heart of preimperial Russia.

Moreover, it had been this struggle that in all probability determined the fate of Russia for the next four centuries. But it happened only in the second part of the sixteenth century, when the Orthodox Church hierarchy apparently came to the desperate conclusion that only a revolution, completely ruining the rules of the game, might save its fabulous wealth (a third of all Russian lands belonged to it). Ivan IV, who was prepared by the Church to become the manager of this counter-reformation, turned out to be instead the autocratic master who crushed not just the constitutional aspirations of Russian aristocracy, the main competitor of the Church, but the political and fiscal autonomy of the Church itself. The planned counter-reformation turned into an autocratic revolution, thus changing the course of Russian history just as radically as Lenin’s revolution changed it four centuries later, perhaps even more so. It appears that it was precisely Ivan’s revolution, which ended the crucial attempts at Church reformation in the sixteenth century (Russia was the only North European country where reformation

at the time failed), that marked the beginning of the insular, xenophobic, and culturally barren Muscovy engulfed in serfdom and universal service. It is this remarkable confluence of post-Soviet Russia's new political/ideological reality and the previously neglected evidence that compelled me to revise my old volume *The Origins of Autocracy*, published twenty years ago.

That Hosking's alternative attempt at the revision of conventional approaches does not rely on any new evidence is not our concern: after all, what he is talking about is a new interpretative approach. Much more important is that his approach directly contradicts everything that has happened in post-Soviet Moscow. Moreover, if one ignores the only fundamentally new element in Russia's history brought to light during the last decade, the unexpected strength of Russian Europeans today (a strength, let me add, not comparable even to the time of the "constitutional experiment" of 1905–1917), why then reinterpret Russian history at all? The question is especially pertinent if one starts with the oldest of conventional clichés, that "[t]sarist Russia was essentially an Asiatic empire," which nevertheless was somehow guided by an ideology that sounds rather European, "a national myth in which they [the Russians] were the chosen people building the one true Christian empire."¹⁹ It is significant that the Russian Eurasianist-in-chief, Alexander Dugin, agrees completely: "Two hundred years of pre-Petrine Rus' were two hundred years of the ideal, archetypical Rus' strictly in accordance with her cultural-historical, political, metaphysical and religious mission."²⁰

It is easy to see what fascinates Dugin in that "archetypical Rus'." Its actual policies consisted, according to him, in "taking over the Tatar geopolitical mission" of confronting "the Roman-German world whose pathological culture is a dead-end of degradation and decay."²¹ It is more difficult to determine what, other than Gachev's charming personality, attracts a British liberal scholar to this pre-Petrine Rus'.

"The Russians Are Not Really a Nation"

But back to Russian history according to Hosking. By the end of the seventeenth century disaster struck this dream of the Sonderwegers. Out of that mysterious blending of Asiatic empire and the dream of "the one true Christian empire" emerges yet another empire, that of Peter I obsessed with an insane "drive to secularize and Europeanize." It goes without saying that the national myth of Sonderweg "had been trampled underfoot by that Russian imperial state."²²

One is surely entitled to ask at this point, But wasn't Muscovy also a Russian imperial state in its own right? Yes, it was, but it had still been Rus', "humble, homely, sacred and definitely feminine," while Peter's Rossiia was "grandiose, cosmopolitan, secular and, pace grammarians, masculine."²³ Like a drunken sentinel betraying his oath of allegiance, Peter widely opened the gates of the sacred Rus' to the damned Roman-German world whose destiny, as we have already heard from Dugin, is degeneration and decay.

By Europeanizing Muscovy, by "artificially implanting enterprise, probity, discipline and the spirit of enquiry" into the "feminine" Rus',"²⁴ Peter messed things up for centuries, according to both Dugin and Hosking. And now we have

the result: “The Russian Federation is not a nation-state, but rather a bleeding hulk of empire.”²⁵ And “the Russians are not really a nation.”²⁶ And thus we see here how the “foreign policy and security deliberations of Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski”—as writes a Russian political scientist, Igor Zevelev—“have finally been put into a seemingly solid theoretical framework with a deep historical perspective.”²⁷

Not less important, we immediately see here why there is no liberal alternative to the ultraconservative view in Western studies. For what follows from Hosking’s conclusion is precisely what the ultraconservatives recommend. Since the Russians today are not really a nation, nation building must indeed be the order of the day. And that’s not all. A radical redrawing of borders within the post-Soviet space is in order as well. For there is no other way to make the Russians a real nation, which, in Hosking’s view, means to gather all of them under one national roof. Now the claim of the most celebrated Russian Sonderweger, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, that Northern Kazakhstan populated by Russians is nothing more than “Southern Siberia and Southern (Trans) Urals,” appears to be fully confirmed by the authority of a Western liberal historian.

Justification of Carnage?

Alas, Geoffrey Hosking is by no means the only one who supplies powerful ammunition to Russian nationalists. Astrid Tuminez asks the question, “Was a modern nation-state ever created in Russia?” and answers with a firm, “the scholarly consensus is no.”²⁸ She also thus believes, along with Pipes and Hosking (and let us not forget Dugin), that nation building is the order of the day in post-Soviet Russia, if only because “nationalism is a glue of modern states.”²⁹ The same is true, as we shall see, of John Dunlop and Simon Dixon, as well as of practically everyone in Western studies whose work I have read.

Surely all these scholars must know, along with Michael Howard, that the very principle of nationalism is indissolubly linked to war, and nation building to violence. This is doubly so when the redrawing of borders is involved (and it has always been involved in disintegrating European empires, be it the Ottoman, the Austro-Hungarian, the Russian, or the Yugoslavian). Even the usual trick of splitting nationalism into evil (“ethnic”) and benign (“civic”) doesn’t help here. As Igor Zevelev notes,

[N]ation-building on the rubble of the empire is usually an endeavor of ethno-nationalists. Kemalist Turkey started its experiment with a nation-state by subjecting its Armenian, Greek and Kurdish minorities to genocide and expulsion. . . . Serbia and Croatia became aggressively nationalistic and began to redraw the post-Yugoslavian political map by brutal force.³⁰

What’s more to the point, however, is that “nation-building on an ethnic basis seems to be the only game in Eurasia” as well. And here is his theoretical conclusion: “Intellectually, all these policies relied on the Romantic historicist tradition, claiming that humanity could be divided neatly into nations, and stipulating that culturally—or ethnically—defined nations possessed sacred rights.”³¹

Zevelev seems to have put his finger right at the heart of our problem. For nation building is not to be confused with state building, and even less so with democracy building, as ultraconservatives would have us to believe (just as nationalism is not to be confused with everything “national”). In the ordinary usage of words, nation building means an attempt by artful or “artificial” measures to consolidate a nation into a clear-cut, self-conscious, organized, and volitional entity. Usually this is done, at least in Europe, by identifying the state with the ethnic nation, by approximating the borders of the state and this nation, by ultimately merging its identity with the state. That is why nation building is always an ethnic affair, and on the rubble of an empire invariably evil. In fact, if a genuine nationalist and nation builder such as, say, Zyuganov had been the leader of post-Soviet Russia instead of Yeltsin, we could almost certainly have on our hands now a war in Kazakhstan for “southern Siberia,” if not in the Ukraine for the Crimea. All in the name of making Russia a “modern” nation-state.

And here is how these wars, turning Russia into a mega-Serbia, would be justified by refined Western scholars: “some twenty five million Russians . . . remain outside its [the Russian Federation’s] framework. . . . nearly all Russians are used to the borders of the USSR; they find it especially difficult to take Ukraine, Belorussia and much of Kazakhstan seriously as foreign countries . . . most Russians would wish to exercise their putative voting rights within borders different from those of the current Russian Federation.”³² But this is Hosking speaking, not Zyuganov.

One Exception

Certainly it would be much easier for Western scholars if, instead of endlessly splitting nationalism into evil and benign categories (Tuminez adds to the bunch some “nativists,” as well as “great power nationalists”³³), they were simply to acknowledge that the world changes, and with it, the meaning of ideologies. Communism, for instance, had also been considered by many in the West a progressive force in the nineteenth century (by some in the twentieth as well). Yet by the end of the second Christian millennium it looked hopelessly obsolete. Not even the most obstinate of ultraconservatives would tell us that, although the West has turned communism into a reactionary doctrine, it is still distinctly progressive for, say, Cuba or China at the stage of history where they happen to find themselves. And nobody in Western studies is trying to save communism’s honor by splitting it into evil and benign categories. Ditto for the ideology of “The market always knows best,” which ruled the Western world for an entire century until it was turned into a reactionary doctrine by the Great Depression. So why should nationalism be exempt from this rule?

True, nationalism was to a large extent progressive in sixteenth- through eighteenth-century Europe, when it was a way to enlarge the sphere of social consensus by ending medieval feudal wars and the wars of religion. Even in the nineteenth century it helped Italy and Germany to consolidate. Yet by the twentieth century nationalism usually led to carnage. So why should we still consider it a

progressive, let alone benign, force in twenty-first-century Europe? Why should we still encourage it, for example, in the Baltic states, let alone Russia?

To be sure, there is something to be said for Tuminez's observation that nationalism is a "glue of modern states." Glue is a useful thing. What is hard to comprehend is why Western scholars are so eager to assign that job to brutally compromised nationalism, which has blown apart as many states as it has glued together. Could it be that there is nothing behind this but the power of an old paradigm and the enormous scholarly capital invested in it by the academic community? Or has there simply been no innocent boy, as in the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale, to cry out that the emperor has no clothes?³⁴

There is one exception to the strange trend in which everybody is prescribing nationalism for Russia: In Russia itself, which for obvious reasons was cut off in the twentieth century from sophisticated Western debates on Russian nationalism, nobody I know pretends that there is anything benign about it. Even the most reactionary nationalist forces, such as Zyuganov's communists, never call themselves nationalists, only "patriots." Even Dugin swears that his Eurasianism (which in post-Soviet Russia has replaced both the old pan-Slavism and communism as the leading ideology of Sonderweg) is a prescription for an empire, not nationalism. I would like to think that this is a credit to the memory of Vladimir Solovyev, who left an indelible mark on the nation's consciousness.

Solovyev's Staircase

Solovyev waged an unrelenting fight against nationalism and made a penetrating analysis of the irreconcilable "contradiction between genuine patriotism, working to make Russia better, and the false claims of nationalism pretending that Russia is the best just the way she is."³⁵ It is a fact that after Solovyev, "nationalism" became a dirty word in Russia. (Perhaps the disparaging Soviet usage of the word also helped, although people in the USSR were extremely adept at perverting the official usage, especially intellectuals who automatically saw white wherever the authorities ordered them to see black.) Even more important, it was Solovyev who, at least in my view, laid the foundation for a new paradigm in the study of Russian nationalism. Let me therefore try to describe briefly my mentor's vision. He deserves to be heard.

In contrast to the old paradigm, in which, as we already know, nationalism is the natural and necessary fulfillment of every nation, Solovyev approaches the entire phenomenon of nationality in its dynamics—its dialectic, as Marxists would say. Its first stage is *national self-awareness*, which in his thinking is the real "glue of modern states." To distinguish it as fully as possible from "national egoism," he did not call it "nationalism"—not civic, not benign, not liberal, not any kind. For Solovyev, it was the purest of human feelings, as natural as love for one's parents or children. His name for it, as we remember, was "patriotism." It implied national self-criticism as well as hard work for the betterment of one's country, and tolerance toward others made it thus completely open to the supranational, European identity for Russia. In other words, it denied the very idea of Sonderweg, which was for Solovyev, as for A. J. P. Taylor, not just the hallmark

of imperial nationalism but also the source of all its evils. Like Michael Howard, Solovyev linked it to war and violence. The moment one crosses the fateful line from patriotism to Sonderweg, he concluded, one enters the zone of irreversible nationalist degradation.

The second rung down the “Solovyev staircase,” as I dubbed it in my book *Rossia protiv Rossii*,³⁶ he called *national self-complacency*. It was a relatively benevolent, “soft” nationalism (the Slavophilism of his time), which, although it celebrated the non-European nature of Rus’, did not yet hate Europe. On the contrary, it felt that there was still hope for Europe—if it abandoned its degrading “Roman-German” ways, that is to say, renounced heretical Catholicism and Protestantism in favor of the one true Christian faith of Russian Orthodoxy. And, of course, it would have to forget about traditional European individualism and free-thinking.

But Europe showed no indication of abandoning its sinful ways, and so the hopelessly utopian character of “soft” Russian nationalism was soon revealed. Its function was accomplished: it had sown in the public consciousness the malignant seeds of Sonderweg. In other words, for all its “softness” it had been a sinister sign that degradation of patriotism was on its way.

And because at this point there is no way back up the Solovyev staircase, its further degradation was predetermined. In place of its non-Western brand comes the militant, “rabid,” anti-Western pan-Slavism that calls for a total war against Europe as the only way to save the alleged Slavic civilization, led by Russia, from being devoured by the West. (By the late 1880s, however, pan-Slavism forgave France its Roman sins, which in its view were fading out anyway, and concentrated its hostility on the “aggressive and amoral Germany, that villain of Aryan humankind.”³⁷) “The devourers of Slavs must themselves be devoured,” it proclaimed.³⁸

In Solovyev’s terms, this third, penultimate rung down his “staircase” was *self-adoration*. This one, he predicted, would be terminal for the country; the final rung therefore he called *self-annihilation*.³⁹ History proved him right. By engaging in a world war in the name of the alleged Slavic civilization, the political and cultural elites of the Russian empire had indeed committed political suicide.

In a way, Solovyev delineated the path followed in the twentieth century not just by Russian but also by the German and Japanese imperial nationalism after World War I. This might even be described as a general formula for the behavior of any nationalism, whenever the myth of Sonderweg conquers the elite of an imperial nation (or becomes its “idea-hegemon,” as Antonio Gramsci might have put it).

A Moribund Paradigm?

Whether Solovyev’s ideas will be a basis for a new paradigm in the study of Russian nationalism is up to my colleagues. One thing, however, seems undeniable. The embarrassing errors of such respected scholars as Richard Pipes, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Geoffrey Hosking, Astrid Tuminez, and other practitioners in the field, as detailed above, testify that the old paradigm must be moribund: it has lost whatever heuristic power it ever had.

If all the evidence I have presented so far is not enough to settle the matter, let me convey on a lighter note a few truly scandalous episodes that, in my view, show with ultimate clarity the confusion that is inescapable within the confines of the old paradigm. The first one concerns John Dunlop of the Hoover Institution. In 1985, at the start of Gorbachev's perestroika, it became obvious to him, an acknowledged expert on, and champion of, Russian nationalism, that the only way to ruin the Marxist-Leninist regime in Moscow was for the West to support with all its might the nationalists, whom he had praised for years in his numerous books.

There was one obstacle though. Secret Soviet fellow-travelers might have led the West astray from this absolutely clear imperative, tempting it "to use its resources to prevent Russian nationalism from coming to power and thereby to prolong the existence of the present Marxist-Leninist regime." At this point Dunlop considered it necessary to add: "Strange as it may appear, there exist scholars and diplomats in the West who seriously contemplate advocating such a policy. They even have a spokesman: recent emigre Alexander Yanov."⁴⁰

Of course, one could discuss whether this method of "criticism" is appropriate among scholars, but instead, let me say a few words in Dunlop's defense. Was it really his fault if he couldn't even imagine that in Moscow there might be patriots (in Solovyev's sense of the word) who rejected both nationalism and Marxism-Leninism, and that the future of Russia could be determined by precisely these people—beginning with, say, Alexander Yakovlev, the "architect of perestroika," and ending with Andrei Sakharov, Boris Yeltsin, or Dmitri Likhachev? Was it indeed Dunlop's fault if the old paradigm didn't give him a choice? Patriotism simply doesn't exist in this paradigm as a distinctive category. Unless, of course, it is treated as "great power nationalism" (Tuminez, for one, uses it as a synonym of that specific brand of nationalism⁴¹).

What do Russian patriots think of this kind of distortion? Let me give the floor for a moment to Dmitri Likhachev, a liberal and a patriot, who by the time of his death was recognized as one of the highest cultural authorities in post-Soviet Russia: "I believe that any kind of nationalism is a psychological aberration. Or more precisely, since it comes from an inferiority complex, I should say rather a psychiatric aberration . . . I have repeated this again and again, and I will repeat it. Because today it is relevant as ever."⁴²

This didn't prevent, however, the British expert Simon Dixon from characterizing Likhachev himself as an "ethnic nationalist"⁴³ or Astrid Tuminez from relegating him to another category of nationalists, the "nativists," whatever that might mean. Moreover, led by the same logic Tuminez calls even Galina Starovoitova, the most fierce and articulate antagonist of the Russian nationalists, a nationalist as well, albeit a "Westernizing" one.⁴⁴ Starovoitova would have considered it a mortal offense if she were called a nationalist to her face. Unfortunately, the great lady cannot defend herself now. But no one in Moscow doubts that Likhachev spoke for her as well.

Whom are we to believe then? The Russian patriots or the practitioners of an arrogant and dysfunctional paradigm?⁴⁵

Why Is It Important?

There are institutions in the West, such as the European Union, whose very nature ought to predispose them to understand people like Starovoitova as patriots and Europeans and to see supranational integration as the thing the doctor prescribed for validating them. But institutions cannot act very well by mere institutional momentum; they need the support of the thinking mind, otherwise their institutional momentum too easily gets diverted, as has happened to NATO expansion. Yet the thinking mind of the West has been celebrating nationalism, not patriotism, not integrationism. It goes without saying that by patriots I do not mean Zyuganov's Sonderwegers of the National-Patriotic Union of Russia, who were allowed by liberals to misappropriate the term in the 1990s. Solovyev's criterion is clear: patriots do not push their country to the abyss of self-annihilation. In a word, patriots are integrationists.

“How could it happen that respected Western scholars of all persuasions for years should preach exactly the same thing about Russian nationalism?”

All through the Eastern bloc, up to and including Moscow, the new era was defined in a very clear way—these states were moving out from behind the Iron Curtain, out of isolation, out of the cold war and the division of Europe, in the name of integration, into the common European home. In the West this was called “nationalism.” It was worse than misinterpretation; it was political deafness.

And it surely contributed in the 1990s to the lack of preparations in the West for integrating the East, to the delays and disappointments these countries have suffered in their efforts at integration. In some cases, particularly Russia's, it gave rise to near-despair of integration, despair that has much to do with pushing Russians into the very nationalism that the Western academics have been preaching.

It is amazing how strong the Europeanist strand of thinking still is in Russia. It is this fact that needs explaining, not the fact that nationalism has indeed shown its face. Why is it that only the latter receives theoretical attention, as if it were a revelation of the true nature of the political world, while patriotism-integrationism is ignored? The only answer to this is that such has been the price of a moribund paradigm.

Agreement in Misunderstanding

As an exile from Moscow, I asked myself questions like these for the first time many years ago. In May 1981, at a conference in Washington devoted to Russian nationalism, I was left dumbfounded by the presentation of Jerry Hough, one of the most radical and well-known revisionists in American sovietology. The gist of Hough's speech was that all Russians are nationalists. Andrei Sakharov, for instance, is just as much a nationalist as Alexander Solzhenitsyn, or Leonid

Brezhnev. Of course, Hough added, we must differentiate between the benign Russian nationalists and the evil ones, but in principle the problem is clear: when dealing with Russians, no matter what they call themselves, we are dealing with nationalists.

Richard Pipes, Hough's conservative nemesis, arrived at the conference late and so missed the presentation by his antipode. The reader may imagine the audience's astonishment when in his speech Pipes, virtually word for word, repeated Hough's tirade. On one and the same day we heard one and the same speech from two experts who over the course of years have invariably contradicted one another on everything concerning Russia.⁴⁶

To appreciate fully the degree of shock I experienced in listening to Hough and Pipes, the reader must imagine how, for example, the author of a book on sixteenth-century Catholicism would have felt if he or she heard from respected academics that all Europeans were Catholics at that time and the only difference between Martin Luther, the leader of the Reformation, and Ignatius Loyola, leader of the Counter Reformation, was that one was an evil Catholic and the other a benign one.

The reader must agree that this would be obvious nonsense. So how could it happen that respected Western scholars of all persuasions for years should preach exactly the same thing about Russian nationalism? My shock was even greater when I found out that the aforementioned Simon Dixon, in direct contradiction of John Dunlop, declared me a Russian nationalist, of all things (albeit, like Starovoitova, of a benign brand).⁴⁷

Perhaps someday someone will be able to explain to me what kind of scholarly paradigm allows one and the same person to be counted at the same time as both a Russian nationalist and an enemy of Russian nationalism. Academic experimentation with categories is all well and good, but it needs to be subjected to the usual tests and standards of the discipline; it cannot be allowed unlimited self-contradiction. I mention all this here not merely because personal testimony has its relevance in reminding us that word games have consequences, but also in the hope of driving an additional nail in the coffin of a paradigm that deserves to be long since dead and buried.

It seems easy now to see its main failings. To be sure, John Dunlop is an extreme case. Yet, precisely for that reason his writings demonstrate with the utmost clarity how, by excluding a distinctive category of patriotism from the equation, the dead paradigm doomed its practitioners to the either/or choice between nationalism and Marxism-Leninism.

Geoffrey Hosking is an extreme case as well. And once again it is for that reason that his book shows us the second fundamental failing of the old paradigm. By excluding federation, it dooms us to a similar either/or choice between nationalism and empire. Just listen to him: "I do not pretend, of course, that the process of strengthening national identity in Russia [read: fighting Kazakhstan for "southern Siberia"] can be wholly reassuring either for its neighbors or for the international community at large. But I believe it is preferable to any attempt at rebuilding empire, which I take to be the only serious alternative."⁴⁸

But why not “federation within a federation,” for crying out loud? Why not the liberal alternative that escapes both nationalism and empire? If we are to believe Timothy Garton Ash, such might be the best solution for Britain.⁴⁹ Why then not for Russia? And what about the balance between national and supranational European identities, which saved Germany from A. J. P. Taylor’s harsh sentence?

In a new paradigm, both patriotism and federation, as well as integrationism, would have to replace the absurdly numerous and increasingly arbitrary splittings of Russian nationalism that dominate the old one, like the new epicycles that always had to be tacked onto the old epicycles in Ptolemaic theory every time there was a new observed fact. The idea of Sonderweg would stand as a comparative explanatory category for imperial nationalism, one that has always been at the ideological core of actual Russian nationalism. And the “Solovyev staircase” would be recognized as a statement of the natural dynamics of the Sonderweg.

We know from Thomas Kuhn that a paradigm change is an enormous enterprise. Personally, I am skeptical that anything fundamental will come of this in my lifetime. But it might be literally a matter of life and death for post-Soviet Russia, and so the sooner we start the work the better. In any case, it’s better to start discussing it before the moribund paradigm infects scholarship inside Russia as well.⁵⁰

NOTES

1. See Ira Straus, “How Far East Can the EU and NATO Go? The Interplay of National with Supranational Identity-Formation,” 2001, manuscript.
2. Aleksei Podberezkin, *Russkii put’* (Moscow, 1996), 41.
3. Podberezkin, *Russkii put’*, 51.
4. *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 30 December 1999.
5. Richard Pipes, “Introduction: The Nationality Problem,” in *Handbook of Major Soviet Nationalities*, ed. Zev Katz (New York: Free Press, 1995), 1.
6. Richard Pipes, “Birth of Empire,” *New York Times Book Review*, 25 May 1997, 13.
7. Michael Howard, *The Lessons of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 39.
8. I leave aside, as a sort of “internal affair” of the Western ideologists, the question of whether this is genuine conservatism, to which Howard might have some claim.
9. A. J. P. Taylor, *The Course of German History* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1945), 7, 10.
10. Taylor, *The Course of German History*, 225.
11. Cited in B. B. Glinsky, *Bor’ba za konstitutsiiu. 1612–1861* (St. Petersburg, 1908), 190.
12. *New York Times*, 2 July 2000.
13. *NG-Scenarii*, 15 November 2000.
14. Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552–1917* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), xxvi.
15. Hosking, *Russia*, xix.
16. Hosking, *Russia*.
17. Hosking, *Russia*.
18. Arnold Toynbee, “Russian Byzantine Heritage,” *Horizon* 16 (August 1947). Not long ago Jenő Szucs practically repeated this old Toynbee argument in his “Three Historical Regions of Europe,” in *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives*, ed.

John Keane (London: Verso, 1988).

19. Geoffrey Hosking and Robert Service, eds., *Russian Nationalism: Past and Present* (New York: St. Martin's, 1998), 2, 30. Hosking's brief and precise summary of his "Russia" in this collection of articles is sometimes more straightforward than in the bulky and somewhat unwieldy book itself.

20. Nikolai Trubetskoi, *Nasledie Chingizkhana, Predislovie Alexandra Dugina* (Moscow, 1999), 12.

21. Trubetskoi, *Nasledie Chingizkhana*, 10.

22. Hosking and Service, *Russian Nationalism*, 30.

23. Hosking, *Russia*, xix.

24. Hosking, *Russia*, 91.

25. Hosking and Service, *Russian Nationalism*, 5.

26. Hosking and Service, *Russian Nationalism*, 2.

27. Igor Zevelev, *Johnson's Russia List*, 15 December 2000.

28. Astrid Tuminez, *Russian Nationalism Since 1856: Ideology and the Making of Foreign Policy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 29.

29. Tuminez, *Russian Nationalism Since 1856*, 26.

30. Zevelev, *Johnson's Russia List*, 15 December 2000.

31. Zevelev, *Johnson's Russia List*, 15 December 2000.

32. Hosking, *Russia*, 485

33. Tuminez, *Russian Nationalism Since 1856*, 132, 133.

34. If one wishes to gain Russia's respect for the newly independent states around her borders, there could be nothing more self-defeating than to raise up russkii nationalism. Ditto if one wishes to gain Russia's respect, period. And if anyone doubts this, they need only look at the reaction of Russians to another American, Brzezinski, whose counsel to become russkii instead of rossiiskii has not inspired Russians to calm down and become a "normal" European country as he hoped, but rather thrown oil on the fires of Russian nationalism. The fervor and the bitterness of the Russian reaction to Brzezinski should serve as a warning to those who would play in this way with words: they are playing literally with fire.

35. V. S. Solovyev, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1989), 39.

36. Alexander Yanov, *Rossiia protiv Rossii* (Novosibirsk, 1999).

37. S. Sharapov and N. Aksakov, *Germaniia i slavianstvo* (Moscow, 1909), 26.

38. V. Apushkin, *Skobelev o nemisakh* (Petrograd, 1914), 27.

39. For the "staircase" captured in one brief formula, see Solovyev, *Sochineniia*, 1:282.

40. John Dunlop, *The New Russian Nationalism* (New York: Praeger, 1985), 39. In Russia this is called a *donos*. And it wasn't at all a trifling accusation in the atmosphere of the cold war. If you think that the FBI didn't pay me a visit after Dunlop's publication, think again.

41. Tuminez, *Russian Nationalism Since 1856*, 133.

42. Dmitry Likhachev, *I Remember* (Moscow, 1991), 126–27.

43. Hosking and Service, *Russian Nationalism*, 157.

44. Tuminez, *Russian Nationalism Since 1856*, 189, 188.

45. As my colleague Ira Straus likes to say, "nationalism" has become a kind of imperialist in the world of categories, gobbling up everything in its path. Whatever has anything national in it becomes "nationalism." The term is treated as if it were defined as "anything of or pertaining to a nation." But that is the definition of the adjective "national," not of the noun "nationalism." The correct elementary linguistic definition of the latter is "a doctrine in which the nation is raised to the level of central value." Actually, nationalism defined empirically is an even more limited phenomenon: it is an identifiable historical movement and ideology. Based on my decades of historical research, I will use the following descriptive definition of nationalism as far as it pertains to Russia: it is the ideology of Sonderweg in a great imperial power.

46. For me, their logic was especially depressing. After all, if all Russians are supposed

to be nationalists, as we heard from both Hough and Pipes, what place does that leave for myself—an “enemy of the people”? That was the KGB’s conclusion when it exiled me from the USSR, and it flowed with strict deductive logic from its professional way of thinking. One might have expected a more subtle way of thinking from Western scholars.

47. Hosking and Service, *Russian Nationalism*, 166.

48. Hosking, *Russia*, xviii.

49. *New York Times*, 17 June 2000.

50. It is already happening before our eyes. See, for instance, Suzanna Matveeva, “Vozmozhnost’ natsii-gosudarstva v Rossii,” *Polis* 54, no. 1 (1996), or Igor Yakovenko, *Rossiiskoye gosudarstvo* (Novosibirsk, 1999).