

**THE EVOLUTION OF RUSSIA'S GREAT POWER DISCOURSE:  
A CONCEPTUAL HISTORY OF *VELIKAYA DERZHAVA***

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Anatoly Reshetnikov

Budapest, 25 September 2018

## ABSTRACT

Today, Russia is yet again talking about being a great power. Such rhetoric emerges in almost every programmatic text written by Russian politicians, as well as in every forecast and policy analysis prepared by Russian state-affiliated think-tanks. Most western observers perceive this as a question of foreign policy and treat Russia's claims with suspicion. At a closer look, however, it becomes evident that, instead of having an exclusive connection to foreign policy, Russia's great power discourse is self-centered, defensive, ideological, and relates equally, if not more, to the causes of Russian domestic consolidation and catch up development. In this study, I argue that the origins of this inherent ambivalence and specific functions of Russia's great power discourse should be sought in the conceptual evolution of *velikaya derzhava*, a Russian political concept that is usually translated as 'great power'. In its current shape, *velikaya derzhava* is a product of both the evolution of local political culture, and Russia's discursive encounters with external political environment, the most consequential of which was Russia's lengthy and troubled integration into the European society of states in the XVIII and the XIX centuries.

While before the XIX century, Russian and European ideas about political greatness and power could be said to develop on collinear tracks, sometimes converging, but sometimes drifting apart from each other, in the XIX century, there emerged an important diversion between the two. In Europe, different genealogically related versions of political glorification were synthesised into the story of progress, which was universalist, but not essentialist. While it postulated the existence of the family of mankind developing in one common direction, the position of each individual polity on that axis was to be established based on rigorous civilizational analysis and comparison.

In Russia, that synthesis proceeded differently. Instead of fully rejecting the progressive paradigm, or, on the contrary, adopting it in its entirety and accepting the role of a learner, Russia seems to have internalised the Western discursive framework, but did not find a way to relate to it unproblematically. Viewed as an ambivalently positioned latecomer from within the progressivist

paradigm, Russia never came to terms with that role, refused to leave the club altogether, but was also unable to greatly improve its relative position vis-à-vis the core (if measured by the core's standards). Consequently, it ended up oscillating between the two poles: (1) the forceful assertions of its own greatness (retrieved in different genealogical variations from its cultural image bank), and (2) the acute realisations of its underdevelopment, which was supposed to be mitigated through an emergency modernization program that Russia was believed to be capable of, empowered by the ideology of being a *velikaya derzhava*. This created an uneasy tension in Russia's self-image, as well as in its interactions with the outside world. That failed synthesis continues to shape Russia's great power discourse until today.

## TRANSLATION AND TRANSLITERATION NOTE

Unless specified otherwise, all translations of the Russian sources are mine. The sources originally written in French were either read in Russian translations provided by the publishers and then translated by me into English or translated by me directly from French. The sources originally written in Church Slavonic were read in translation into modern Russian provided by the publisher, but the original text was also scrutinized for semantic nuances that could have been lost in translation. In transliterating Cyrillic letters, I used the ‘Passport (1997)’ standard ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanization\\_of\\_Russian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanization_of_Russian)) with the exception of some last names, whose spelling variant has become widespread. I also opted for transliterating the common ending of Russian first and last names “ий” by using “y” in English.

*To Y.I.*

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Figure 1. Hermogenes, Philaret and Mikhail Romanov on the Millennium of Russia monument

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# CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction

Recently, Russia has been talking a lot about being a great power ([*velikaya*] *derzhava*).<sup>1</sup> In the Western discourse, the term ‘great power’ immediately evokes unambiguous connotations. Namely, it is believed to be related to some privileged status in the international system. This status is associated either with a claim to be one of a few real policy-makers (as neorealists have argued),<sup>2</sup> or with a claim for some rights and responsibilities in relation to the management of international order (as has been suggested by the English School of International Relations (IR)).<sup>3</sup> Hence, it is those specifically IR-related associations that Russian great power rhetoric elicits in the West. Most observers perceive it as a question of foreign policy.

Yet, at a closer look, the specific contexts in which Russia spoke about being *velikaya derzhava*, as well as the meanings it attached to this signifier, often had little to do with foreign policy, relational superiority and/or concerted management of international order. For instance, Russian elites insist very often that Russia must be a great power, or it will not be at all, as if there is no middle ground between shining success and total annihilation, and greatpowerhood is presented as the only remedy for otherwise imminent disaster.<sup>4</sup> That is, foreign policy is put at the service of domestic survival, a concern that Western great powers would have usually left behind. On other occasions, Russian leaders demonstrate their willingness to tolerate sanctions and be

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Vladimir Putin, “Vystuplenie Prezidenta [Presidential Address],” *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 8 May 2004, <https://rg.ru/2004/05/08/putin-rech.html>, accessed 19 September 2018; Vladislav Surkov, “Natsionalizatsiya buduschego [Nationalization of the Future],” *Expert*, No. 43 (537), 20 November 2006; Dmitry Medvedev, “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation,” Grand Kremlin Palace, Moscow, 12 November 2009, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/5979>, accessed 19 September 2018; Dmitry Medvedev, “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation,” The Kremlin, Moscow, 30 November 2010, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/9637>, accessed 19 September 2018; and Vladimir Putin, “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly,” The Kremlin, Moscow, 12 December 2013, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19825>, accessed 25 September 2018..

<sup>2</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *The tragedy of great power politics* (New York and London: WW Norton & Company, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Hedley Bull, *The anarchical society: a study of order in world politics*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2002 [1977]).

<sup>4</sup> Vladislav Surkov, “Nationalization of the Future”; Mikhail Leontiev cited in Viatcheslav Morozov, “Sovereignty and democracy in contemporary Russia: a modern subject faces the post-modern world,” *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 11 (2008): 162; Nikita Mikhalkov, *Pravo i Pravda: Manifest Prosveshchennogo konservatizma* [Right and Truth: Enlightened Conservatism Manifesto] (Eksmo, 2017); and Lilia Shevtsova, *Putin’s Russia* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003), p. 175.

excluded from global financial flows emphasizing that Russia is able to and will resist the pressure as a real great power should.<sup>5</sup> So much for international recognition and concerted management efforts. More often than not, Russian leaders use great power rhetoric when talking to their domestic audience, and instead of describing the international status quo, they either appeal to the public's hopes and desires, or evoke nostalgia, imbuing this discourse with mobilizational tint.<sup>6</sup>

Evidently, Russian great power discourse intertwines several seemingly incompatible features: internal modernization and foreign policy, domestic ideology and the international balance of power, strength and weakness. It also often combines the roles of an established great power and a global challenger. What is more, such ambivalence is an enduring feature. Back in the 1990s, Russia also invariably bedazzled the international audience, which could not help wondering whether "there [was] 'a right to be great?'"<sup>7</sup> It often seemed strange to them that the country wanted "an agreement which reflects not its present weakness but its past, its hopes, its future."<sup>8</sup> While, economically speaking, Russia is in much better shape today than it was in the end of the last century, the abovementioned ambiguities persist.

Consequently, Russia's behaviour frequently seems irrational to many international actors. Its actions remain misunderstood and are treated with suspicion. The fact that 'understanding Russia' has recently become a new cottage industry,<sup>9</sup> points quite clearly in the direction that Russia is yet again an enigma.<sup>10</sup> Such a nickname may boost Russia's self-esteem, but it remains an obstacle

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<sup>5</sup> E.g. Sergei Lavrov cited in Dmitry Trenin, "Demands on Russian Foreign Policy and Its Drivers: Looking Out Five Years," *Carnegie Moscow Center*, 10 August 2017, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/72799>, accessed 24 August 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Vladimir Putin, "Seliger 2013 Youth Forum," Seliger, 2 August 2013, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/18993>, accessed 19 September 2018; Vladimir Putin, "National open lesson Russia Focused on the Future," Yaroslavl, 1 September 2017, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/55493>, accessed 19 September 2018; Vladimir Putin, "Address to the Nation at the Presidential Inauguration Ceremony," The Kremlin, Moscow, 7 May 2004, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22452>, accessed 19 September 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Woollacott, "To the Finland Bus Station," *The Guardian* (22 March 1997), p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> E.g. Christian Neef, "The Mysteries of the Russian Mindset," *Spiegel*, 22 August 2017, <https://goo.gl/DPfmCr>, accessed 6 February 2018; Vartan Oskanian, "Understanding Russia," *Aljazeera*, 7 April 2014, <https://goo.gl/BHPcwm>, accessed 6 February 2018; Michael Curtis, "Understanding Russia," *American Thinker*, 19 March 2017, <https://goo.gl/9Nasru>, accessed 6 February 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Coined by Winston Churchill in relation to the Soviet Union in 1939, this metaphor survived both Churchill and the Soviet Union. Some recent uses related to Russia include Ayse Zarakol, *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live*

for a major actor seeking recognition from the international community. It is equally problematic for the international community to have a major actor that constantly remains misunderstood, and hence, unpredictable. This opens a whole set of difficult questions. (1) *Why is the idea of being a great power so important to Russia?* (2) *Why does Russia stick to this identity even when doing so may compromise its international standing and damage its economic health?* (3) *What does Russia, in fact, mean when it speaks about being a great power, given that its subsequent actions often do not conform to other actors' expectations about proper 'greatpowerly' conduct?* (4) *Why does the Russian story about its political greatness often include an element of dissatisfaction and unfulfillment?*

The first question is related to discursive preconditions for action. Since the latter are created in the domestic (i.e. Russian) discursive space, I suggest that the best way to understand their specifics is to historicise them. In this study, I will first try to understand those preconditions on their own terms, i.e. emically (from the perspective of the subject). Russian great power discourse is different from its equivalents in other European languages and there are historical reasons for it. I am going to look for and analyse those reasons. At the same time, the specificity of the subject matter – international status, political greatness, etc. – presupposes relationality, i.e. such categories as *velikaya derzhava* and great power involve and are partially shaped by outsiders. Outsiders, in this case, are neither a stable gold standard, nor irrelevant – they are actors just like Russia, who often contest or misunderstand Russia's claims. Studying these discursive interactions is essential for answering questions two, three and four, which are formulated relationally.<sup>11</sup>

As a methodological solution that would be suitable for addressing both types of questions, as well as have enough historical and inter-lingual sensitivity, I propose an international conceptual history of *velikaya derzhava*. This approach seems especially suitable, given my analytical task: to explain discursive endurance and ambiguity. Further, I justify my analytical choices from two separate angles showing that, whichever way one decides to look at the problem at stake, it is

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*with the West* (Cambridge University Press, 2010) and Fabrizio Tassinari, "A riddle inside an enigma: Unwrapping the EU-Russia strategic partnership," *The International Spectator* 40.1 (2005): 45-57.

<sup>11</sup> I thank Einar Wigen for helping make sense of how to ask and answer different types of questions.

difficult to answer those questions without acquiring a special sensitivity related to the evolution of the Russian political concept signifying ‘great power’.

The first angle I look from is the positions existing in academic literature. I review a number of academic works that emphasise Russia’s attachment to its great power identity and try to account for ambiguities present in how that identity operates. While I do find at least several worthwhile explanations of Russia’s almost religious attachment to the great power narrative, as well as of its local specifics, I also discover a few limitations mostly related to the authors’ general unwillingness to seriously engage with the history of Russia’s domestic discourse. I then propose that a better way to account for the ambiguities of the Russian great power identity is to study how the Russian concept that corresponds to ‘great power’ emerged and developed.

The second angle I look from is contemporary discourse in use. I map out the everyday and academic understandings of great power status as they operate outside of the Russian discourse. I then examine the ways in which Russia itself currently talks about being a great power. I do this to demonstrate a few structural patterns distinguishing Russia’s great power rhetoric from its mainstream Western analogues. Some of those patterns I already hinted at in the very beginning. I then argue that the only way to explain these differences is through analysing the evolution of the Russian concept *velikaya derzhava*, as well as its inter-lingual encounters with external discourses that influenced it. To conclude, I discuss a few methodological considerations and justify the selected timeframe, as well as provide an outline of my argument and a chapter breakdown.

## **1.2 Russia’s ambiguous greatness**

Russia’s quest for great power status is not a topic that lacks scholarly attention. Hence, some of the questions outlined in the beginning of this introductory chapter have been addressed already. Yet, pressing as they are, they have not initiated a comprehensive debate within a single subfield of International Relations (IR). Consequently, attention to Russia’s great power standing is spread across several scholarly fields, including cultural studies, postcolonial studies,



constructivist IR, historical IR and, of course, history. Because of this, it is difficult for me to position my investigation within any pre-given theoretical framework.

In general, I share the interpretivist vision of social reality and knowledge. This means that I treat social reality as, first and foremost, the sphere of constant production, reproduction and interpretation of signs. I believe that the latter processes, together with individuals' own histories, situational contexts and power relations, condition human action. Hence, to understand the patterns of social interaction a researcher needs to study meaning-making processes and interpret different actors' interpretations. Doing so allows to uncover the dialectics of socially constructed similarity and variation, i.e. the approximation of meaning in situational and historical contexts that creates collective identities and the misalignment of meaning that creates social divides.

At the same time, however, responding to my potential interlocutors who belong to different epistemic communities and who addressed the questions of my interest before, I must engage with different conceptual apparatuses, from neo-Marxism to conceptual history. Consequently, the following discussion is theoretically eclectic, as it must necessarily be to cover the most relevant studies. Yet, my overall charge against the existing accounts of Russia's great power identity is mostly twofold. The authors either simply register the puzzling endurance of this identity and numerous mishaps related to it without trying to uncover the origins of the problem, or disregard the specifics of Russian discourse altogether, adopting a Eurocentric perspective to political greatness and 'measuring' Russia's position by their own yardstick.

In contrast to my theoretical position, I try to be consistent in methodology. I propose an international conceptual history of Russian political notions associated with greatness and greatpowerhood from the moment of their inception until the establishment of a visible pattern that could explain the current ambivalence of Russian great power discourse, its unfailing vitality and failing recognition.

I start this section by discussing the authors who perceptively registered Russia's puzzling attachment to greatness but did not try to explain why this was the case. I then engage with several

psychological explanations of Russia's obsession with its international status and conclude that, incisive as they are, those explanations fail to provide a credible account of why the Russian condition had to emerge to begin with and why it remains so long-lasting. After that, I survey several materialist and international systemic explanations that are naturally suitable for long timespans and conclude that they do not go back far enough, and consequently remain locked within Eurocentric terms and concepts. Finally, I argue for a need to write a conceptual history of Russian political notions related to greatpowerhood and begin pursuing this task.

### **1.2.1 Registering Russia's attachment to greatness**

In his seminal study of Russian and Soviet identities, Ted Hopf shows very convincingly that the idea of being a great power was (and remains to be) firmly entrenched in every identity competing in Russian and Soviet public spaces, regardless of their ideological convictions.<sup>12</sup> Whether one is loyal to the socialist dream or the Western-style market economy, both believe that Russia must be a great power (even though differently defined), and that alternatives to this status are unthinkable. Yet, Hopf does not try to explain why this is the case.

Christian Thorun also demonstrates that the evolution of Russian foreign policy from 1992 till 2007 was effectively a sequence of interchanging understandings of greatness: from "normal great power" to "Eurasian great power" to "responsible great power" to "independent great power."<sup>13</sup> Thereby, he also signals implicitly that a second-class status was never a thinkable option for Russian elites, no matter which political ideology guided their thinking. Just like Hopf, however, Thorun does not problematise this finding and leaves it to his readers to wonder why alternatives to burdensome political greatness remained unthinkable for Russian politicians even during the hardest moments of post-communist transformation.

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<sup>12</sup> Ted Hopf, *Social construction of international politics: identities & foreign policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999* (Cornell University Press, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> Christian Thorun, *Explaining change in Russian foreign policy: the role of ideas in post-Soviet Russia's conduct towards the West* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 39.

What is more, both Thorun and Hopf approach the issue inductively, simply documenting divergent ideas about political greatness within Russia, disregarding their fundamentally social nature and conceptual roots. However, greatpowerhood can only acquire meaning in relation to more general ideas about political order and hierarchies therein. Hence, to be taken seriously, this concept should always be viewed in the process of a dialogic construction – its different meanings emerge and replace one another in the process of Russia’s conversation with the world. Naturally, the world possesses its own different sets of ideas about political greatness, some more established, some less so. Thus, to understand the meaning of Russia’s discursive toolkit, it makes sense to try to look at it in conjunction with the conceptual baggage accumulated by the international society, where greatpowerhood has a long history as an institution that continues to shape international hierarchies until today.

### **1.2.2 Psychological explanations**

A few illuminating studies that can put Russia’s quest for greatness into a global context and explain why a state like Russia should be overly concerned with its international status were written by the authors who took the psychological route. In his book *The Culture of Defeat: On National Mourning, Trauma and Recovery*, Wolfgang Schivelbusch reconstructs “a set of patterns or archetypes that recur across time and national boundaries”<sup>14</sup> in societies experiencing defeat and trying to overcome its negative consequences. All those archetypes, in their own way, help to soften the trauma and re-establish a sense of achievement for the losing side to avert depression and other negative psychological repercussions. Some archetypes redefine material defeat as a spiritual victory or denigrate the victor’s success as dishonest or unworthy. Although Schivelbusch does not discuss Russia directly, it is certainly possible to apply his framework to the Russian case. Thus, when contemporary Russia talks about its spiritual superiority prioritizing it over material factors or when it blames the West for breaking the rules of the game, this may be interpreted as an attempt to deal with the psychological consequences of its defeat in the Cold War.

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<sup>14</sup> Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The culture of defeat: On national trauma, mourning, and recovery* (Macmillan, 2003), p. 10.

To be sure, this is how Ayşe Zarakol explains Russian hypersensitivity towards its great power status and the strange intermingling of greatness and fragility in its rhetorical stance.<sup>15</sup> In her interpretation, Russia, just like Turkey or Japan, is a state that was stigmatised in the process of its socialization into the international society. Its recent defeat in the Cold War reinforced the stigma, and Russia had only two available options: (1) to accept the stigma and a second-class status coming with it, or (2) to act as if the stigma was not there and submit to life-long dissonance. Zarakol argues that Russia preferred to live in denial, for accepting the stigma seemed unthinkable. Consequently, it looks up to the West and treats it with mistrust and suspicion simultaneously; it implicitly accepts its own civilizational inferiority, and, at the same time, asserts its spiritual leadership.

While this explanation seems appealing, it is also true that not every great power deals with defeat in an identical fashion. Some states, like Japan and Germany after WWII, delve temporarily into self-reflection and eventually re-direct their intellectual and economic resources to excel in alternative competitive fields becoming “geo-economic powers”<sup>16</sup> or “aid great powers,”<sup>17</sup> for example. In this quest, the relatively more secure position of Germany among the established European nations did not make its restoration path significantly different from that of Japan. Other states, like Sweden, let go of their great power status and global ambitions relatively easily, deciding to concentrate on domestic development and well-being. And while today one may think of Sweden as an exemplary Western nation, which would explain why it did not carry a stigma, its place among the founders of the Western civilizational core is debatable. After all, it had to go to war in 1630, despite being poor and economically backward, to put its name on the European map, from which it was soon removed by Russia.<sup>18</sup> Hence, from early on, Sweden battled with the

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<sup>15</sup> Zarakol, *After Defeat*.

<sup>16</sup> Hans Kundnani, “Germany as a Geo-economic Power,” *The Washington Quarterly*, 34:3 (2011): 31-45.

<sup>17</sup> Dennis T. Yasutomo, “Why Aid? Japan as an ‘Aid Great Power’,” *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 62, No. 4 (Winter, 1989-1990): 490-503.

<sup>18</sup> Erik Ringmar, *Identity, interest and action: a cultural explanation of Sweden's intervention in the Thirty Years War* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

same established/outsider dichotomy that Russia, Turkey and Japan were confronted with, but managed to overcome it successfully without sacrificing its psychological integrity.

Thus, not only are there significant variations in coping strategies of different post-defeat states, Russia also seems to be a strange outlier in this list of cases. On the one hand, Russia has been a much better-established power than Turkey or Japan for the last three centuries: it was a member of the European Concert and one of the two protagonists of the Cold War – it is difficult to get more established than that in the international arena. On the other hand, the defeat which should have reinforced the late socialization stigma did not happen on the battlefield and was hardly perceived as a fatal loss by the Russian elites. As Zarakol puts it, Russia switched to ‘westophilia’ “*completely on its own schedule*,”<sup>19</sup> exercising a degree of agency unobtainable by other defeated states. Hence, instead of settling on an explanation that grants European modernity with the status of an all-pervasive and undefeatable force (i.e. the only meaningful variable), it makes sense to look at Russia itself and try to identify the configuration of ideas and process that affected its own political development and the dynamics of its encounter with the West.

### ***1.2.3 Materialist and international systemic explanations***

Alexander Etkind takes one step further in explaining the ambivalence of Russia’s great power standing and in discovering its cultural roots.<sup>20</sup> Like Hopf and Thorun, he takes Russian discourse seriously, making full use of his acute familiarity with the local context. Like Zarakol, he reconnects Russian political existence with global trends and tries to present Russia’s imperial experience in terms familiar to the Western audience. Etkind begins by identifying two enduring stories about imperial Russia (which are also applicable to its successor states). One is the story of a great power competing successfully with the most powerful countries in the world. The other one is the story of a backward nation, riddled with violence and misery. To make sense of this contradiction, Etkind borrows a well-developed vocabulary from the field of Imperialism and

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<sup>19</sup> Zarakol, *After Defeat*, p. 33, emphasis original.

<sup>20</sup> Alexander Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia’s Imperial Experience* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011).

Colonization studies to create a theoretical construct of ‘internal colonization’ to render Russian political development intelligible for outside observers and “comparable to other colonial empires of the past.”<sup>21</sup> In his interpretation, “Russia has been both the subject *and* the object of colonization and its corollaries, such as orientalism.”<sup>22</sup> It was a state that colonised its own people, who developed anti-imperial ideas in response. Great power status came with empire and imperialism, but Russia was a self-colonizing empire (and continues to be one, in Etkind’s opinion),<sup>23</sup> and hence, it is only logical that its great power rhetoric was always self-referential and unfulfilled, while its hinterlands were always more like colonised territories than an empire’s backyard.

Viacheslav Morozov brings Etkind’s argument to a new level by adding an international-systemic dimension to it.<sup>24</sup> Internal colonization, Morozov maintains, is what happens to some peripheral countries. Uneven development causes the inability to compete on common terms, while an internalised hegemonic ideology brings about nervous inward-oriented application of hegemonic categories, such as empire and colonization. He calls the resulting political construct ‘subaltern imperialism,’ meaning that in addition to colonizing its own people, the Russian elite has itself become an object of cultural colonization by the West during the process of its socialization in Europe. Hence, Russia continues to exist as a subaltern empire that remains outside of the hegemonic core (which means that its right to sit at the table is permanently contested), but also claims a contemporary equivalent of imperial status and a sphere of influence that comes with it (which means that it adamantly insists on being a great power).

Elegant as they are, Etkind’s and Morozov’s arguments leave some blank spots when it comes to the main objectives of this study. First, they both take pre-existing categories developed in a different socio-political environment and try to stretch them to explain a deviant case, whose

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 2, emphasis original.

<sup>23</sup> Alexander Etkind, “Vnutrennyaya kolonizatsiya. Kriticheskaya teoriya paraziticheskogo gosudarstva [Internal Colonization. A Critical Theory of Parasitic State],” *Vestnik Evropy*, 46 (2016), <https://goo.gl/dXs9nU>, accessed 5 February 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Viacheslav Morozov, *Russia’s Postcolonial Identity: A Subaltern Empire in a Eurocentric World* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

deviance can only be established against those pre-existing categories to begin with. In that, their analyses remain Eurocentric. Second, if one asked why Russia necessarily had to be a state that colonised its own people (which certainly explains the ambivalence of its great power identity), Etkind's answer would probably be a materialist one: such was its resource profile and geography. Morozov would probably add that this was also an outcome of uneven development and cultural colonization. Yet, I argue that Russia's self-colonizing condition and the resulting ambivalence of its great power identity also have important conceptual and ideological roots.

The two stories that Etkind identifies in the beginning of his study do not merely exist side-by-side. In Russian political imagination, they are conceptually interwoven. What is more, various manifestations of the idea that true greatness and complete submission are two sides of the same coin already emerge a few hundred years before the age of colonialism. It is an important part of Orthodox Christian philosophy that shaped early Russian political culture, and it keeps re-emerging in different forms and shapes as a leitmotif of Russian political thinking at least since the X century. Thus, while I do not want to claim that early Russian political concepts fully determined the country's response to European imperialism, I believe it is more productive to look at the current Russian great power identity as an outcome of the conceptual evolution of Russian political culture *affected by* Russia's encounter with other empires, as well as the dominant ideas of the age. Without fully understanding the assortment of available discursive resources with the opportunities and limitations they entail, it is difficult to grasp why Russia got stuck in this somewhat erratic state of a self-colonizing political entity to begin with and why it arguably remains in this condition until today.

#### ***1.2.4 Towards a conceptual history of Russian political notions***

In fact, a few scholars have either called for or attempted to accomplish comprehensive investigations of Russian political concepts. Oleg Kharkhordin invested a tremendous effort into reconstructing the histories of such Russian political concepts as 'state', 'civil society', 'the

collective and the individual' and others.<sup>25</sup> Yet, he did not address the equally ancient and complex concepts used to designate 'power' itself. Having noticed this, Vsevolod Samokhvalov has rightly pointed out that even "a superficial glance reveals differences of meaning attached to the term 'power' in the Russian and Anglo-Saxon languages [and] a deeper analysis of this term and its meaning for Russia is long overdue."<sup>26</sup> The concept that Samokhvalov has in mind is *derzhava*, the second element of the Russian expression *velikaya derzhava*. Still, while accurately outlining the difference between the workings of equivalent concepts in different languages, he limits his study to the last 50 years, which is virtually nothing on the scale of linguistic and conceptual evolutions. By doing this, Samokhvalov excludes some crucially important transformative moments from his analysis, e.g. the XVIII century diplomatic discourse where the concept of great power emerged and took shape and the beginning of the XIX century, when Russia, having defeated Napoleon, became a recognised member of the great powers' concert.

Others did try to properly analyse the evolution of Russian concepts related to power and greatness on a much larger scale. In his authoritative study, Michael Cherniavsky lays an impressive groundwork for a conceptual reconstruction of Russian ideas of political greatness by looking at the early development of the idea of the ruler in ancient Rus'.<sup>27</sup> He discovers that the very concept of 'state' was introduced in one of Russia's predecessor political formation as a part of Christian ethos, i.e. no concept of secular state existed in Rus' before it was baptised around 988, no concept outside the purposes of Christianity. Consequently, early Russian princes "were the main if not the only concrete expressions of Russian state and its continuity."<sup>28</sup> Because of this, the princes were attributed with *personal*, human saintliness. Their person and their functions could not be divided as neatly as it was done in the West – "the Russian prince ... in his person was as much an image

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<sup>25</sup> Oleg Kharkhordin, *Main Concepts of Russian Politics* (University Press of America, 2005); Oleg Kharkhordin, "What is the State? The Russian Concept of *Gosudarstvo* in the European Context," *History and Theory*, Vol. 40. No. 2 (May 2001): 206-240; Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999).

<sup>26</sup> Vsevolod Samokhvalov, *Russian-European Relations in the Balkans and Black Sea Region: Great Power Identity and the Idea of Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 12.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Cherniavsky, *Tsar and people: Studies in Russian myths* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961).

<sup>28</sup> Cherniavsky, *Tsar and people*, p. 33.



of Christ as he was in his office and function.”<sup>29</sup> With personal saintliness came the most prominent Christian virtues of humility and complete submission to god’s will and authority. Hence, “the ideal of the angelic ruler ... is translated into the concrete image of the monk-tsar, the synthesis of glory and humility; in his glory [the Russian prince] wishes to be humble, and through his humility before God he gains the tsarlike glorious victories.”<sup>30</sup>

Thus, Cherniavsky demonstrated convincingly that the myth of political power in ancient Rus’ (but also the later imperial myth of state power) incorporated a mixture of leader-centrism and peculiar Christian ethics which rendered greatness in moral, rather than in relative terms. He, however, did not look at the concepts *derzhava* or *velikaya derzhava* specifically. And while throughout his book he pointed very lucidly at a few historical ruptures in the Russian understandings of the ruler and the people, he did not say anything about the consequences of Russia’s interaction with international society and its political institutions, such as great power management. I, on the other hand, am equally interested in both: the conceptual history of *velikaya derzhava* from its very early uses and the political and discursive effects of Russia’s entry into the European society of states.

Thus, the main aim of this study is threefold. First, I am trying to trace the uses of greatness in Russia’s discourse related to its international stance from the time when Russia’s predecessor polities began to contemplate on and assert their special position vis-à-vis their neighbours. Second, I attempt to uncover the ruptures in Russian understandings of political greatness and present a conceptual evolution of *velikaya derzhava* as a sequence of those fundamental semantic breaks that were brought about through regime transformations and rhetorical action. Third, I pay a specific attention to the effects of the conceptual entanglement of *velikaya derzhava* with the related concepts of other members of the international (primarily European) society. I argue that this XIX-century entanglement with its multiple problems caused a remarkably enduring ambiguity

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 34.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 27.

in Russia's relation to its great power status that can be still witnessed today. In the following section, I try to systematically demonstrate what that present-day ambiguity is exactly about.

## 1.3 Contexts of greatness

### 1.3.1 *Political and everyday uses*

Before I look more attentively at how Russia talks about being a great power and what distinguishes its rhetoric from similar rhetoric produced by other states, it makes sense to see how such discourse operates elsewhere, and whether there is an agreement among the members of the international society on what great powers are in general. It is hardly surprising that, in contemporary policymaking and journalistic circles, there is no uniformity or full agreement on what a great power is supposed to be. Still, one can detect a few family resemblances in how Western journalists and politicians talk about great powers. For most of them, this concept only makes sense in several interrelated contexts.

The first context is resources and relationality. Great power is a status which is usually ascribed to *several* states in the international system that are well-endowed with *resources*, are *comparable* among themselves, and happen to be *more powerful* than most other actors. Hence, for example, when Western journalists and scholars try to assess whether Russia is or is not a great power, it often comes down to measuring Russia's resources and capabilities and comparing those to the resources and capabilities possessed by other states. For example, for Jonathan Adelman, Russia is a great power simply because it spends USD 49 billion a year on security, retains 1,790 strategic nuclear weapons, has a population of 140 million (with 13 million college graduates), and because in some of those aspects it is comparable to the US and surpasses other major powers, such as Japan or India.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Stephen Fortescue measures Russia's economic potential vis-à-

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<sup>31</sup> Jonathan Adelman, "Thinking the Unthinkable: Russia Has Re-Emerged As a Great Power," *HuffPost*, <https://goo.gl/Kooiiu>, accessed 19 September 2018.

vis other powerful states and concludes that even though “Russia wants to behave as a great power ... there are serious restraints, resistant to policy action, that limit its economic capacity.”<sup>32</sup>

The second context which always accompanies the discussion of great powers is globalised norms. Great powers are believed to be “responsible for maintaining international peace and order.”<sup>33</sup> At least, this argument, according Piza Escalante, the Costa Rican representative in the UN in the 1980s, is “always ... put forward to justify their right to the veto in the Security Council.”<sup>34</sup> They are supposed to be the moral caretakers of the international system, and as such, their greatness should “not depend on [their] military might but on [their] ability to maintain the balance of forces in the world.”<sup>35</sup> Therefore, when Russia does something that seemingly disrupts the balance and threatens the order which the great powers have allegedly been crafting so carefully after the end of the Cold War, it is reproached immediately and deemed unworthy of the great power status. For instance, when Russia annexed Crimea, Barack Obama called Russia “a regional power” and insisted that Russia did what it did “not out of strength, but out of weakness.”<sup>36</sup> In Obama’s view, by invading Ukraine, Russia behaved irresponsibly, which any power hoping to be accepted as a legitimate managerial power cannot afford.<sup>37</sup>

The third context is recognition. Great power status cannot be purely self-ascribed. A state may brag endlessly about being a great power, but without systemic recognition, such talk is nothing but empty rhetoric. Hence, it is usually up to other great powers and third states to ascribe this label, which endows a great power’s managerial function with legitimacy. Of course, such kind of recognition is not as formal as the recognition of sovereignty or a state’s accountability for grave wrongdoings. Even though in the current state of affairs, the most pertinent politico-legal reflection of the great power status is a UNSC permanent seat, this status remains semi-official in

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<sup>32</sup> Stephen Fortescue, “Can Russia afford to be a great power?” *Lony Institute*, 1 June 2017, <https://goo.gl/buPjEv>, accessed 19 September 2018.

<sup>33</sup> United Nations, *Security Council Official Records*, 2187<sup>th</sup> meeting, New York, 6 January 1980, p. 9.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> Barack Obama cited in Julian Borger, “Barack Obama: Russia is a regional power showing weakness over Ukraine,” *The Guardian*, 25 March 2014, <https://goo.gl/YUWCjg>, accessed 19 September 2018.

<sup>37</sup> Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, p. 222.

a sense that no UNSC permanent member would use the concept self-referentially in UN debates, even when they veto the adoption of a resolution, thereby *de facto* exercising their great power privilege. On the other hand, recognition remains the most controversial aspect of greatpowerhood, for it does not emerge out of thin air. A state cannot do nothing and be recognised as a member of the club. It is also true that greatpowerhood is, first and foremost, the power to define what greatpowerhood is. Thus, a great power is expected to be capable of both defining and altering the regulating principles of international order through conducting its foreign policy and having those principles and its right to maintain them recognised by other actors.

Consequently, great power politics is always perceived as a stimulus-response kind of game. In this context, many discussions of Russia's great power status centre around a double-stage process: Russia's performative uptake interpreted as a claim for great power status, and a reaction to this move coming from other actors. For instance, Samuel Ramani interprets Russian foreign policy towards North Korea as aimed at achieving an international recognition of its great power status, as well as its role of the leading counterweight to the United States. This and other similar moves, Ramani notes, have not been entirely successful, but have managed to draw support from Cuba and Iran, and may potentially bolster Russia's international status in the future.<sup>38</sup> In the same vein, Richard Reeve insists that Putin is "developing Russia as a great power again, [and Syria is] a theatre to test out [Russian] military equipment and doctrine."<sup>39</sup> Russia's involvement in Syria, Reeve concludes, "sends a message to the rest of the world that Russia is a capable, modern military player,"<sup>40</sup> and it is up to the world to either discard this message or take it seriously.

### 1.3.2 Academic uses

In academic discourse, just like in everyday and political use, the concept 'great power' does not have a consensual definition. Yet, as a rule, it is believed to be related to some privileged

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<sup>38</sup> Samuel Ramani, "Why is Putin backing North Korea? To build up Russia as a great power," *The Washington Post*, 26 July 2017, <https://goo.gl/dGNtL6>, accessed 19 September 2018.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Reeves cited in Imran Rahman-Jones, "Why does Russia support Syria and President Assad?," *BBC*, 11 April 2017, <https://goo.gl/LXLFw2>, accessed 19 September 2018.

<sup>40</sup> Rahman-Jones, "Why does Russia support Syria and President Assad?"

status in the international system. The exact meaning and consequences of possessing this status vary across different IR theories, and the most which academics seem to unwillingly agree upon is that it applies to the situations when a state conducts foreign policy with global implications, while having some shared understanding of the international order in mind. Even though almost every IR theory has something to say about great powers, the latter tend to receive the most attention from all versions of IR realism and the English School.

For realists, great powers are the only real policy makers. In Jack Levy's words, "[w]hile balance of power theorists speak very loosely about 'states' balancing, nearly all [of them] strongly imply that the great powers do most of the balancing."<sup>41</sup> Consequently, the realist nostrum – balance of power theory – has a strong great power bias, as becomes especially obvious in Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics*, which describes how the number of great powers in a system defines context for every other member thereof.<sup>42</sup> Realists tend to justify this bias by asserting that smaller and less powerful states simply do not possess enough capabilities to be able to change anything at the systemic level, and hence are not worth looking at, if global balance of power is concerned.

For the English School, great powers are the members of an exclusive club of powerful states, who possess special rights and responsibilities, and jointly manage international order. That is, they perform an institutional function in relation to what Hedley Bull called 'international society', or "a body of independent political communities linked by common rules and institutions as well as by contact and interaction."<sup>43</sup> In Bull's view, great powers "accept the duty, and are thought by others to have the duty, of modifying their policies in the light of the managerial

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<sup>41</sup> Jack S. Levy, "What Do Great Powers Balance Against and When?," in: Thazha Varkey Paul, James J. Wirtz, and Michel Fortmann, eds, *Balance of power: theory and practice in the 21st century* (Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 38.

<sup>42</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of international politics* (Waveland Press, 2010). See also Mearsheimer, *The tragedy of great power politics*.

<sup>43</sup> Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, p. 196.

responsibilities they bear.”<sup>44</sup> The list of institutions of international society also includes diplomacy, war, international law and balance of power.

Even though the (English-)language game that uses the concept ‘great power’ in media and politics is somewhat separate from the language game that uses the same concept in IR scholarship, those two games are entangled. The Western academic discourse both digests the everyday and political uses of the concept and substantiates them with a theoretical foundation. It perpetuates their discursive lives by approaching them systematically and bringing forth criteria that define greatness, such as relational superiority, endowment with resources, a specific take on global norms, and the need for recognition. Since the Russian great power discourse does not always operate the same way, this creates frequent misunderstandings. Consequently, when Russia speaks about being a great power, is usually denied (but sometimes granted) recognition, frequently criticised (and occasionally supported) in normative terms, and/or assessed against a set of criteria (military, economic, demographic, etc.) to be found fitting, or more often deemed unfit.

I take issue with such an approach, because it tends to ignore the Russian discourse itself. By this, I do not mean to say that the Russian discourse hides a yet unseen, hence unappreciated, meaning of greatpowerhood that must be reckoned with and brought to occupy its rightful place in international politics. Rather, I mean that if one takes the three mentioned themes and applies them, in all honesty, to the actual rhetoric the Russian elites are producing, many puzzling things would emerge. To identify those, I give a closer look at the Russian discourse about greatpowerhood and map out some trends and specificities it exhibits. As I go, I identify several puzzling trends in how the contemporary Russian great power rhetoric is constructed.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 196.

## 1.4 Structural and operational specifics of Russia's great power discourse

### 1.4.1 Linguistic contextualisation

The concept 'great power' has an unambiguous, yet still curious, Russian equivalent – *velikaya derzhava*. It is unambiguous in a sense that it has no synonyms identical, or sufficiently close in meaning. It is curious because *velikaya derzhava* seems to be a pleonasm, i.e. an expression where one element already conveys the meaning of another element. In modern Russian, *derzhava* is not just any state or power. It sounds quite archaic and bears a connotation of real (as opposed to formal) sovereignty and strength. Thus, unlike it would be in modern Ukrainian, where *derzhava* is any state, no matter how powerful, the Russian concept *velikaya derzhava* seems to include a redundant adjective. Consequently, when *derzhava* is used with some other attribute (like 'nuclear', 'leading' or 'large') or as a standalone word, the compound meaning of *velikaya derzhava* (i.e. great power) is always looming somewhere on the background.

For example, while in English it is possible to use an expression 'nuclear state' to refer to a country possessing nuclear weapons, in Russian this would sound strange (*yadernaya strana* or *yadernoe gosudarstvo*). On rare occasions when those collocations still appear in press, they either refer to a nuclear state which is neither a great nor a rising power (e.g. North Korea),<sup>45</sup> are put between quotation marks to emphasise that this is the only suitable contextual translation,<sup>46</sup> or are translated from Ukrainian (presumably, by a Russian-speaking Ukrainian).<sup>47</sup> However, in most cases, nuclear states, most of which are also great powers, are referred to in Russian as *yadernaya derzhava*, i.e. 'nuclear great power'. In this collocation, the superfluous characteristic 'great' is reduced, while the archaically sounding word *derzhava* keeps a touch of exaltation to it, always making its referent more than just a state.

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<sup>45</sup> Vzgl'yad, "Obama: USA will never recognize DPRK as a nuclear state," *Vzgl'yad*, 9 September 2016, <https://vz.ru/news/2016/9/9/831623.html>, accessed 19 September 2018.

<sup>46</sup> Aleksey Berezin, "America will pay close attention to 'nuclear state' China," *RIA-Novosti*, 1 May 2008, <https://ria.ru/world/20080501/106321577.html>, accessed 19 September 2018.

<sup>47</sup> Gordon, "Poroshenko: Russia is a nuclear state, which considers democracy as a threat, and freedom as a poison," *Gordon*, 23 May 2016, <https://goo.gl/5yK3Zc>, accessed 19 September 2018.

In the bulk of the official texts published on the Russian president's website ([www.kremlin.ru](http://www.kremlin.ru)) the expression '*velikaya derzhava*' was used at least 113 times by Putin and his interlocutors.<sup>48</sup> I analysed those, as well as a handful of other contextual uses of this concept and discovered several puzzling trends that appear to be structural. To render those in familiar terms, but also because they have shaped inductively into positions related to the contexts of greatpowerhood discussed in the previous section, I present them in a sequence that corresponds to the one I outlined above: (1) resources and relationality, (2) globalised norms, and (3) recognition.

#### 1.4.2 Downplaying resources and relationality

The first puzzling trend manifests itself in Russia's emphatic refusal to discuss its great power status in relative terms. While Putin has no difficulty in playing with numbers, and frequently does this in front of domestic and international audiences alike, when it comes to Russia's great power status, all real-time comparisons stall. In rare cases, the president can even use the numbers to the detriment of Russia's recognition. For instance, in the very beginning of his first presidential term, Vladimir Putin gave a long interview to a German newspaper *Welt am Sonntag*. In its course, Putin's interlocutor pointed out that Russia had increased its military budget by 50% and lowered the threshold for the use nuclear weapons. The journalist added, speaking on behalf of all Western nations, that the West was concerned with Russia's growing ambition to be a great power. Putin's response was prompt and sturdy: "Russia is not trying to haggle (*ne vytorgovyvaet*) a great power status for itself. It *is* a great power. This has been determined by its huge potential, history and culture."<sup>49</sup> Then, however, as a Russian rhetorical habit goes, he compared

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<sup>48</sup> The texts I am referring to here include speeches, transcripts of public events and meetings with foreign leaders, interviews with national and international media, etc.

<sup>49</sup> Vladimir Putin, "Interview with the Newspaper *Welt am Sonntag* (Germany)," 11 June 2000, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24202>, accessed 5 October 2017, emphasis added. Unless specified otherwise, all the remaining references in this chapter are to the official texts published on the Russian president's website [www.kremlin.ru](http://www.kremlin.ru) and were accessed no later than 21 September 2018. All the quotes belong to either Vladimir Putin, Dmitry Medvedev or their interlocutors. The titles of the texts, when available, are taken from the English versions of the webpages published on the same website, but the analysis itself was done on the Russian texts. Hence, the exact wording of quotes may sometimes differ from the official translations due to the utmost importance of precise formulations for this project, as well as bigger attention to detail I try to exert.



Russia's military spending to that of the US declaring that the latter was 100 times higher, i.e. that the American military budget was incomparably higher than the Russian. Apparently, Putin saw no contradiction between Russia's incapacity to compete militarily and its culturally and historically predetermined great power status.

On most occasions, Putin speaks of Russia's current great power status in either historic or prophetic terms, i.e. projecting it into the past or the future. For example, in his 2004 inaugural speech he called Russian people "the heirs of a thousand-year-old Russia, the motherland of distinguished sons and daughters [who] left us as their inheritance a vast great power."<sup>50</sup> On another occasion, while speaking to the Russian Federal Assembly in 2003, Putin presented a grim picture, in which Russia was surrounded by hostile and economically superior powers with clear "geopolitical ambitions" and was literally fighting for its life. To combat this imminent threat and "to live and develop in its current borders," the president insisted, Russia had to be a "strong [great] power, [because] in all periods of weakness ... the country invariably faced a threat of disintegration."<sup>51</sup> Consequently, he continued, it was "not enough [for Russia] to simply survive, [it had] to possess substantial economic, intellectual, moral and military superiority." However, when Putin spoke about conventional attributes of political greatness, such as military superiority, competitive and modern economy and adherence to globalised norms, he insistently used an expression "must and will be" in relation to Russia, thereby projecting those attributes into the future.<sup>52</sup> For outside observers, such use of this concept probably seemed almost metaphysical.

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<sup>50</sup> "Address to the Nation at the Presidential Inauguration Ceremony," 7 May 2004, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22452>. In the original transcript of this speech, there is a comma between the words 'vast' (*ogromnuyu*) and 'great' (*velikuyu*). Such punctuation would suggest that the two adjectives are equivalent in their function, which should point in the direction that the second adjective (great) must be semantically detached from the compound 'great power' and interpreted as a separate characteristic meaning general greatness, not specific greatness attributed to great powers. Presumably, this comma has something to do with the fact that Putin made a clearly audible pause between the words 'great' and 'power' – it either conditioned the pause or was conditioned by it. Yet, despite the pause, the prosodic (i.e. intonational) structure of the phrase is telling a different story. A rising tone on 'great' and a falling tone on 'power' unequivocally suggests that the two words should be treated as integral parts of a single semantic compound. Whether Putin intended this or not, his prosody convinces the audience that *velikaya derzhava*, in this case, is a holistic construction, and that the comma is superfluous.

<sup>51</sup> "Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation," 16 May 2003, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21998>.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

In a similar vein, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov, while addressing the UN General Assembly in 2016, launched an explicit rhetorical attack against hegemonic great powers by reproaching them for attempting “to set the criteria of greatness for one country or another.”<sup>53</sup> The same line of argumentation was also present in the minister’s programmatic article on Russia’s foreign policy. In it, Lavrov, citing Russian religious and political philosopher Ivan Ilyin, insisted that “the greatness of a country is not determined by the size of its territory or the number of its inhabitants, but by the capacity of its people and its government to take on the burden of great world problems and to deal with these problems in a creative manner.”<sup>54</sup> Here again, the sum and substance of the Russian position on greatpowerhood is that resources and relationality have less importance compared to inherent creativity, whatever it is supposed to mean.

### 1.4.3 Opposing globalised norms

The second consistent pattern traceable in the Russian great power discourse is related to globalised norms and Russia’s marginalised position. Russia does speak the normative language, appealing to the supremacy of international law and global peace and security, but it mostly does so in the context of opposing hegemony.<sup>55</sup> Just like it is the case for the Russian discourse about Europe, wherein it often represents itself as a ‘true Europe’ confronted with decadent ‘false Europe’ or even ‘post-Europe’ of the West,<sup>56</sup> it also poses as a carrier of the true global values upon which the UN was built. Russia criticises harshly the Western hegemonic powers, mostly the

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<sup>53</sup> Sergei Lavrov, “Remarks at the 71st session of the UN General Assembly,” 23 September 2016, [http://russiaun.ru/en/news/ga\\_71sl](http://russiaun.ru/en/news/ga_71sl), accessed 21 September 2018.

<sup>54</sup> Sergei Lavrov, “Russia’s Foreign Policy: Historical Background,” *Russia in Global Affairs*, 2 (2016), <https://goo.gl/oWTNey>, accessed 21 September 2018.

<sup>55</sup> “Russia and Italy support the unconditional priority of international law...,” 16 July 2008, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/809>; “President Vladimir Putin said it is essential in the modern world...,” 23 June 2003, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/28887>; “Interview to Bloomberg,” 5 September 2016, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/52830>; “Meeting with heads of international news agencies,” 1 June 2017, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/54650>; “Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club,” 24 October 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46860>; “Speech and discussion at Munich conference on security politics,” 10 February 2007, <http://special.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>.

<sup>56</sup> Iver Neumann, “Russia’s Europe, 1991-2016,” *International Affairs* 92:6 (2016): 1383; and Sergey Karaganov, Fyodor Lukyanov et al, *Strategiya dlya Rossii. Rossiyskaya vneshnyaya politika: konets 2010-kh – nachalo 2020-kh godov* [Strategy for Russia. Russian Foreign Policy: end of the 2010s – beginning of the 2020s] (Moscow: The Council for Foreign and Security Policy, 2016), p. 12.

US, for having corrupted the principles that Russia is still trying to promote.<sup>57</sup> Hence, as opposed to speaking, in concert with other great powers, from a (not unproblematic) position of a guardian of peace and security based on some shared understanding of international order, it often puts itself in opposition to the rest of the great power club, revealing the marginality of its systemic position.

Consequently, it faces contestation and criticism for being a revisionist power, but, at the same time, it still cannot let go of the normative language typical of the conventional great power rhetoric. It seems to be faithfully attached to its own idealised vision of the international system, which, in Russia's own interpretation, is still there implicitly, but has been badly corrupted. Russia does not promote any revolutionary alternative to the existing structures and institutions. (This goes hand in hand with Putin's anti-revolutionism at home). Putin insists that the current system has its problems, but that the existing "institutions are sufficiently versatile ... [to be] filled with more modern content, corresponding to the current situation, [which should create] a new 'edition' of interdependence."<sup>58</sup> Thus, Russia finds itself in an ambivalent situation. On the one hand, it insists implicitly on being a proper great power that should be recognised and reckoned with, but it also adopts a counterhegemonic stance claiming that the international system, within which Russian great power status could have been validated through recognition, is in severe crisis. Acting on its own perception of that crisis Russia usually breaks the rules and is labelled a revisionist power.

#### ***1.4.4 Recognition and domestic-international nexus***

Finally, the third and, perhaps, the most interesting structural pattern in how Russian elites talk about great powers is related to recognition. More specifically, they simultaneously demonstrate their perfect awareness of the rules of the recognition game and expose the potential

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<sup>57</sup> "Interview with the French Newspaper Le Figaro," 26 October 2000, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21634>; "Speech and discussion at Munich conference on security politics".

<sup>58</sup> "Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club," 24 October 2014.

origins of the ambivalence and misunderstandings that always haunt Russian great power discourse. As becomes evident from the texts published on the president's official website, most times when Russia is called a great power in international context, this is done by either foreign journalists and politicians,<sup>59</sup> or some domestic actors<sup>60</sup> only indirectly related to the Russian political elite. Putin, by contrast, *almost never* calls Russia a great power in the foreign policy context. While he uses the expression '*velikaya derzhava*' quite a lot, in most cases, he applies it to other states (mostly the US,<sup>61</sup> but also China,<sup>62</sup> France<sup>63</sup> and India<sup>64</sup>). In exceptional cases, he refers to Russia as a great power in foreign policy terms only paring it up with a rising power (e.g. India).<sup>65</sup> Yet, in those few instances (17) when he ascribes this status to Russia alone, he clearly speaks to the

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<sup>59</sup> "Interview with the Chinese newspapers...", 13 October 2004, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22633>; "Opening Remarks at a Meeting with Vietnamese President Trang Duc Luong," 20 November 2004, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22697>; "Joint Press Conference with President of Egypt Hosni Mubarak," 27 April 2005, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22933>; "Press Statement and Answers to Journalists' Questions Following Talks with Greek President Karolos Papoulias," 31 May 2007, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24311>; "Speech at the XI St Petersburg International Economic Forum," 10 June 2007, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24337>; "Beginning of the Meeting with President of France Nicolas Sarkozy," 12 August 2008, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/1071>; "Meeting with Prime Minister of Hungary Viktor Orban," 31 January 2013, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/17400>; etc.

<sup>60</sup> "Ceremony on the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary...", 7 March 2006, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23475>; "Excerpts from Transcript of Meeting with Members of Russian Youth Organisations," 24 July 2007, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24433>; etc.

<sup>61</sup> "Interview to NBC," 5 June 2017, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/54688>; "The Arctic: Territory of Dialogue international forum," 30 March 2017, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/54149>; "Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club," 27 October 2016, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53151>; "Vladimir Putin answered questions from Russian journalists," 16 October 2016, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53103>; "Presenting state decorations and the prize for contribution to strengthening the unity of the Russian nation," 4 November 2016, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53212>; "Interview with Swiss media," 27 July 2015, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50066>; "Russian Popular Front's Action Forum," 18 November 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47036>; "Meeting with Students of Saint Petersburg State University," 25 May 2002, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21607>; "Interview with the Wall Street Journal," 11 February 2002, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21498>.

<sup>62</sup> "Presenting the Order of St Andrew the Apostle to President of China Xi Jinping," 4 July 2017, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/54973>; "Beginning of meeting with President of China Xi Jinping," 4 July 2017, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/54972>.

<sup>63</sup> "Vladimir Putin answered questions from Russian journalists"; "Russia Calling! Investment Forum," 12 October 2016, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53077>.

<sup>64</sup> "Statement for the press following Russian-Indian talks," 24 December 2015, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/51011>; "Interview with the Indian Magazine India Today and the Weekly Russia Journal," 29 September 2000, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24229>; "Interview with the Indian Media and the Russian RTR TV Channel," 1 October 2000, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24250>; "Vladimir Putin answered questions from Russian journalists".

<sup>65</sup> "Press statements following Russian-Indian talks," 11 December 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/47221>; "Vladimir Putin's article, Russia and India: 70 years together, has been published," 30 May 2017, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/54633>.

domestic audience. This usually happens when Putin attends relatively low-profile events, such as youth contests and forums,<sup>66</sup> award ceremonies for veterans and other distinguished persons,<sup>67</sup> and the meetings of the government.<sup>68</sup> As mentioned before, once he called Russia a great power in his inauguration speech (2004). This was certainly not an ordinary occasion, but again, he mainly spoke to the Russian public and wrapped the concept in historic connotations, not foreign policy, and insisted that greatness had to be “backed up by the new deeds of today’s generations.”<sup>69</sup> Another time, while speaking to his electorate before his first presidential term, Putin used the label to contrast it with Russian realities.<sup>70</sup> That is, he lamented that the level of poverty and social injustice inside the country was disgraceful and sad for a great power, which, in his mind, Russia had always been. Yet, at that point in time, Russia was a great power only “in potentiality.”<sup>71</sup>

On the other hand, Putin occasionally rejected the label ‘great power’ when it was used in relation to Russia’s role in the world by external actors or evaded repeating it in his replies. In 2000, he refused this rhetorical offering from a journalist of *Le Figaro*, emphasizing that Russia had too many internal problems to concern itself with global tasks.<sup>72</sup> Yet, while shunning away from great power management, he, nevertheless, pointed out that a managerial function was not the only characteristic of a great power, probably implying that Russia still was a *velikaya derzhava*, but on somewhat different grounds. In 2007, during a meeting of the Discussion Club ‘Valdai’ – a

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<sup>66</sup> “Seliger 2013 Youth Forum,” 2 August 2013, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/18993>; “National open lesson Russia Focused on the Future”; “Extracts from a Transcript of the Meeting with the Finalists of the Student Essay Competition ‘My Home, My City, My Country’,” 5 June 2003, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22021>.

<sup>67</sup> “Speech at Award Ceremony for President of the Republic of Tatarstan Mintimer Shaimiev,” 20 January 2007, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24004>; “Presenting Hero of Labour gold medals,” 1 May 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20889>; “Presentation of jubilee medals to Great Patriotic War veterans,” 20 February 2015, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47718>; “Vladimir Putin sent his greetings...,” 28 April 2005, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/33249>; “Speech at an Awards Ceremony for Veterans of the Great Patriotic War who have Earned with the Military Awards,” 9 February 2005, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22818>.

<sup>68</sup> “Meeting of Council for Culture and Art,” 25 September 2012, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/16530>; “Introductory Remarks at an Expanded Meeting of the Atomic Energy Ministry Board,” 31 March 2000, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21306>.

<sup>69</sup> “Address to the Nation at the Presidential Inauguration Ceremony,” 7 May 2004.

<sup>70</sup> “Open Letter to Voters,” 25 February 2000, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24144>.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> “Interview with the French Newspaper Le Figaro”.

traditional channel of communication with foreign journalists and academicians – Putin publicly voiced an opinion that the present-day Russia, just like the Russian Empire in the early 1900s, would be much better off, if it “did not pose as a great power.”<sup>73</sup> In 2014 and 2015, Putin insisted at least twice that Russia did not want to be a superpower (*sverkhderzhava* or *superderzhava*), because it was not fond of imposing its own ways upon other actors and had enough space to reclaim in its own hinterlands.<sup>74</sup> Of course, one could interpret the latter as an implicit critique of American hegemony, which destroyed the institution of great power management in its proper shape that would anticipate equality among several great powers. In this sense, Putin’s insistence on Russia’s leadership in maintaining the norms of international law (i.e. enforcing a shared understanding of order) looks only natural.<sup>75</sup> Yet, here again, he abstained from calling a spade a spade in front of the international audience.

## 1.5 Implications and potential sources of ambivalence

What does this all have to do with recognition and why is there such a manifest difference in the concept’s use in the internal and foreign policy contexts? What are the implications of the outlined trends? As I see it, the diverging patterns of the concept’s domestic and international usages are the key to unlocking my puzzle. While Russia clearly does appeal rhetorically to the institution of great power management and has no difficulty in recognizing other powerful states as members to this club, it usually abstains from self-ascribing the role of a great power in the international context. At the same time, it insists almost religiously on being a *velikaya derzhava* while speaking to its people at home. In addition, we can safely conclude that Russian elites are perfectly aware of the problem of multi-vocal signalling, i.e. conveying different messages to domestic and international audiences, and are trying to avoid it at all cost. According to Pyotr

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<sup>73</sup> “Meeting with Members of the Valdai International Discussion Club,” 14 September 2007, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24537>.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid; “Plenary session of the 19th St Petersburg International Economic Forum,” 19 June 2005, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/49733>. This position was also voiced earlier, in the very beginning of his first presidential term: “Interview to French TV channels...,” 23 October 2003, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21643>.

<sup>75</sup> “Meeting with Members of the Valdai International Discussion Club,” 14 September 2007.

Ilyichev, a member of the Russian delegation to the UN, one of the primary reasons why the delegation always speaks Russian even in relatively informal contexts is that its rhetoric “is aimed not only at the international audience, but also at the domestic one.”<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, Russia seems to be talking quite differently to actors inside and outside its borders.

Why is this the case? My take on it is relatively simple: *velikaya derzhava* is not exactly ‘great power’, or more specifically – these two concepts are same and different at the same time. In its institutionalised form corresponding approximately to the Western understanding of the concept, *velikaya derzhava* is established through recognition, which, in turn, comes through relational assessment of capabilities and conformance with universalised norms. Russian elites understand fully well what it takes to be a Western great power. They are also aware of the ineptness of talking in great power terms in the UN, where great powers hardly ever call themselves that way. They know how to properly use the vernacular, and realise it makes no sense to call one’s country a great power on the international arena, where greatpowerhood is what it is today. If Russia were to self-ascribe this label systematically, (1) it would be meaningless, for the role of a great power is legitimised through recognition (which Russia often grants to other powerful actors by calling them *velikaya derzhava*); and (2) it would place Russia under even more scrutiny and assessment against a set of traditional characteristics of greatpowerhood, which is unlikely to end in Russia’s favour.

At the same time, Russia can freely talk to its domestic audience about being a *velikaya derzhava* even when (or especially when!) times are dire, because the latter is not fully equivalent to the international institution, as most members of the international society understand it. More so, it seems that Russian elites have to/choose to talk with their domestic audience in such terms, because, for a reason I will try to explain in this study, the idea that Russia is a *velikaya derzhava* happens to be firmly embedded into Russian national identity – it possesses some ideological

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<sup>76</sup> Pyotr Ilyichev, “Intervyu ispolnyayushchego obyazannosti Postoyannogo predstavatelya Rossiyskoy Federatsii... [Interview of the acting permanent representative of the Russian Federation...],” *United Nations Radio*, [http://russiaun.ru/ru/news/intr\\_unr](http://russiaun.ru/ru/news/intr_unr), accessed 21 September 2018.



importance and mobilizing potential.<sup>77</sup> Sometimes, this ideological and mobilizational surplus meaning possessed by *velikaya derzhava* spills over into the international realm. In such cases, Russian politicians may, for example, argue that Russia's great power status is a given, which has been conditioned by its potential, history and culture,<sup>78</sup> or which reveals itself in Russia's creative approach to solving problems.<sup>79</sup>

In this sense, as already mentioned, *velikaya derzhava* is both the same as and different from 'great power'. It is the same because it is not some isolated, idiosyncratic concept – it is a direct translation of 'great power' (or, to be more precise, of a French expression '*une grande puissance*') and acquires meaning only in the international context. In other words, it is not some purely Russian concept with only marginal linguistic and cultural equivalence in other languages which is being routinely and unfortunately translated as 'great power' in the absence of a better fit. Yet, *velikaya derzhava* is also not 'great power', because it does not share with the latter all the key characteristics of the international institution, as it is understood in the West. While it is tightly related to and dependent on its Western equivalent, *velikaya derzhava* has not come to possess all the distinctive features of the latter to the extent of full semantic merge and equivalence.

As such, *velikaya derzhava* is a product of both (1) the evolution of Russian domestic political discourse, and (2) Russia's international and inter-lingual relations with its neighbours. But most importantly, it is an outcome of a problematic conceptual entanglement that European and Russian discourses on political greatness underwent historically.<sup>80</sup> What went wrong and when? In the context of the present study, it is possible to broadly identify two stories of political greatness: Russian and European. I prioritise the European discourse as the main referent in Russian political

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<sup>77</sup> This has been convincingly demonstrated at least several times in the scholarship on Russian identity. E.g. see: Hopf, *Social construction of international politics: identities & foreign policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999*; and Thorun, *Explaining change in Russian foreign policy: the role of ideas in post-Soviet Russia's conduct towards the West*.

<sup>78</sup> "Interview with the Newspaper Welt am Sonntag (Germany)".

<sup>79</sup> Lavrov, "Russia's Foreign Policy: Historical Background".

<sup>80</sup> I borrow the terms 'inter-lingual relations' and 'conceptual entanglement' from Einar Wigen, who developed them theoretically while looking at Turkey's appropriation of the French concept of 'civilisation'. Einar Wigen, "Two-level language games: International relations as inter-lingual relations." *European Journal of International Relations* 21.2 (2015): 427-450.



imagination. Yet, of course, I use the label ‘European’ with much reservation here: there certainly are enough differences in every European language and local political context, when it comes to ideas about political greatness. At the same time, there are enough similarities in how these ideas evolved in European discourses and the discourses of other political entities, including Russia. Nevertheless, I believe that this somewhat simplified separation is still meaningful for the purposes of this study because of a crucial difference between the European and the Russian stories of political greatness that became visible in the XIX century and that arguably remains relevant today. To represent this difference more clearly, I need to briefly recap how the understanding of political greatness evolved in the Russian and the European contexts and what distinguished them at the time when the international institution of great power management came into being.

## **1.6 Two stories of greatness: Argument outline**

There were a lot of similarities in how the understandings of political greatness evolved in Russia and in Europe. Time lags and certain local specifics notwithstanding, one could say that until the XIX century, Russian and European discourses developed on collinear tracks, sometimes converging, but sometimes drifting apart from each other. The most ancient recorded way to write about political greatness was by conceiving it in *noumenal* terms. That is, political power was usually made great or majestic through its direct connection to divine authority. And even though every instantiation of this quality depended on a combination of symbols and rituals, the latter merely represented something that was believed to exist independently of human sense and perception, and hence – of a special focus on international recognition and direct comparison as well.

Later, in Europe – but soon enough also in Russia – political greatness was reinterpreted in *phenomenal* terms. Having lost its essentialist character and universalist foundation, political greatness was constantly enacted and re-enacted through glorious manifestations thereof. Instead of being linked to some internal and imperceptible quality, greatness became a property of the discourse itself, while its validation largely relied on persuasion through spectacle. In Russian discourse, such political style reached its peak in the XVIII century, the time of panegyric literature

and sermons whose primary purpose was to glorify Russian monarchs, representing them as almost deified creators and guardians of national glory and grandeur.

At the same time, in Europe, political greatness was reinterpreted yet again. Noumenal and phenomenal versions of political glorification were synthesised into the story of progress, which was universalist, but not essentialist. While it postulated the existence of the family of mankind developing in one common direction, the position of each individual polity on that axis was to be established based on rigorous civilizational analysis and comparison. That is, instead of proclaiming an essential and unquestionable superiority of European nations, the advocates of this story treated the level of civilisation as a product of European political history. The level of civilization was subject to a cultural-historical analysis, comparison, recognition, and, potentially, change. The *noumenon* of universal and unidirectional progress began to be manifested through state practices, i.e. concrete *phenomena* that could advance political entities or push them back along the line of progress. This process was accompanied by the transformation of international law, where the principles of natural law were superseded by positive international law grounded in state practices.

Such understanding of universal development shaped the international institution of great power management. Political greatness was then conceived as a fruit of individual states' political histories. At the same time, those histories were still considered as parts or stages in the development of one global whole, and great powers ascribed to themselves the role of the leaders and the main driving forces of human progress. Being at the forefront of that universal becoming, which anticipated everyone was going the same way but on different schedules, great powers not only claimed to represent the standard of civilization, but also took it upon themselves to evaluate civilizational levels of other polities. The polities that scored especially low in that test were deemed legitimate objects of colonization.

While XIX-century-style colonization is, thankfully, a thing of the past, discursive implications of such understanding of political greatness are still with us. That is why, when today

one speaks about greatpowerhood in the West, this concept is usually imbued with connotations related to measurable resources (material or not), global norms, international recognition, and, of course, foreign policy. In Russian discourse, this, however, is not the case, because the synthesis of noumenal and phenomenal understandings of greatness that translated into the story of universal progress in the European political discourse of the XIX century proceeded differently in Russia.

It already became obvious during the Congress of Vienna (1814-1815) that the phenomenal glorification that served Russian monarchs well throughout the XVIII century was failing to impress the European audience. Consequently, Russia had to seek a new conceptual alignment with Europe, if it wanted to stay in the club. However, because Russia did not score too high on the civilizational scale, as seen by European great powers, adopting the meaning of greatness that developed in the European political context was equal to losing its partially recognised great power status altogether.

Consequently, throughout the XIX century, Russia struggled with adopting the progressive paradigm of global politics and finally came up with a discursive construct that domesticated it. That is, what applied to the international society in the European version of this story was projected on Russia's own political history and domestic regime. The ruling elites started to present Russia discursively as a *velikaya derzhava* in potentiality, which was supposedly predetermined by the centuries of its political practice. Yet, even though Russia was in the process of becoming great, it was not truly there yet – according to then-current consensus about the nature of political greatness, the country badly needed to modernise. To achieve the latter, Russia applied the narratives of world-historic progress and international hierarchy self-referentially. To be a proper great power and legitimately engage in colonization, Russia first needed to colonise itself. So, instead of being a foreign policy issue, the story of *velikaya derzhava* turned into a powerful domestic ideology and a regime-entrenching factor that refashioned in foreign policy terms what in fact was a domestically oriented modernization policy. Similarly, today, when Russia talks about being a

great power, it does not necessarily talk foreign policy. In most cases, it directs such rhetoric at the domestic audience. Yet, in the eyes of its external interlocutors, foreign policy connotations emerge unavoidably, because in the West greatpowerhood has little or no meaning outside the international context.

Domestication of the great power narrative was also – and continues to be – a discursive trap. To catch up in an emergency mode that was deemed necessary, Russia sought to act upon the fruits of its political evolution – the most powerful transformative engines provided by the history of its political regime. Among those engines, however, were things no longer appropriate for great powers, such as autocracy and religious zeal.<sup>81</sup> As a result, Russia discursively locked itself in the process of constantly chasing its own projection. In that chase, means always undermined the ends and the main goal and a foundation of the domestic regime remained a distant potentiality. As such, the main problem that spurred dissatisfaction, created grievances and sowed misunderstandings in Russia's relations with Europe was the failure to integrate the two stories of greatness in the way that would be in harmony with the hegemonic norm. This, of course, is not to say that the story of world-historic progress, which contains plenty of pages stained with blood, is a morally right and completely unproblematic way to imagine greatness and to manage relations between states. In fact, it is just another historical conjuncture.

## 1.7 Structure and analysis

I substantiate my argument in five distinct steps, each performed in a separate chapter. In *Chapter 2*, I describe the first stage of the previously mentioned conceptual evolution. I look at the uses of the concept *velikaya derzhava*, as well as its separate components, from the XI century until the beginning of the XVII century. First, I reconstruct separate discursive lives of the two parts of this concept and show how they merged into one in the XVI century. The underlying idea is to show that discursive manifestations of political greatness in that period could be united under one

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<sup>81</sup> On this also see: Iver B. Neumann, "I Remember When Russia Was a Great Power," *Journal of Regional Security*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (2015): 5.

label – *noumenal greatness*, i.e. existing in unverifiable form and independently of perception. I also devote a section of the second chapter to the discussion of the first Russian political ideologies that extensively utilised the idea of political greatness for mobilizational purposes.

*Chapter 3* covers the XVII century, a crucial time for Russia's domestic political regime when noumenal understanding of greatness was challenged. Working with XVII-century sources, I trace how greatness understood in terms of *majesty* got slowly reinterpreted as *glory*, and how noumenal foundation beneath this concept disappeared. I argue that this process developed alongside a growing trend towards sacralisation of the Russian monarch, which, somewhat counterintuitively, culminated in the time of the most well-known Russian Europeanizer Peter the Great (1682-1725)<sup>82</sup>.

*Chapter 4* addresses the XVIII century, when the uses of greatness in the Russian political discourse took a predominantly *phenomenal* shape, i.e. got subsumed entirely into their own enactment and were lacking universal foundations of any sort. To demonstrate this, I analyse two big groups of sources. First, I focus on the great transformation accomplished by Peter I and specifically the discourse that legitimised this transformation and promoted his reforms among the wider audience. Second, I look at the time of Catherine II (1762-1796) and try to grasp the defining characteristics of the dominant political style of her epoch, as it revealed itself in contemporary political and literary discourse. In the same chapter, I also bring the Russian political discourse into a much closer dialog with the more familiar and better-studied ideas about political greatness coming from the West (paying special attention to the European theorists of natural law and contemporary diplomatic correspondence).

In *Chapter 5*, I analyse the discourse produced during the Congress of Vienna (1814-1815), one of the most crucial moments, where the international recognition of Russia's great power status is concerned. In this chapter, I show how phenomenal manifestations of its political

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<sup>82</sup> Here and below I include the time of rule in the brackets, when I mention monarchs.

greatness that Russia had been used to rely on until that moment stopped working with the European audience. I argue that this mismatch could help explain the puzzling transformation that occurred to Alexander I (1801-1825) during and in the immediate aftermath of the Congress. I suggest that the European great power discourse had further evolved and the noumenal and phenomenal understandings of political greatness got *synthesised* into the progressive paradigm of world history, which also shaped the international institution of great power management. To demonstrate this, I provide historical context related to the emergence of positive international law and the progressive understanding of world history and show how Russia struggled to adjust to the new European consensus by trying to reinvent its greatness relying on alternative, non-phenomenal discourses that had been staying dormant in its political image bank up until then.

Finally, *Chapter 6* covers the rest of the XIX century, as well as the decade preceding the First World War. In it, I show how Russian statesmen and public intellectuals were struggling to adopt the story of the world-historic progress and ended up domesticating this narrative, reinterpreting *velikaya derzhava* as an ever-becoming but perpetually underdeveloped political entity that masked in foreign policy terms what essentially was a domestic project. I focus on both the official discourse and popular debates that took place outside of the policy circles.

When it comes to actual analysis, I proceed as follows. First and foremost, I treat *velikaya derzhava* as a concept, not a (compound) word. As Reinhart Koselleck has it, “[e]ach concept is associated with a word, but not every word is a social and political concept.”<sup>83</sup> Together with Koselleck, I maintain that political and social concepts, such as *velikaya derzhava*, “possess a substantial claim to generality and always have many meanings – in historical science, occasionally in modalities other than words.”<sup>84</sup> Hence, on the one hand, concepts can never be defined unequivocally. On the other hand, they encapsulate “the entirety of meaning and experience within a sociopolitical context within which and for which a word [associated with the concept] is

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<sup>83</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 84.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p. 84-85.

used...’’<sup>85</sup> Second, while reconstructing a conceptual history of *velikaya derzhava*, I am trying to see whether the semantic and contextual substance of this concept remained the same through time and space, and if it did not, then I ask myself how it changed and through which processes. Third, I accept the basic premise of Einar Wigen’s intervention in the debate, in which he argued that, since “polities interact across linguistic boundaries, international relations are also inter-lingual relations.”<sup>86</sup> To that end, I add an inter-lingual dimension to my analysis by looking at how Russian concepts related to political greatness interacted with foreign concepts attached to similar designata and how the meaning transfer proceeded. The biggest attention devoted to this exchange coincides with the time when Russia was trying to join the European society and sought recognition of its great power status, i.e. in the end of the XVIII – the beginning of the XIX centuries.

A caveat is due here. One might argue that it is problematic to call ‘great power’ a proper concept. Not only because it is a compound consisting of two parts, but also because the voluntarism of great powers in the making of ‘great power’ is significantly greater than, say, of states in the making of ‘state’. Yet, even if this may be partially true for ‘great power’, *velikaya derzhava* is different. On the one hand, this concept has a long and vibrant history in Russian political discourse that spans far beyond the moment of discursive hegemony of the balance of power as the main principle of international politics. What is more, in that history one could identify a few significant ruptures in the concept’s semantics that are traceable on the systemic level and are independent from the voluntarism of individual actors. In other words, *velikaya derzhava* possesses enough historical depth and alterability to count as a political concept proper. On the other hand, the relationship between the two parts of this compound concept is different from those within ‘great power’. They are not only knit much tighter together, but also its compound meaning is unequally spread making it possible to truncate the concept in its modern use to *derzhava*. In my second chapter, I also argue that from its very inception, the semantic

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, p. 85.

<sup>86</sup> Wigen, “Two-level language games”: 427.

imbalance characterizing *velikaya derzhava* was very similar and the adjective was attached to the noun to emphasise some semantic elements that the noun had already contained.

The choice of sources is conditioned by the discursive specificities of the periods in question. I mostly follow the debate about Russia's<sup>87</sup> political greatness (and later – great power status) to where it unfolds during each historical period. The starting point of my analysis is the very early known uses of the concept *derzhava* that occurred in the XI century. For the XI-XVI centuries, the most relevant and pretty much the only widely available discourse is religious literature. In the XVI and XVII centuries, I look at the popular sources that still belong to the realm of religious writing, but already slightly change their genre, becoming more of a product for popular consumption. Their exact purpose and style vary greatly and include anything from doctrinal documents of the Old Believers to political pamphlets of the Time of Troubles. I also analyse some recognised discursive monuments of the time, such as Ivan IV's diplomatic correspondence. As my discursive samples from the XVIII century, I use the writings of Petrine ideologues, diplomatic correspondence, polemic essays, as well as attend to the works of some XIX-century and XX-century historians, such as Vasily Klyuchevsky. In the XIX and the beginning of the XX centuries, my focus is mostly twofold. On the one hand, I engage with the debates among Russian public intellectuals, paying specific attention to Westernisers and Slavophiles. On the other hand, I read and interpret memoirs and other writings of Russian political actors. I also provide a more detailed justification for my data selection in each individual chapter.

As I proceed along the time axis from past to present, the sources I include in my analysis become more and more internationalised and begin to reflect an inter-lingual contestation between the European and the Russian conceptions of greatpowerhood. In parallel, Russian political actors

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<sup>87</sup> I sometimes use the word 'Russia' anachronistically to designate its predecessor polities, such as Ancient and Early-Modern Rus' and the Russian Empire. I do not, however, claim any unbreakable historical continuity between these entities, just like I do not harbour any deterministic prejudices about the nature and qualities of their political regimes.



grow more and more concerned with Russia's integration in Europe and contemplate on Russian European-ness (or lack thereof) ever more often. This process comes to its peak in the XIX century, spilling over to the beginning of the XX century as well, and this is where I choose to adjourn my investigation. I stop at the point where the concrete shape of conceptual entanglement between Russian *velikaya derzhava* and European greatpowerhood, as well as its main problematic nodes, become fully visible. Furthermore, it is the time when Russia was preparing to leave the international society after grappling with integration into it for a little over a century and failing to claim the status of a fully recognised member. I stop when Russian foreign policy discourse, thoroughly Europeanized by that time, took a departure towards a revolutionary alternative that rejected (even if for a short while) the sole notion of great powers. I stop when Russia and Europe thought they spoke the same language and were about to stop doing this for a while. I interpret the current processes as an attempt to reinvent that allegedly common language, while the problems and ambiguities associated with the Russian great power discourse today seem to have similar roots to the problems and ambiguities that haunted Russia's political experience in the XIX century.

Due to my main interest in and focus on the evolution of Russian political concepts, I pay much more attention to the Russian sources, reconstructing the European side of the story in a cursory way, mostly relying on secondary literature and the moments of Europe's interaction with Russia. On the Russian side, however, I try to present a fully-fledged conceptual history of *velikaya derzhava* from its very early uses to the beginning of the First World War, when the mismatch between the two discourses became fully visible.

My analysis is mostly inspired by three interrelated schools of thought: the German school of conceptual history (*Begriffsgeschichte*),<sup>88</sup> the Cambridge school of intellectual history,<sup>89</sup> and the

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<sup>88</sup> Koselleck, *Futures past*.

<sup>89</sup> Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and theory* 8.1 (1969): 3-53; Kari Palonen, *Quentin Skinner: history, politics, rhetoric* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003).

critical history of modernity through genealogical method coming from France.<sup>90</sup> All their nuances notwithstanding, these schools of thought share a set of fundamental assumptions about social continuity and change that I subscribe to as well. First, they all disagree with a vision of history as a progressive path towards modernity, i.e. as a gradual emergence, development and perfection of modern ideas and institutions, culminating in their contemporary most flawless shape. This intellectual position presumes that history is not a constant progression from chaos to order or from primitiveness to harmonious complexity, but that it is rather a sequence of alternating orders each having its own unique semantic structures and appropriate rules of conduct. Second, they all insist that ideas and concepts *in use* are instances of political action, i.e. they perform productive work related to the stabilization of contextual meaning or alteration thereof. This proposition implies that language is not a mere reflection of reality, but rather a site of productive contestation where actors define, redefine and challenge social concepts in their (actors' and concepts') contextual milieus, thereby reproducing or changing semantic structures of given orders. Third, since languages (and discourses<sup>91</sup> more broadly) are both instrumental for and constitutive of their speakers' social realities, the appropriate way to create awareness of their fluidity is through a diachronic exposition of changing meanings attached to political concepts, practices, and institutions. Thus, by tracing conceptual evolutions, the representatives of all three schools (1) denaturalise social realities that are usually taken for granted by social actors; and (2) investigate social change by looking at how the key political concepts change their meaning.

One important caveat is due here though. If for people like Koselleck conceptual history is always in some way related to social history (whether as a subsidiary discipline, an equally important partner discipline, or as a discipline conditioning the possibility of effective social

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<sup>90</sup> Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in: D. F. Bouchard, ed., *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 139-164; David Garland, "What is a 'history of the present'? On Foucault's genealogies and their critical preconditions," *Punishment and Society*, 16(4) (2014): 365-384.

<sup>91</sup> Together with Kevin Dunn and Iver Neumann, I define discourses as "the systems of meaning-production that fix meaning, however temporarily, and enable us to make sense of the world and to act within it" (Kevin C. Dunn and Iver B. Neumann, *Undertaking discourse analysis for social research* (University of Michigan Press, 2016), p. 2).

historical analysis to begin with),<sup>92</sup> my work is not a work of history in any meaningful disciplinary way. Rather, it is what Michel Foucault would have called a ‘history of the present.’ That is, I do not claim any authority on the question of Russia’s social and political development in the bygone centuries. Instead, I reconstruct a genealogy of the present-day discourse. This discourse, as I will demonstrate, came into being through digestion, reinterpretation and amalgamation of the previously existing discursive positions. Hence, what I am trying to do is to immerse into those pre-existing positions and to understand their internal logic, i.e. to analyse them emically. Rejecting the commonly held opinion that concepts preserve an unchanged meaning through time, I look at how they operate from within each discursive locality. I am trying to understand what meaning those concepts acquire while at work in an argument, accompanied by their discursive surroundings.

Hence, while I do provide some basic contextualisation of sources required for historical rigor, the whole analysis may create an impression that sometimes I am being kidnapped by the discourse I analyse. Sometimes, I allow myself to be kidnapped on purpose when trying to map the meaning of my concepts. I am doing this because it is essentially what often happens to those political actors who reinterpret and utilise old discourses while constructing the new ones. New discursive positions and ideologies are often anachronistic and decontextualised. The same is the case for the ones that come after them. In this sense, of course, I cannot and will not claim historical proficiency. Yet, I do not think I must. This study is not about early modern or XIX-century Russia. It is about Russia’s great power discourse in its contemporary shape; but to fully understand how that shape came about and what it means for Russian politics and foreign affairs today, I need to go back in time and to reconstruct its genealogical ancestors, as well as identify the main ruptures in its millennial evolution.

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<sup>92</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, “*Begriffsgeschichte* and social history,” in: Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 75-92.

## 1.8 Conclusion

When Russia and its Western interlocutors talk about greatness, they, in fact, speak different languages, not only literally, but also conceptually. Even though neither Russia nor the rest can boast to have a consensual definition of what they mean by great power, both discourses exhibit some structural patterns that make them coherent within their own boundaries and discordant in cross-coupling. When Russia speaks about being a *velikaya derzhava*, it does not always speak about foreign policy. However, when *velikaya derzhava* is translated as ‘great power’, foreign-policy implications become inevitable. Consequently, Russia’s discursive interaction with the outside world is often riddled with misunderstandings. While it is certainly futile to hope for an unobstructed transfer of meaning between two actors because of the nature of the signification process as such,<sup>93</sup> one nevertheless should exert every effort to interpret, if not approximate, diverging meanings, when it comes to the issues of global peace and security and any lasting ambivalence therein.

The contestation around Russia’s great power status has been one of the most enduring features of Russia’s relations with the West. As it turns out, however, they may have not even been speaking on the same terms. More precisely, the concepts they used may have been both same and different. To understand why and how this happened, I investigate the conceptual history of *velikaya derzhava*, an inherently international and inter-lingual Russian concept that signifies ‘great power’ today. I trace the uses of this and related signifiers to uncover political contestation and sematic ruptures in this concept’s discursive life.

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<sup>93</sup> Charles Kay Ogden and Ivor Armstrong Richards, *The meaning of meaning: A study of the influence of thought and of the science of symbolism* (A Harvest/HBJ book, 1923).

## CHAPTER 2 – NOUMENAL GREATNESS: ORIGINS AND EARLY EVOLUTION

### 2.1 Introduction

Language is a notoriously fluid matter. Words change their meaning over time and space. They take up new designata and free themselves from the old ones. They gather different constellations of meaning in different places and may sometimes mean slightly different things even for two individuals coming from the same cultural and temporal context. It is equally true that meanings change their words – certainly over time, as the rapid evolution of any youth slang can vividly demonstrate, but especially through space, which is evident to anyone who did translation or studied regional dialects.

At the same time, new words referring to old designata do not appear as innocent and empty labels devoid of any independent significance. Even if a new word is a pure neologism that did not exist prior to being attached to some new or old phenomenon, it bears a distinctive connotation pointing at the willingness to break away from the ties of norms and traditions. And while some linguistic contexts are more open to such innovations (e.g. Russian in the early XX century), others remain (at times, absurdly) conservative (e.g. the Icelandic language in the second half of the XX century).

Similarly, when old words are being attached to newly emerging notions and objects, they carry parts of their discursive genealogies with them. Those genealogies do not necessarily determine how language speakers think about the categories they refer to by using specific denotations. Yet, they matter in so far as they can illuminate various bendy paths that concepts travel before they take up their contemporary constellations of meanings. That is, discursive genealogies help demonstrate that *meanings are path-dependent*.

As I tried to show previously, the English concept ‘great power’ with the load of connotations which it usually bears in Western IR cannot immediately capture the way Russian elites interpret and use its equivalent concept *velikaya derzhava* in the Russian discourse. This seems

puzzling, given that the use of this concept in the Russian discourse often aspires to a fair degree of historical depth and continuity drawing all the way from when (an equivalent of) this status was claimed by Russia's ancestor-states, including the Russian Empire.<sup>1</sup> The latter could be said to bear this label in the most classical of its formulations – the one that emerged in Europe of the XVIII and the XIX centuries, i.e. in the cradle of the progressivist interpretations of world political and cultural evolutions. In a situation like this, I would suggest, one should forget for a moment about the concepts' equivalence and try to identify the differences that exist between them. Those differences, as one could expect, should be the products of their conceptual evolutions.

In this chapter, I start reconstructing a conceptual evolution of *velikaya derzhava*, which designates 'great power' in the contemporary Russian political discourse. Importantly, I am not trying to write a history of this concept in the sense of tracing a continuous and uninterrupted development of a notion standing for some culture-specific designatum which remained homogenous throughout centuries. Instead, I am trying to reconstruct a genealogy of what is referred to as *velikaya derzhava* today, i.e. of a slightly odd (if looked at from within the hegemonic Western frame of reference) and context-specific *contemporary* Russian idea of greatpowerhood, which emerged as a synthesis of qualitatively different ideas about political greatness, international hierarchies, and modes of international socialization that went through a series of discursive clashes in time.

As such, this will be a story of ruptures rather than a story of continuity. This will be a story of different discursive positions and consensi that competed with and superseded one another. Each one of those positions and consensi represented a different story of what it meant to be a great polity. Often those stories were based on qualitatively different premises and posed divergent goals for Russia's political development. They also had different visions of the international system. Few of them could be said to conform to the idea of great powers as it was

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<sup>1</sup> Lavrov, "Russia's Foreign Policy: Historical Background".

articulated in XVIII- and XIX-century European politics. However, those discursive positions can still be argued to possess a genealogical likeness in the sense that every subsequent position, as it was trying to adapt to various surrounding discourses, was feeding on an array of antecedent positions by utilizing their structures of meaning, digesting and transforming them into something qualitatively new, yet still familiar to discursive inhabitants. Taken all in one, this discontinuous assemblage of Russian ideas about its political greatness will constitute a genealogy of Russia's great power discourse and a conceptual history of *velikaya derzhava*, which can help illustrate the specific path-dependency that led it to where it is today.

In this chapter, I reconstruct the first stage of this process and try to illustrate how the compound concept *velikaya derzhava* came into use in the early Russian political discourse and what meanings this concept brought with it. I begin my report by focusing on the early sources (XI-XVII centuries), where *derzhava* and *velikaya derzhava* were already present quite prominently. As I mentioned above, back then, these concepts meant something very different. Yet, they were still related to political order, which was, at that point in time, understood predominantly in religious terms and believed to be endowed with legitimacy by means of its connection to the divine absolute. In addition, I also present my take on the dynamics of those pre-modern and early modern discursive representations of political greatness in Russia that were not necessarily conveyed through the abovementioned concept. I look at this issue through the prism of the first political ideologies that utilised the idea of Rus' being a great polity for mobilizational purposes during the moments of political crises.

In general, this chapter's main argument is that, while the religiously conceived idea of political order, as it revealed itself in the Russian political discourse, had always been implicitly connected to greatness, understood in transcendental terms, greatness as a concrete feature of the Russian regime was emphasised explicitly only in the XV and the XVI centuries. At that time, as I will demonstrate by analysing contemporary diplomatic correspondence and popular religious texts, this discursive shift was a conservative and defensive reaction to contemporary strategic

challenges and the transformations of political orders in some European states. Such shift unearthed a set of underlying assumptions that early modern Russian rulers held about great (i.e. proper and legitimate) political entities more generally. This set of assumptions constituted what I call *noumenal* understanding of political greatness, i.e. the belief that a truly great polity, first and foremost, had to found its greatness on a proper domestic regime (claiming its attachment to the intangible transcendental truth) and a long-lasting political tradition. Whereas the international hierarchy only emerged for Russian ruling elites as an epiphenomenon of the distribution of domestic regimes.

I have largely based the forthcoming analysis on the textual sources from *The Library of Literature of Ancient Rus'* published online by the Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House) of the Russian Academy of Sciences.<sup>2</sup> To date, *The Library* is one of the most comprehensive collections of Old Russian literature, which contains the most important texts that were written in Russia from the XI till the beginning of the XVII century. It consists of fourteen volumes that cover all genres of Old Russian literature from Christian hagiography and translations of foreign texts to chronicles and political pamphlets to diplomatic letters and everyday correspondence (both in Church Slavonic<sup>3</sup> and modern Russian). Thus, *The Library* presents the most balanced and complete 'slice' of pre-modern and early modern Russian discourse which allows for an exhaustive and in-depth analysis.

## 2.2 *Velikaya*: Early sources

It would be problematic to discuss the evolution of the concept *velikaya derzhava* without also looking at the linguistic biographies of its separate parts. *Derzhava* in modern Russian is not just any state or power. It sounds quite archaic and bears the connotation of *real* sovereignty and

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<sup>2</sup> The Institute of Russian Literature (the Pushkin House), Russian Academy of Sciences, *Biblioteka literatury drevney Rusi* [The Library of Literature of the Ancient Rus'], <http://goo.gl/Iu94Ly>, accessed 21 September 2018, hereinafter referred to as '*The Library*'.

<sup>3</sup> Church Slavonic was a general literary language in Russia until the XVIII century, when it was replaced by the Russian language in secular literature and remained in use only in clerical circles. It was, however, almost never spoken outside church services. In everyday communication, Old Russian (aka Old East Slavic) or one of its dialects were preferred between the X and the XV centuries.



strength.<sup>4</sup> The word *velikaya* also has a touch of exaltation to it. Yet, earlier in texts written in Church Slavonic this word had such an incredibly high degree of compatibility and polysemy that practically anything could be *velikiy* ('great') in terms of size, goodness, diversity, geography, intensity, or some peculiar quality that had nothing to do with any of the above. Thus, at a closer look, the compound noun *velikaya derzhava* seems to be a strange tautology whose second element partially conveys the meaning of the first element, while the first one is a polysemic and vague characteristic with no precise definition. Therefore, without addressing such semantic imbalance between the two parts of the concept the discussion of its evolution would be necessarily incomplete. Hence, I begin this section by looking at the early uses of the adjective *velikaya*; I then proceed to the noun *derzhava*; and finally, I trace the merge of the two words into one concept, as well as the concept's further proliferation in early Russian texts.

The adjective 'great' (masculine – *velikiy*; feminine – *velikaya*; neutral – *velikoye*), not unlike in the English language, was almost a buzzword in Church Slavonic texts. It was extremely polysemic and could be a characteristic describing big size, goodness of soul, geographical location, intensity of a feeling, and superiority within political hierarchy – often all in one text. For instance, in the *Life of Mikhail Yaroslavich of Tver*,<sup>5</sup> written in the beginning of XIV century, the word *velikiy* was used to describe hierarchically superior titles of grand princes and grand princesses (*velikiy knyaz'* and *velikaya knyaginya*), their reign (*velikoye knyazheniye*), the great happiness that was brought to Rus' by its baptiser Vladimir I (*velikaya radost'*), the high intensity of striving towards one god (*velikoye ustremeniye*), a very violent fight (*secha velikaya*), awe and horror (*velikiy strakh i uzhas*), great martyr as a title in the church hierarchy (*velikomuchenik*), archangel Michael (*velikiy arkhangel Mikhail*), a big wooden log (*velikaya koloda*), the beginning of the Mongol-Tartar yoke (*velikoye zhestokoye plenie*), etc. Sometimes, like in *The Life of Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich*, also written in the

<sup>4</sup> S.A. Kuznetsov, ed., "derzhava," *Bol'shoy tolkovyi slovar' russkogo yazyka* [Big Definition Dictionary of the Russian Language], <https://goo.gl/mg79sZ>, accessed 21 September 2018.

<sup>5</sup> The Library, *Zhitiye Mikhaila Yaroslavicha Tverskogo* [The Life of Mikhail Yaroslavich of Tver], text prepared by V.I. Okhtnikova and S.A. Semyachko, translation and comments by S.A. Semyachko, <http://goo.gl/hSPsMn>, accessed 4 November 2014.

XIV century, one could find such constructs as “Dmitry ... was ... great in his greatness” (*velik v svojom velichii*),<sup>6</sup> which was perceived as a norm of glorification rather than a tautology. This indicates clearly that, in this particular case, the two cognate words bore qualitatively different semantic content, which could, perhaps, be better explicated through an alternative translation: “Dmitry ... was great in his majesty.” In addition, several Russian cities that were prominent in ancient chronicles also had the word *velikiy* in their names (e.g. Velikiy Novgorod and Velikiye Luki).

Thus, unlike in modern Russian, where the word *velikiy* has lost some of its meanings remaining primarily the characteristic of something glorious and significant (as in *Velikaya Otechestvennaya voyna* (Great Patriotic War) or *Pushkin - velikiy russkiy poet* (Pushkin is a great Russian poet)), in Church Slavonic there was an extremely wide array of things, persons and phenomena that could be described as great. Even more puzzling is the fact that until the XVI century the word *velikiy* was *almost never* used to characterise any kind of political power (*vlast'*, *vladychestvo* or *derzhava*) or the Russian polity (*Rus'*, *derzhava* or *gosudarstvo*).<sup>7</sup>

There were, of course, a few notable exceptions to this rule. For instance, in *The Legend of Boris and Gleb*, a tale about the martyr's death of the two sons of Vladimir I written in the middle of the XI century, the two martyrs were “placed by God to bring light to the world and shine with miracles in the *great Russian land*.”<sup>8</sup> In this context, however, the word *velikaya* is likely to have been used quite randomly as a simple laudatory epithet or a characteristic of big size, for this case seems too solitary in the general context. The same could be said about *Three Addresses and a Spiritual Letter of Kirill Belozerskiy*, written around the end of XIV – beginning of XV century, in which the author mentors one of the grand princes writing, “If it happened so that you have been given this *great*

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<sup>6</sup> The Library, *Slovo o zhitii velikogo knyazya Dmitriya Ivanovicha* [The Life of Grand Duke Dmitry Ivanovich], text prepared, translated and commented by M.A. Salmina, <http://goo.gl/3Hffvr>, accessed 4 November 2014.

<sup>7</sup> At this point I keep both ‘power’ and ‘state’ as possible translations of *derzhava* until the further discussion on how this word was understood in Ancient Rus’ and how it changed its meaning is presented.

<sup>8</sup> The Library, *Skazaniye o Borise i Glebe* [The Legend of Boris and Gleb], text prepared, translated and commented by L.A. Dmitriev, <http://goo.gl/PGGCz6>, accessed 4 November 2014, emphasis added.

*power* [*velikuyu vlast'*] by God, then you should provide Him with an equally great retribution.”<sup>9</sup> Similarly, in a series of three lengthy epic descriptions of the Battle of Kulikovo (one of the most important victories of Russian forces over the Tartars in 1380), written shortly after the battle, it is only once that Rus' is called *velikaya*, although Rus' and Russians are mentioned in all three sources more than 150 times. Another exception was also related to the Battle of Kulikovo – Dmitry Donskoy, who commanded the Russian forces in the battle was said to “accept God-given power, and, with God’s guidance, created a *great kingdom* thereby revealing the *greatness of Russia’s throne*.”<sup>10</sup> Yet, those and a few more<sup>11</sup> instances notwithstanding, collocations when the word *velikiy* is referred to political power (especially in relation to the word *derzhava*) or Russian polity are glaringly absent from the Church Slavonic sources before XVI century. Then, why is it that such polysemic and widely used adjective as *velikiy* was only very sporadically attached to power and Russian polity? Was it not only natural to praise the power of grand princes<sup>12</sup> and the polity they built with this laudatory characteristic? To find an answer to this, it is necessary to consider the origin and the evolution of the word *derzhava*.

## 2.3 Derzhava: Early sources

*Derzhava*<sup>13</sup> is a concept which also enjoyed wide presence in the old Russian literature from very early on. In modern Russian, the primary meaning of *derzhava* is “a sovereign state, conducting independent foreign policy.”<sup>14</sup> Yet, its old meaning was a bit different from the modern definition. In the translations of the early literary monuments of the XI-XIII centuries *derzhava* was often a

<sup>9</sup> The Library, *Tri poslaniya I dukhovnaya gramota Kirilla Belozerskogo* [Three Addresses and a Spiritual Letter of Kirill Belozerskiy], text prepared, translated and commented by G.M. Prokhorov, <http://goo.gl/AgpiXO>, accessed 4 November 2014, emphasis added.

<sup>10</sup> The Library, *The Life of Grand Duke Dmitry Ivanovich*, emphasis added.

<sup>11</sup> One could also find an expression *velikaya vlast'* in a XIII-century source *Kievo-Pecherskiy Paterik* [Kiev Pechersk Patericon], text prepared by L.A. Olshevskaya, translation by L.A. Dmitriev, comments by L.A. Dmitriev and L.A. Olshevskaya, <http://goo.gl/z60nss>, accessed 4 November 2014; and a XIII-XIV-century translation of *Stefanit i Ikhnilat* [Stephanit and Ikhnilat], text prepared, translated and commented by O.P. Likhacheva, <http://goo.gl/c0Mo3g>, accessed 4 November 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Grand prince was the highest title in Russian political hierarchy until Ivan IV was crowned as tsar in 1547.

<sup>13</sup> This word could be spelled as *держава*, *дѣржава*, *дѣръжава*, *дѣржава*, *дрѣжава*, or *дрѣжава* in different versions of the Church Slavonic orthography.

<sup>14</sup> Kuznetsov, ed., “*derzhava*,” *Big Definition Dictionary of the Russian Language*.

divine quality. In combination with the word ‘god’ it was interpreted as ‘power of god’ (*sila Gospoda*),<sup>15</sup> ‘might of god’ (*mogushchestvo Gospoda*),<sup>16</sup> or left without translation (*derzhava Gospoda*).<sup>17</sup> In addition, one of the most widespread codas of Church Slavonic texts looked something like this: “Glory and power (*derzhava*) to our God with Father and Holy Spirit always and for all eternity! Amen.”<sup>18</sup> When referred to mortals, *derzhava* could be translated as the ‘rule’ of a tsar or a prince (*vlast*),<sup>19</sup> or ‘ruler’ (*gosudar*),<sup>20</sup> but almost never as ‘polity’ or ‘country.’ In later sources, it could also be translated as ‘reign’ (*pravlenie*).<sup>21</sup> At times, just like with the divine *derzhava*, the word was left in its original form.<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, it was also often translated as ‘Majesty’ (*Velichestvo*), which in Russian is cognate and almost homonymous to ‘greatness’ (*velichie*),<sup>23</sup> and in those occasions when *velichestvo* is used in Church Slavonic, it could sometimes be translated as *velichie* (‘greatness’) into modern Russian.<sup>24</sup>

One thing that the ancient authors made clear was that *derzhava*, as an attribute of an earthly ruler, was only given by the grace of god and remained itself of divine origin. In his outstanding

<sup>15</sup> E.g. The Library, *Povest' vremennykh let* [Primary Chronicle], text prepared, translated and commented by O.V. Tvorogov, <http://goo.gl/Rv30oI>, accessed 4 November 2014.

<sup>16</sup> E.g. The Library, *Iz Prologa* [From Prologue], text prepared, translated and commented by S.A. Davydova, <http://goo.gl/InDl6r>, accessed 4 November 2014.

<sup>17</sup> The Library, *Kiev Pechersk Patericon*.

<sup>18</sup> E.g. The Library, *Slovo mudrogo episkopa belgorodskogo* [The Word of the Wise Bishop of Belgorod], text prepared, translated and commented by V.V. Kolesov, <http://goo.gl/c4Dy1a>, accessed 4 November 2014; The Library, *Kiev Pechersk Patericon*; and The Library, *Zhitiye Avraamiya Smolenskogo* [The Life of Avraamiy of Smolensk], text prepared, translated and commented by D.M. Bulanin, <http://goo.gl/rgN4ik>, accessed 4 November 2014.

<sup>19</sup> E.g. The Library, *Zhitiye Konstantina-Kirilla* [The Life of Constantine-Cyril], text prepared and translated by L.V. Moshkova and A.A. Turilova, comments by B.N. Flori, <http://goo.gl/WWbRmG>, accessed 4 November 2014.

<sup>20</sup> E.g. The Library, *Zhitiye propoka Moiseya* [The Life of Moses the Prophet], text prepared, translated and commented by M.V. Rozhdestvenskaya, <http://goo.gl/RZT2aU>, accessed 4 November 2014.

<sup>21</sup> E.g. The Library, *Zhitiye tsarevicha Dimitriya Uglichskego* [The Life of Tsarevich Dmitry of Uglich], text prepared, translated and commented by T.R. Rudi, <http://goo.gl/6NQWAm>, accessed 5 November 2014; and The Library, *Sochineniya Yermolaya-Erazma* [Writings of Yermolay-Erazm], text prepared and commented by R.P. Dmitrieva, translation by A.A. Alekseev and L.A. Dmitriev, <http://goo.gl/WpIvOg>, accessed 5 November 2014.

<sup>22</sup> E.g. The Library, *Sluzhba vozdvizhenyu kresta Kos'my Mayumskogo* [Sermon on the Erection of the Cross of Kosma Mayumskiy], text prepared, translated and commented by T.V. Tkacheva, <http://goo.gl/Qza0S5>, accessed 4 November 2014.

<sup>23</sup> E.g. The Library, *Chudesa Nikoly Merlikiyskego* [The Miracles of Nikola Merlikiyskiy], text prepared and commented by I.I. Makeeva, translation by L.V. Sokolova, <http://goo.gl/43J4wm>, accessed 4 November 2014; and The Library, *Slova i poucheniya Kirilla Turovskogo* [The Words and Edifications of Kirill Turovskiy], text prepared, translated and commented by V.V. Kolesov and N.V. Ponyrko, <http://goo.gl/Q9ByIK>, accessed 4 November 2014.

<sup>24</sup> The Library, *Slovo o zakonachii i blagodati mitropolita Ilariona* [Sermon on Law and Grace of Metropolitan Ilarion], text prepared and commented by A.M. Moldovan, translation by Andrey Yurchenko, <http://goo.gl/iwdg4N>, accessed 5 November 2014; Ivan IV, *Poslanie shvedskomu korolyu Yukhanu III 1573 goda* [The Letter to Swedish King Johan III from 1573], text prepared by E.I. Vaneeva, translation and comments by Ya.S. Lurye, <http://goo.gl/gV7Y6J>, accessed 5 November 2014.

analysis of the Russian national and social myths, Michael Cherniavsky illustrated this point very vividly by looking at how political power was conceptualised in the *Tale of Andrey Bogolubskiy's Assassination*, a XII-century vita of a grand prince of Vladimir, a victim of political assassination who was later canonised by the Orthodox Church. "In Andrew's case," wrote Cherniavsky, "for the first time the chronicle reveals the theological status of political power in order to condemn the murderers the more: 'As the apostle Paul says: Every soul obeys the ruler, the rulers are established by God. In his earthly being, the caesar is like every man, but in his power he has the rank of God ...; those who oppose the ruler oppose the law of God.'"<sup>25</sup> And of course, it was up to god to grant and take *derzhava*, as they saw fit. This is why the author of the *Tale* pleas to the assassinated to ask the almighty god "to forgive [Andrey's] brothers and to grant them a victory over their enemies, peaceful power [*derzhavu*] and long and respected reign for all eternity."<sup>26</sup>

Such conception of *derzhava* being god's endowment, was also present in many other Church Slavonic sources. For instance, the author of the *Praising Word of Monk Foma*, while describing a grand prince, writes, "there are many grand princes, but none of them is like our ruler grand prince Boris Aleksandrovich, who, by the grace of God, is power (*derzhava*) and support for our city."<sup>27</sup> Similarly, in the *Tale of Tsarina Dinara*, the tsarina, while rallying her troops, suggests that she would "attack the barbarians, ... forget feminine weakness and strengthen herself with man's wisdom, ... for [she does] not want to hear any longer [her] enemies' threats to capture the Holy Mother's lot – the power [*derzhavu*] given by her."<sup>28</sup>

Thus, a grand prince or princess, in this respect, was a transmission link, or a "mediator," for god to be able to exercise his divine power over people.<sup>29</sup> And when the people were god-fearing and righteous, god imposed a kind and wise ruler upon them. Yet, when people were

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<sup>25</sup> Cherniavsky, *Tsar and People*, p. 12.

<sup>26</sup> The Library, *Povest' ob ubienii Andrey Bogolubskogo* [Tale of Andrey Bogolubskiy's Assassination], text prepared, translated and commented by V.V. Kolesov, <http://goo.gl/IoADSt>, accessed 5 November 2014.

<sup>27</sup> The Library, *Inoka Fomy slovo pokhvalnoye* [Praising Word of Monk Foma], text prepared and translated by N.V. Ponyrko, comments by N.V. Ponyrko and Ya.S. Lurye, <http://goo.gl/BvydiK>, accessed 5 November 2014.

<sup>28</sup> The Library, *Povest' o tsaritse Dinare* [Tale of Tsarina Dinara], text prepared, translated and commented by N.S. Demkova, <http://goo.gl/AMC0ly>, accessed 5 November 2014.

<sup>29</sup> Cherniavsky, *Tsar and People*, p. 27.

sinner, a cruel and selfish ruler would be sent to punish them. One way or another, grand princes did not possess any power of their own – they were only endowed with god’s power, which could be withdrawn at any moment and which, by default, was unlimited, all-pervasive and great, for it was an attribute of the transcendental creator. If there still was a potential for comparison, when one dealt with different polities in the system, or when it was about different rulers, each having a private domain and power over it, *derzhava* given by god could not be compared to anything. It was a constant, which, in addition, could only be great to begin with, for the greatness (*velichie*) of the Christian god was not something that anyone would be ready to question in pre-modern Orthodox Russia. Hence, such an expression as ‘great power’ (*velikaya derzhava*) would probably sound for the contemporary reader as a tautology, since the second part of this collocation (*derzhava*) already contained the semantics of the first part (*velikaya*), and was also not a relative category, but absolute.

*Derzhava*, not as a ‘polity’, but as the ‘god-given power,’ preserved this meaning all the way through the pre-modern and early modern periods of Russian literature. As late as in *Chronicle of 1617* the author uses the word to communicate that it was the “undefeatable power [*derzhava*] – the hand of Christ, our Lord” which saved Moscow from invaders.<sup>30</sup> On this occasion, however, it was translated into modern Russian as *sila* – a word whose primary meaning is ‘strength.’ The latter may have been the case for already then, the word *derzhava* started to often denote ‘polity’ or ‘country.’ When used in that meaning it was usually left without translation in *The Library*, since it corresponded to the meaning of the word in modern Russian. Yet, when it was used in the meaning which was perceived as more archaic (the ‘god-given power’), the translators would usually use some equivalent, like *sila*<sup>31</sup> or *mogushchestvo* (‘might’).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> The Library, *Iz Khronografy 1617 goda* [From the Chronicle of 1617], text prepared, translated and commented by O.V. Tvorogov and E.G. Vodolazkin, <http://goo.gl/3oNyK4>, accessed 5 November 2014.

<sup>31</sup> The Library, *From the Chronicle of 1617*, and also The Library, *Povest’ o Temir Aksake* [The Story of Temir Aksak], text prepared, translated and commented by V.V. Kolesov, <http://goo.gl/4f0nM2>, accessed 5 November 2014.

<sup>32</sup> E.g. The Library, *Dukhovnaya gramota i ispoved’ Yevfimiya Turkova* [Spiritual Letter and Confession of Evfimiya Turkov], text prepared, translated and commented by L.A. Olshevskaya, <http://goo.gl/DwDhn8>, accessed 5 November 2014.



## 2.4 Velikaya derzhava

### 2.4.1 Conceptual fusion in the XV century

It was only in the beginning of the XV century when the words *velikaya* and *derzhava* started to occasionally appear side by side, and it was not until the XVI century when they started to be used together systematically. What is more, initially they were put together to make up an adjective *velikoderzhavny*, which could be translated as ‘possessing great power’ and mostly used to refer to grand princes. In the second decade of the XV century, Epiphanius the Wise used the adjective a few times in his *The Life of Sergiy Radonezhskiy*.<sup>33</sup> In most cases, *velikoderzhavny* (*kenyaz*) would simply be translated as ‘grand prince,’ but also the adjective was used to describe big cities (*velikoderzhavniya grady*), i.e. the cities where grand princes resided. The word *velikoderzhavny* was also used in the identical sense in *Independent Chronicle of 1480s*: “[pagans] captured from the residence of the grand prince (*velikoderzhavny*) one soldier named Ivan, whom the prince liked.”<sup>34</sup>

To the best of my knowledge, as a standalone collocation, *derzhava velikaya* (in such reverse order) was first used in the beginning of the XVI century by Maksim Grek, a writer of Greek origin, who was schooled in Italy and was largely influenced by the ideas of Girolamo Savonarola. In his *Story about Savonarola*, Grek described France by calling it “a state [*derzhava*] great [*velikaya*], and glorious [*slavnaya*], and rich [*bogataya*] with abundant weal [*blagami*].”<sup>35</sup> Yet, if it is quite clear that *derzhava* to him was already a polity, as opposed to god-given power, it is disputable what he meant by *velikaya* (*великая* in modern Russian and *велия* in Church Slavonic). Most likely, he used the word to indicate that France simply was a large country, i.e. for him it was not in any way politically greater than any other polity or land, or, at least, Grek did not want to indicate this by calling France *velikaya*. Rather, if there was any qualitative difference to French political life, he

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<sup>33</sup> The Library, *Zhitiye Sergiya Radonezhskogo* [The Life of Sergiy Radonezhskiy], text prepared by D.M. Bulanina, translation by M.F. Antonova and D.M. Bulanina, comments by D.M. Bulanina, <http://goo.gl/Bw2hLn>, accessed 5 November 2014.

<sup>34</sup> The Library, *Nezavisimyy letopisnyy svod 80-kh gg. XV v.* [Independent Chronicle of 1480s], text prepared and commented by Ya.S. Lurye and N.I. Milyutenko, translation by N.I. Milyutenko, <http://goo.gl/iaM2RG>, accessed 5 November 2014.

<sup>35</sup> The Library, *Sochineniya Maksima Greka* [Writings of Maksim Grek], text prepared, translated and commented by D.M. Bulanina, <http://goo.gl/etCAdR>, accessed 5 November 2014.

reflected this difference in the words “rich with abundant weal,” which he explained by telling his reader that France spent its resources to educate in various sciences those, who would become skilful statesmen and active citizens, and advised that this, perhaps, should have been done in Russia as well for the sake of the public weal.<sup>36</sup>

Whether it was a simple coincidence, or a meaningful discursive mark, Grek’s writings opened a whole new period in the evolution of the Russian literature, when Rus’ political greatness was explicitly reflected upon and brought to the fore. With Ivan IV the Formidable (aka Terrible) coming to the throne in 1533 (crowned as tsar in 1547) and with the first imperial expansion to the East, the concept clearly acquired a distinguishable shape which can be analysed in more detail.

#### **2.4.2 Greatness as qualitative superiority**

When it comes to Great Russia (*Velikaya Rossiya* or *Velikaya Rus’*), one clarification is needed. When old Russian authors called Rus’ ‘great’ (*Velikaya* or *velikaya*) they could mean several things. Sometimes, the adjective was used in a geographical sense, to distinguish Great Russia from Small Russia (*Malaya Rus’*), i.e. the metropole of Galicia-Volhynia (now Western Ukraine) that was established in 1305.<sup>37</sup> However, it was quite obvious that in many cases the adjective ‘great’ was not a geographic characteristic. Probably, this was the case for *The Story of the Princes of Vladimir of Great Rus’* written in the 1510s.<sup>38</sup> On the one hand, the events described in *The Story* date back to the time when this geographical differentiation did not exist and *Velikaya Rus’* was not an established designation. Hence, it can only be attributed the geographical meaning anachronistically. More importantly, however, the scholars of the Old Russian literature attest that *The Story* may have been composed as an attempt to create a state ideology, which could be used in political practice of the Russian polity.<sup>39</sup> Some of its ideas were widely utilised in diplomatic

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<sup>36</sup> The Library, *Writings of Maksim Grek*.

<sup>37</sup> A.V. Solovyov, “Velikaya, Malaya i Belaya Rus’ [Great, Small and White Rus’],” *Iz Istorii Russkoy Kultury* Vol. 2, No. 1 (2002), pp. 479-495; and E.M. Pospelov, ed., *Geographicheskiye nazvaniya mira: Toponimicheskij slovar’* [Geographical Names of the World: Toponymical dictionary] (Moscow: AST, 2001).

<sup>38</sup> The Library, *Skazanie o knyaz’akh vladimirskikh* [The Story of the Princes of Vladimir], text prepared and commented by R.P. Dmitrieva, translated by L.A. Dmitriev, <https://goo.gl/8aJNnn>, accessed 7 September 2018.

<sup>39</sup> The Library, *The Story of the Dukes of Vladimir of Great Rus’*, see the comments section.



disputes during the reigns of Vasily III (1505-1533) and Ivan IV (1533[1547]-1584), as well as some literary monuments of the XVI century – particularly, the legend about the genealogy of the Russian tsars going all the way back to the Roman emperor Augustus, and the transfer of the royal regalia from Byzantium to Rus' during Vladimir II Monomakh's reign (1112-1125).<sup>40</sup>

If *The Story* indeed had this ideological function, then the greatness ascribed to early modern Rus' may have, in fact, signified some qualitative difference of the Russian polity that the Russian authors of XVI century began to recognise and promote. What is more, this difference was likely to be located at the intersection of politics and religion. According to the author of *The Story*, the then-current Byzantine emperor Constantine IX Monomachos sent ambassadors to his grandson Vladimir II Monomakh asking to accept his regalia and negotiate peace, which would “establish God's church, and all Orthodoxy would remain in peace under the reign of [Byzantine] tsardom and [Vladimir's] free sovereignty [*svobodnogo samoderzhavstva*] of *great Rus'*, and Vladimir from [then on] would be called the tsar, appointed by God and crowned ... by the hand of metropolitan Neophytus and his bishops.”<sup>41</sup>

Most likely, the whole story about passing the regalia was a XVI-century invention (Vladimir was only two years old when Constantine died, and his chances to inherit the grand prince's throne were very low, for he was not the oldest son; in addition, he was certainly never called ‘tsar’).<sup>42</sup> Yet, this, of course, did not matter: the attribution of some qualitative greatness to the Russian polity began to be a very real phenomenon, which had its first subtle signs in *The Story*, and, by time when another literary monument of the early modern discourse – *Kazan Chronicle* – was created, almost became a norm.

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<sup>40</sup> E.g. The Library, *Povest' o zhizni tsarya Fyodora Ivanovicha* [The Life of Tsar Fyodor Ivanovich], text prepared by V.P. Budaragin, translation and comments by A.M. Panchenko, <http://goo.gl/SuqOqg>, accessed 5 November 2014; and Ivan IV, *Poslanie polskomu korolyu Stefanu Batoriyu 1579 goda* [Letter to Polish King Stephen Báthory from 1579], text prepared by E.I. Vaneeva, translation and comments by Ya.S. Lurye, <http://goo.gl/mq8oBf>, accessed 5 November 2014.

<sup>41</sup> The Library, *The Story of the Dukes of Vladimir of Great Rus'*, emphasis added.

<sup>42</sup> Boris Akunin, *Chast' Evropy. Istoria Rossiyskogo Gosudarstva. Ot istokov do mongolskogo nashestviya* [Part of Europe. History of the Russian State. From the Beginning to Mongol-Tartar Yoke] (Moscow: AST, 2014).

*Kazan Chronicle* written in 1564-1565 is a story about three hundred years of Russia's relations with the Golden Horde, which culminated in Ivan IV's military campaign of 1552, prolonged siege of the city of Kazan, its final occupation, and the fall of the Khanate of Kazan – the remaining fragment of the Golden Horde founded in the middle of the XV century. The *Chronicle's* genre is identified by its anonymous author as a *new novel*. And it is this new novel which appears to be the first source in *The Library* where such characteristic as 'great' (*velikiy*) is routinely attached not only to rulers and other personalities, but also to *derzhava* (be it a polity or power), its synonyms (e.g. *tsarstvo* meaning 'tsardom'), Russia and the Russian land.<sup>43</sup>

Describing the transfer of power from Vasily III to Ivan IV, the author of *Kazan Chronicle* writes that "[Ivan's] father left the whole of great power [*velikuyu vlast'*] of the Russian state [*Russkoy derzhavy*] to him after his death."<sup>44</sup> Ivan, in his turn, after reaching the age of maturity (he was only four years old when Vasily died), "accepted the power over the *great Russian tsardom* of Muscovy ... and was proclaimed the tsar of the whole *great Russia*."<sup>45</sup> After the victory over the Khanate, the author remarks, "Kazan has ceased to be an independent tsardom and, against its will, became a subject to the *great tsardom* of Muscovy."<sup>46</sup> Finally, when it comes to Ivan's domestic politics, he, according to the *Chronicle*, "tried to get rid of any wrong, dishonour and injustice, and spread wise people and loyal centurions ... across the whole of his great state [*velikoy derzhave*] and made all the people to swear fealty, like Moses once did to Israelites."<sup>47</sup> As a result of such domestic restructuring and foreign expansion, "the glorious city of Moscow began to glow as if it was the second Kiev, or ... as the third and new great Rome, which has recently started to shine as the great sun in our great land of Russia [*v velikoy nashey Russkoy zemle*]."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> The Library, *Kazanskaya istoriya* [Kazan Chronicle], text prepared and translated by T.F. Volkova, comments by T.F. Volkova and I.A. Lobakova, <http://goo.gl/t3jiZE>, accessed 5 November 2014.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, emphasis added.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, emphasis added.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

Despite the difficulty of ascribing a single unambiguous meaning to the word ‘great’ in each case, one could sustainably argue that in *Kazan Chronicle* this word was quite often attached to the Russian land, *derzhava* and *tsarstvo* not as a geographic indicator (which is evident from the grammar, as in “*velikaya nasha Russkaya zemlya*” (our great land of Russia)) and not as a simple laudatory epithet (for it preserved an unusual degree of regularity). One could also suggest that, because it was insistently used when either Rus’, or tsardom, or power (meaning ‘rule’) were mentioned, *velikiy* here was not (or not always) a characteristic of size. Then, if the adjective ‘great’ as it was used with *derzhava* (meaning ‘power’ or ‘polity’) or its synonyms (*vlast’*, *tsarstvo*, and *gosudarstvo*) could be conceived as a qualitative differentiation, what could the meaning of this differentiation be?

One potential answer to this can be already found in the *Chronicle* itself – in the part where the author describes Ivan’s coronation for tsardom in 1547 and the international reaction to it. On 16 January 1547, Ivan IV “went through the ritual of sacring and [was crowned] according to the ancient royal ritual that Roman, Greek and other Orthodox monarchs went through, while being crowned for tsardom ... [In this] he was akin to his grandfather, grand prince Ivan, for prior to him no one from his great grandfathers was called ‘tsar’, and none of them dared to be sacred for tsardom and adopt this title, for they feared jealousy and attacks from pagan and infidel tsars.”<sup>49</sup> This self-proclamation was followed by international response, which, according to the author of the *Chronicle*, was favourable. “Having heard about this, all his enemies – pagan tsars and godless kings – were surprised, but praised and glorified him, and sent their ambassadors with presents, and recognised him as a *great tsar* and autocrat [*samoderzhets*].”<sup>50</sup> Allegedly, the Turkish sultan even

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid. In fact, neither Ivan III (Ivan IV’s grandfather), nor Vasily III (Ivan IV’s father) went through this coronation ritual, although both were occasionally called tsars. The ritual was performed for the first time in 1498, when Ivan III sacred his grandson Dmitry. However, Dmitry never inherited the throne. Thus, Ivan IV was the first head of state who officially underwent the coronation ritual.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, emphasis added.

sent Ivan a letter saying that from then on he was recognizing Ivan as a *great tsar* and “all his hordes were fearing [him] and would not dare to approach [his] borders.”<sup>51</sup>

Traditionally, this discursive shift was interpreted as a reflection of the changing status of the Russian monarch within the nascent international hierarchy of the XVI century. Having liberated itself from the yoke and having witnessed the fall of Constantinople in the preceding century, which had effectively turned Russia into the last standing stronghold of Orthodox Christianity, Russian rulers, allegedly, began to aspire for the highest possible political title in the world – that of an *imperator* (or *tsar* as its Russian equivalent). In Cherniavsky’s words, “The [ruler’s] myth shifted from the saintly princes of Russia to the imperial rulers of Rome, Constantinople, and Kiev as the models and justification of the Muscovite Tsar.”<sup>52</sup>

Indeed, it seems plausible that in the XVI century, the word ‘great’ in relation to Russian polity could become an indication of international rank, which was believed to be qualitatively different from the lower ranks of some other kingdoms. However, it is equally true that the validation mechanism of this rank of greatness had little to do with dependency, measurable resources, size, military might, or any kind of relational assessment. Instead, this greatness was believed to be built upon certain characteristics of Russia’s domestic regime, while its international validation depended on the recognition of Russia’s noumenal superiority, i.e. the unconditional acclamation of the Russian ruler’s moral preponderance and political grandeur. At least, this is how it was presented in the domestic discourse, the international response to Ivan’s coronation described in *Kazan Chronicle* being the prime example.

Frequently, such essentialist interpretation of political greatness compelled the observers of Russian politics – especially our contemporaries – to speak of Russian messianism driven by some eschatological fervour.<sup>53</sup> I, however, argue that the attribution of messianic sentiments to the rulers of early modern Rus’ may be anachronistic, and it obscures the real issue: the contemporaries

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Cherniavsky, *Tsar and People*, p. 51.

<sup>53</sup> Peter JS Duncan, *Russian messianism: third Rome, revolution, communism and after* (Routledge, 2002).

of Ivan IV wrote about political greatness in such terms because they understood greatness in general, as well as the mechanism of its validation, in noumenal terms, not because they believed themselves to be on a world-conquering mission. What is more, they were forced to reflect on this subject under tangible international pressure coming from Russia's western neighbours. In response, they chose to construct the greatness of the Russian polity drawing on the available discursive resources borrowed from the religious discourse. That discourse, as I have shown above, conceived greatness as the product of divine enthronement coupled with a proper type of relationship between the ruler and its subjects. To illustrate this, I address one the most well-known discursive monuments of the XVI century: the diplomatic correspondence of Ivan IV.

## 2.5 Ivan IV and his western neighbours

Ivan IV's understanding of political greatness becomes evident from his extensive correspondence with European monarchs. In his 1572 letter to King Johan III of Sweden, Ivan repeatedly used in relation to himself an expression, which could be translated as "our degree of greatness" or "our degree of majesty" (*nasba stepen' velichestva*).<sup>54</sup> This clearly indicated that he reproduced discursively some kind of international hierarchy, to which nascent diplomacy of XVI century should have catered. That is, 'great' in this context, as opposed to simple laudatory characteristic, performed the function of qualitative differentiation of polities. In the next letter to Johan III written a year later, Ivan explained his understanding of this difference. The tsar started off by reproaching Johan, "First: you write your name ahead of ours – this is inappropriate, for we relate to Roman Caesars and other great princes, while you cannot relate to them, since the Swedish land is inferior to those states, which will be proven below."<sup>55</sup> He continued by stating that "there was no arrogance from our side, for we addressed you the way our autocratic [*samoderzhavnaya*] power ought to address your power of a king."<sup>56</sup> Then, Ivan presented the first point related to the

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<sup>54</sup> Ivan IV, *Poslanie shvedskomu korolyu Yurhanu III 1572 goda* [Letter to Swedish King Johan III from 1572], text prepared by E.I. Vaneeva, translation and comments by Ya.S. Lurye, <http://goo.gl/7ATypj>, accessed 5 November 2014. Ivan IV used majestic plural in all of his correspondence.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

content of greatness by asking Johan to send the record of his genealogy, “which would give [Ivan] an idea about the greatness of [Johan’s] state.”<sup>57</sup>

Ivan’s further statement deserves to be quoted in full. The tsar bitterly remarked,

another reason why [Johan’s] family is rustic and [Sweden] is not a great state is that ... [his] father should have kissed the cross<sup>58</sup> on behalf of the whole of the Swedish state [*derzhavy*] and on behalf of the city of Vyborg and the Vyborg state [*derzhavy*], and the Archbishop of Uppsala had to vouch for this; instead, however, it were the ambassadors of the Swedish Kingdom who by order and on behalf of King Gustav and his Swedish state and the city of Vyborg and Vyborg state were kissing the cross, promising that King Gustav would kiss the cross, and the Archbishop of Uppsala would vouch for it, and everything agreed upon would be fulfilled by them. You probably should know yourself that the way things are done in your state is not the way they should be done in great states [*v velikikh gosudarstvakh*].<sup>59</sup>

What started with a procedural chicanery was further developed by the tsar into an instruction regarding the proper way of building domestic political hierarchy in a great polity.

Your father kissed the cross for the Swedish state and for the Vyborg state – which means that Vyborg is some kind of special place ruled by a peer of your father. If your state was truly great, then the Archbishop of Uppsala would not be mentioned among your father’s peers, and now it seems he is mentioned as one. And why are the advisors of your father named as his peers? And why were the ambassadors sent not from your father alone, but from the whole Swedish Kingdom, while your father is like an elder among equals, as if he was a chief in a district. And if your father was a great ruler [*velikiy gosudar*], then the Archbishop would not be his peer, and the advisors and the whole of the Swedish land and Vyborg state would not be mentioned, and the ambassadors would be from your father alone, and not the Swedish Kingdom... And this is why you cannot align yourself with great rulers: the great rules do not have such customs.<sup>60</sup>

Another lengthy remark on Ivan’s understanding of the nature of great power can be found in his letter to Stephen Báthory, an elected king of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The fact that Stephen Báthory was elected as a new king by the Sejm certainly could not escape Ivan’s attention. In 1579 he wrote

we rule for 717 years from Ryurik the Great, and you were put in charge of such great state only yesterday, you were the first from your family who, by the grace of God, was elected by the peoples and estates of the Kingdom of Poland and placed on those states *to manage* them, but not *to possess*. And they are the people with their own liberties, and you are swearing fealty to the greatness of their land; we, on the other hand, were given the state [*gosudarstvo*] by the hand of God, and not that of the people, and it is with God’s hand that we possess our state – we do not accept it from the people; it is only a son who could accept from his

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Kissing the cross was a widespread Russian way of confirming treaties and alliances at that time.

<sup>59</sup> Ivan IV, *Letter to Swedish King Johan III from 1573*.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

father what is his by the father's blessing ... and we do not kiss the cross in front of our own people.<sup>61</sup>

It is certainly questionable to what extent Ivan IV's paternalistic mentoring was reflecting the existing international balance of power. Most probably, it was not. Ivan was known as an eccentric and volatile ruler, and offensive remarks were not uncommon in all his correspondence, while Stephen Báthory fought with Muscovy quite successfully and in 1582 had negotiations with the Russian tsar that concluded with the Truce of Jam Zapolski, which was very favourable to Poland. Yet, the aim of this study is certainly not to evaluate the objective distribution of capabilities in the early modern period and to identify whether Ivan's claim for superiority was in any way 'real'. Instead, I am trying to show and interpret Russia's first discursive attempts to integrate into the international society, to understand its demands and hierarchies. Towards this end, it is useful to look at Ivan's correspondence as an important site of that process, because it shows how, for the first time, Russia decisively ascribed to itself the status of a great power (*velikoy derzhavy*) and how it interpreted this greatness. *Kazan Chronicle*, in its turn, is an excellent account of Russia's first imperial experience, which coincided with forceful centralization and strengthening of the Russian state and brought the first aspiration for higher and greater international rank.

How did the idea of political greatness operate in this early modern slice of the Russian discourse? Ivan's position on the true greatness of polities appears to be rather simple and conservative. What is more, it exhibits the signs of a continuity stemming from the premodern religious discourse, which Ivan and his contemporaries extensively utilised to make sense of the new international situation they found themselves in. Having looked around, they started noticing challenging realities that could neither be completely ignored, nor eliminated in a total war, like it had happened with the Khanate of Kazan. The rulers that Ivan corresponded with were, at the same time, sufficiently similar to and sufficiently different from himself, thereby becoming

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<sup>61</sup> Ivan IV, *Letter to Polish King Stephen Báthory from 1579*, emphasis added.

significant Others in relation to whom Ivan had to (re)define himself. Importantly, the discursive tension that Ivan was trying to tackle emerged not only out of purely ideological differences, but also out of the fact that Sweden and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (as well as England)<sup>62</sup> were strategic challenges. Responding to these strategic challenges, Ivan was discursively reasserting his own status and political superiority. To understand what exactly his rhetorical bet was, one needs to look behind the façade of the tsar's intemperance and eccentricity, and to seek discursive foundations of his position.

According to Ivan, the defining feature of a truly great polity was not its size, military might or riches. It also had little to do with relational assessment of those things. The Russian tsar insisted that a polity could only be great, if the power of the monarch was undivided and absolute. An identical position also re-emerged in Ivan's correspondence with Andrey Kurbsky – his former general, who had to flee Russia, fearing prosecution, and was accusing Ivan of unnecessary brutality and terror.<sup>63</sup> The monarch's power should have been undivided, because essentially it was god's power delegated to an earthly prince, and even though it did not belong to the prince completely, procedurally it could only be absolute. In this sense, Ivan followed the line of all pre-modern Russian rulers). A king who was not so great was either given the power by the people (like Stephen Báthory) or shared the power with advisors and bishops (like Johan III). Consequently, a great ruler held the polity in complete and undivided *possession*, while a ruler of a lower rank pledged fealty to the people of the kingdom and, hence, did not possess the polity, but only *managed* it. Finally, the claim for a long-lasting dynastic tradition also played an important role. Of course, this dynastic tradition was frequently an invented mythology rather than a reliably traceable fact

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<sup>62</sup> An effusive letter to Elizabeth I triggered by the failure of the Russian-English alliance is another well-known monument of Ivan's epistolary work. See: The Library, *Poslanie angliyskoy koroleve Elizavete I* [Letter to English queen Elizabeth I], text prepared, translated and commented by Ya.S. Lurye, <https://goo.gl/JLZCr2>, accessed 7 September 2018.

<sup>63</sup> See the correspondence of Andrey Kurbsky with Ivan the Formidable, <http://goo.gl/5RgCHy>, accessed 5 November 2014.



(like in the case of Ivan IV's descent from Augustus, or Swedish king Charles XII's self-ascribed numerical order).

It is obvious that all of the abovementioned characteristics of the true greatness are the features of domestic political organization, not the products of international relations. What is more, they reflect a very specific religious outlook that had shaped Russian political discourse for centuries. That outlook anticipated the belief that greatness came only through divine enthronement and that it made no sense to look for its sources anywhere but the holy religion. Consequently, instead of deriving status from the interactions with and recognition of significant Others, Russian ruling elite derived it from the history and quality of their domestic regime.

Of course, such understanding of greatness as a thing-in-itself – i.e. a noumenon, which is not subject to relational assessment and comparison because it is sensually imperceptible – was nothing else but a political ideology. And even though *velikaya derzhava* became the most pertinent discursive embodiment of that ideology only in Ivan's time, the ideological use of political greatness had a much longer history. What is more, just like it was the case with Ivan, who started emphasizing Russia's noumenal greatness in the face of strategic challenges, the earlier historical uses of similar ideologies were tightly connected to the periods of hardships and political decline. To illustrate the latter, I dedicate the remaining sections of this chapter to the discussion of concrete historical instances when the ideology of noumenal greatness was retrieved from the cultural image bank of the ancient and early modern Rus' and used for mobilizational purposes.

## **2.6 First Russian ideology: The cult of Boris and Gleb**

There were several periods in Russian political history when the idea of the country's political greatness was brought to the fore most forcefully. As mentioned before, these were the periods of political and economic decline. To understand this seemingly counterintuitive pattern, it is useful to consider the general functions of political ideologies. According to Clifford Geertz, ideology comes into play most crucially when other guides for social behaviour and mobilization (be it tradition or institutions) are either absent or undergoing some significant change. That is,

ideology may become essential, when stability is lost, and centrifugal forces of societal disintegration plunge society into a period of hardships.<sup>64</sup> History consistently demonstrates that economic, ideational, or military crises often go hand in hand with political ideologies. For instance, Erich Fromm argued that the collapse of social order in post-World War I Germany led to the condition of negative freedom, which a lot of German citizens were willing to escape. This escape was found in the ideology of National Socialism, which provided some form of security amidst economic and political chaos.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, in his response to Theda Skocpol's analysis of social revolutions,<sup>66</sup> William Sewell maintained that impending bankruptcy reinforced by institutional and ideological contradictions of the Old Regime threw France into the 1789 crisis, as a result of which the new ideology of Enlightenment liberated itself from all constraints, and an attempt to reorder a state fundamentally in the Enlightenment terms became possible.<sup>67</sup>

Arguably, Rus' entered its first such period of instability and fragmentation in the XI century, when the institution of grand princes' authority was severely hit by a succession crisis. The succession law introduced by Yaroslav the Wise, who died in 1054, presupposed that all his sons would inherit the Russian polity as a family, while the elder son would simply be the first among equals, having his seat in Kiev.<sup>68</sup> Skipping the details of numerous conflicts that almost immediately followed Yaroslav's death, one could simply mention that this was the beginning of a lengthy and tedious period of the feudal fragmentation of Rus'. Yaroslav's grandson, Vladimir II Monomakh, one of the most gifted Russian rulers of the early period, was the one who, anticipating the troubles that such fragmentation could bring, for the first time in the recorded Russian history consciously attempted to create something which would be called today a state ideology.

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<sup>64</sup> Clifford Geertz, "Ideology As a Cultural System," in: Clifford Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973): pp. 193-233.

<sup>65</sup> Erich Fromm, *Escape from freedom* (Macmillan, 1994).

<sup>66</sup> Theda Skocpol, *States and social revolutions: A comparative analysis of France, Russia and China* (Cambridge University Press, 1979).

<sup>67</sup> William Sewell, "Ideologies and social revolutions: Reflections on the French case," in: Theda Skocpol, ed., *Social Revolutions in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 169-198.

<sup>68</sup> Akunin, *The History of the Russian State*.

An important part of the *Primary Chronicle* – one of the fundamental sources for the interpretation of the history of Eastern Slavs – is *Edification of Vladimir Monomakh*.<sup>69</sup> In it, the author most visibly presents his concerns regarding military interventions into each other's provinces, which were very common among the descendants of Yaroslav the Wise. Such interventions and interfamily wars significantly weakened the Russian polity and increased the chances of interventions from without. To counter such trends, Vladimir II, and then his son Mstislav, created (or rather picked up and amplified) a political cult of the first Russian saints Boris and Gleb, who were assassinated by their brother Sviatopolk in one of the interdynastic conflicts.<sup>70</sup> Essentially, the idea behind this was that Boris and Gleb consciously preferred to accept martyr's death, rather than to bear arms against their elder brother. This was a clear message to the members of the ruling dynasty to respect the order of succession and to be obedient to their elder relatives.

Of course, the Boris and Gleb ideology did not prevent princes from occasionally fighting each other, but it reinforced the foundation beneath the idea of their political unity. Boris and Gleb, already worshiped by the general population, became accepted by the nobility as the saint patrons of the Russian land and the heavenly protectors of all Russian princes. The later chronicles are full of references to the saints in relation to important victories (e.g. of Rurik Rostislavich over Khan Konchak in 1180 and Aleksander Nevsky over the Swedes in 1240), while their relics became the most important sight for princes' pilgrimages.<sup>71</sup> As late as in the XVI century, Boris and Gleb were called “the chosen beginning of Russian offerings to God” in *Panegyric of monk Filolog*.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> The Library, *Poucheniye Vladimira Monomakha* [Edification of Vladimir Monomakh], text prepared by O.V. Tvorogov, translation and comments by D.S. Likhachev, <http://goo.gl/sL5WS5>, accessed 5 November 2014.

<sup>70</sup> Dmitry Likhachev, “Velichie drevney literatury [Greatness of Ancient Literature],” *The Library*, <http://goo.gl/infXeD>, accessed 5 November 2014.

<sup>71</sup> The Library, *Zhitiye Aleksandra Nevskogo* [The Life of Aleksander Nevsky], text prepared, translated and commented by V.I. Okhotnikova, <http://goo.gl/nIKnKz>, accessed 5 November 2014; and S.M. Solovyov, *Istoriya Rossii s drevneyshikh vremen* [Russia's History from Ancient Times], Vol. 2, Chapter 6, <http://goo.gl/XwpMVd>, accessed 5 November 2014.

<sup>72</sup> The Library, *Slovo pokhvalnoye Filologa chernoriztsa...* [Panegyric of monk Filolog], text prepared and commented by N.F. Droblenkova, translation by N.F. Droblenkova and G.M. Prokhorov, <http://goo.gl/Ps4hWS>, accessed 5 November 2014.

Yet, Boris and Gleb were also an odd choice. Sons of the baptiser of Rus' Vladimir I were murdered young, before they managed to accomplish anything politically significant. They were neither war heroes, nor sagacious statesmen. In fact, according to *Primary Chronicle*, the only time when Boris was given a chance to reveal his military talents, was when his deceasing father sent him to fight the Cumans. Boris, however, returned home empty handed, for he had not found them. Even per Christian standards Boris and Gleb did not fit the criteria for canonization, for they were laymen, and did not die as martyrs for Christ, but were killed in a political conflict.<sup>73</sup> Then, what could explain the immense popularity of the cult both among the elites and the general population? What kind of compelling message was this cult trying to promote?

The unity promoted by Vladimir II was for him synonymous to the strength and greatness of the Russian polity. Hence the main idea of Boris and Gleb's cult could have been interpreted as being about strength and greatness through submission and humility. That greatness is in humility was also a general leitmotif of Orthodox Christianity and a very popular conception in pre-modern Rus'. For instance, such interpretation of greatness appeared in a 1076 source *Izbornik*, which was a compilation of moral guidelines for 'new people' (in a sense of being newly Christianised): "Rejoice in submission, for that highness which is from submission is undefeatable, and in it is the true greatness."<sup>74</sup>

Why this idea was resonating with the demands of only recently Christianised masses is certainly up for debate. Perhaps, it had something to do with the socio-religious climate of the newly Christianised polity. In the beginning of the second millennium, there was a faith duality of a peculiar type in Ancient Rus', as Evgeny Ivakhnenko has argued.<sup>75</sup> Unripe paganism was not

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<sup>73</sup> Aleksandr Uzhankov, "Svyatye strastoterptsy Boris i Gleb: k istorii kanonizatsii i napisanii zhitiy [Holy passion bearers Boris and Gleb: on the history of their canonization and hagiography]," <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/archiv/borisgleb.htm>, accessed 1 November 2014.

<sup>74</sup> The Library, *Iz Izbornika 1076 goda* [From Izbornik of 1076], text prepared, translated and commented by V.V. Kolesov, <http://goo.gl/yVSQvt>, accessed 5 November 2014.

<sup>75</sup> Evgeny Ivakhnenko, *Rossiia na 'porogakh'. Ideinye konfrontatsii i 'porogi' v techeniyakh russkoy religiozno-filosofskoy i politicheskoy mysli (XI – nachalo XX v.)* [Russia at the "Thresholds". Ideational Confrontations and 'Thresholds' in the Streams of Russian Religious-Philosophical and Political Thought (the XI – beginning of the XX century)] (Saint Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo RGPU im. Gertsena, 1999).

entirely replaced by Byzantine Christianity but entered into a strange symbiosis with it. On the one hand, Byzantine Christianity, which developed under the influence of Manichaeism, Bogomilism and other dualist doctrines, proved to be amenable to some pagan elements. On the other hand, paganism, although it mainly lost its cultural status, incorporated the elements of new religion and continued to largely define ideological attitudes and religious practice of the population in the new polity. This, in turn, defined the whole cultural practice of the new faith, often making it dualistic and contradictory.<sup>76</sup>

Yet, perhaps, a more substantiated explanation of such peculiar understanding of political greatness being a function of complete submission and humility was provided by Cherniavsky. His explanation was also drawing on the specificities of Russia's Christianisation process. For Cherniavsky, the firm connection between greatness and humility was a consequence of the symbolic position that Russian rulers occupied in Russia's discursive universe. Cherniavsky argued that "the very concept of State was introduced into Russia as part of the Christian ethos, [i.e.] there was no concept of a secular state in Russia, no concept outside Christianity and its purposes."<sup>77</sup> Therefore, since Christian faith and state were virtually synonymous for the Russian people, any prince attending to state affairs was also automatically a worker for Christ – hence the unusually high number of princes among Russian Orthodox saints.

Such image of the saint-prince "implied an emphasis on and an exaltation of the person of the ruler which merged it with his divine power and office."<sup>78</sup> As a consequence, the Western idea of the separation between the prince's two natures – the divine and the human – was not easily applicable to the Russian political context, where a prince as a person was equally saintly as was his function and office. Instead, there was a duality of a different kind: "a mystical dialectic wherein as a glorious Tsar [every Russian ruler was supposed to seek] monkish humility, and this humility

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Cherniavsky, *Tsar and People*, p. 33.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 34.

in turn exemplified and explained the glory of his leadership.”<sup>79</sup> This symbolic constellation later received its material manifestation in the tradition of a deathbed monachization that many Russian rulers of pre-modern and early modern periods went through.

## 2.7 Uses of greatness in dark times

The synthesis of the ideal of humility as a personal attribute of Russian princes and the ideological function this idea played starting with the cult of Boris and Gleb created an interesting discursive tendency, which seems to have had a long-lasting effect on the Russian great power discourse. Namely, the relative superiority of Rus’ and later Russia was mostly emphasised when its objective political and economic conditions were anything but great. Arguably, the cultural compatibility of complete submission and moral superiority entrenched this discursive construct in Russian political imagination very firmly.

Indeed, throughout the period of the initial rise of ancient Rus’, when its rulers were sometimes on par with the most powerful kings and emperors, which can be attested, among other things, by very prestigious interdynastic marriages,<sup>80</sup> the greatness of the Russian polity (understood as superiority over other polities) was never really emphasised in the domestic discourse. On the contrary, there was always a focus on equality, i.e. on Rus’ belonging to a collective of equal political entities united in religious universalism. For instance, the main theme of the *Sermon on Law and Grace of Metropolitan Ilarion*, written somewhere between 1037 and 1043 is equality of all peoples: “For the blessed faith spread across the whole world and reached our Russian people as well ... All the countries were pardoned by our Blessing God including ours, He desired to save us and so He did, and He led us to the understanding of the Truth.”<sup>81</sup> As Dmitry

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p. 34.

<sup>80</sup> For instance, Vladimir I (978-1015) married Anna Porphyrogenita, the daughter of the Byzantine emperor Romanos II, while Yaroslav the Wise (1016-1054) married a Swedish princess Ingegerd Olofsdotter. Almost all the children from the latter marriage married into the most influential European royal families.

<sup>81</sup> The Library, *Sermon on Law and Grace of Metropolitan Ilarion*.

Likhachev pointed out, the idea of “peoples’ equality sharply contradicts the medieval views about one chosen people, it is the theory of universal empire and universal church.”<sup>82</sup>

Yet, equality was always taking the back seat, when Rus’ was in dire straits. Instead, the producers of discourse often emphasised that their polity was unquestionably superior to its neighbours and always excessively glorified its greatness and might. Further, I illustrate this tendency by looking at political discourse that was produced in the first half of the XIII century, when Rus’ was invaded by Batu Khan, and in the beginning of the XVII century, also known as the Time of Troubles.

The first source in *The Library* that unambiguously points at Rus’ superior political standing, as compared to other Christian and pagan peoples, is *The Story of the Perish of Russian Land*, which was supposedly written between 1238 and 1246, i.e. exactly at the time of Batu Khan’s invasion that was followed by 240 years of Mongol-Tatar yoke. In this *Story*, the large territory, the Orthodox faith, the great Russian princes and warriors, and the abundant resources receive a glorifying praise unseen before.

From here to Ugrians, to Poles, to Czech ... and beyond the Breathing Sea ... – all those territories were conquered by the Christian people with God’s help, those pagan countries were obeying the grand prince Vsevolod, his father Yuri, the grand prince of Kiev, his grandfather Vladimir Monomakh, whose name the Cumans used to scare their little children in cradles. And the Lithuanians did not show their faces from the swaps, and Ugrians fortified the stone walls of their towns with metal gates, so that great Vladimir could not get them, and Germans were happy, since they were far away – beyond the Blue Sea... And the Constantinople’s emperor Manuel sent him great gifts fearing that Vladimir would take Constantinople from him. In those days ... a disaster came upon the Christians...<sup>83</sup>

Originally, *The Story* was supposed to be a foreword to a lay biography of Aleksander Nevsky, but the biography itself was lost. However, in the hagiographical source about the life of Aleksander, written at about the same time, the theme of fear that Aleksander aroused in other peoples was also present, for it was said that, “the women of Moab began to scare their children

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<sup>82</sup> Dmitry Likhachev, “Slovo o zakone i blagodati’ Ilariona [Ilarion’s Sermon on Law and Grace],” in: Dmitry Likhachev, *Izbrannye raboty* [Selected Works], Vol. 2 (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1987), pp. 30-43, <http://likhachev.lfond.spb.ru/Articles/vn3.htm>, accessed 21 September 2018.

<sup>83</sup> The Library, *Slovo o pogibel’i Russkoy zemli* [The Story of the Perish of Russian Land], text prepared translated and commented by L.A. Dmitriev, <http://goo.gl/105O8b>, accessed 5 November 2014.

by saying ‘Aleksander is coming!’”<sup>84</sup> It was also then when folkloric monsters and villains began to resemble and represent highly generalised enemies of the Russians (like Kalin, the epic tsar of Tartars who Russian warrior heroes often fought, or Tugarin, a villain often pictured as a dragon, but also as a warrior recognizably belonging to some nomad tribe). Previously, as Vladimir Propp convincingly argued, villains mostly represented in their looks and behaviour Rus’ own pagan past.<sup>85</sup>

Evidently, those texts, among other things, were supposed to consolidate Russian people around the idea of the truthfulness of Christian faith and the greatness of Rus’ to counter invasions that were occurring both on the eastern and on the western borders of what was believed to be the Russian land. While the outlined examples are only thought-provoking at best, the following point is safe to make: the next occasion when the great power rhetoric flourished in the discourse related to the state-society interaction was the so-called Time of Troubles (1598-1613), which was the period of interregnum. During the Time of Troubles, Rus’ suffered not only a famine that killed about two million people, but also an occupation by the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, a few civil uprisings, and three impostors.

If in the XVI century the idea of Rus’ being (or possessing) *velikaya derzhava* (as a state and/or as power) could be mostly traced in royal diplomatic correspondence, one widely circulating literary work (*Kazan Chronicle*), and a work of historiography (*Book of Royal Degrees*), after the death of Ivan’s unhealthy and, by some reports, intellectually disabled son Fyodor I in 1598, it penetrated practically everywhere. In *The Life of Tsar Fyodor Ivanovich*, written shortly after his death, the author was already experimenting with the laudation of Rus’ to such a degree that it almost became meaningless. In this text, one constantly finds such expressions as ‘great Russia,’ ‘great Russian state’ (*gosudarstvo*), ‘Russia, the great power’ (*velikaya Rossiyskaya derzhava*), ‘great Russian

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<sup>84</sup> The Library, *The Life of Aleksander Nevsky*.

<sup>85</sup> Vladimir Propp, *Russkij geroicheskiy epos* [Russian Heroic Epic] (Moscow: Labirint, 1999), pp. 181-208.



tsardom,’ ‘power, protected by God’ (*bogokhranimaya derzhava*), ‘the greatest sceptre of the Russian tsardom,’ ‘the highest Russian tsardom’ (*prevysochayshee Rossiyskoye tsarstvo*), etc.<sup>86</sup>

Having in mind that the last years of Ivan’s reign, Fyodor’s supervised reign (1584-1598) and a few years of Boris Godunov’s reign (1598-1605), who was Fyodor’s father-in-law and successor, were a period of steady political decline that culminated in the Time of Troubles, it is also interesting to compare the official toasts to tsars’ health that were written specifically for Ivan and Boris. In Ivan’s toast the tsar and his family were very plainly wished good health, military victories, and god’s protection. There was also one interesting and unique passage, which could be interpreted as ‘propaganda’ of loyalty: “Those who wish all well to the tsar, shall be healthy together with him and saved for all eternity. And may the tsar have no ill-wishers – so that everyone would wish him only well.”<sup>87</sup> Yet, in general, the tone of the toast was modest for the occasion – neither the tsar, nor his state or power, were ever called great (except for Ivan’s standard title of a grand prince (*velikiy knyaz*)). Boris’ toast, on the other hand, deserves to be quoted at some length:

Shall Boris Fyodorovich, the great sovereign and the grand prince and the autocrat [*samoderzhets*] of all Russia, as well as the sovereign and possessor of many states, of the great, and the highest, and the lightest, and the most glorious tsaric degree of majesty, who is believing and God-loving, who is chosen by God, honored by God, decorated by God, given by God, crowned by God, and sacred by God, ... be healthy and happy.<sup>88</sup>

Such voluminous title of the opening phrase was followed by an articulation of Rus’ essentially imperial status, “in their glorious great states of the highest Russian tsardom,”<sup>89</sup> then, by the evaluation of its international standing, “and all the great sovereigns shall honour and glorify [Boris] according to his tsaric [i.e. imperial] rank and degree,”<sup>90</sup> and finally – by its aspirations regarding international political hierarchy:

... and may the almighty God elevate the great sovereign Boris ... over all [his] enemies, [may He] extend the great states of the Russian tsardom, [and may He make] all neighbouring sovereigns obedient to the highest degree of [Boris’] majesty, all countries – quake with

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<sup>86</sup> The Library, *The Life of Tsar Fyodor Ivanovich*.

<sup>87</sup> The Library, *Chasbi gosudarevy zaxdravnye* [Toasts for Rulers’ Health], text prepared, translated and commented by L.V. Sokolova, <http://goo.gl/wlrWdx>, accessed 5 November 2014.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

fright, fearing his sword and bravery. And may his royal name be glorified across the Universe.<sup>91</sup>

It becomes evident that the tone of this rhetoric had absolutely nothing to do with the actual political achievements or realities of the day – Boris Godunov was unlucky enough to reign during one of the darkest periods of Russian history. It is, in fact, possible (if this, of course, was not his personal taste for flattery) that it was precisely the depth of political crisis that elevated this rhetoric to the point of becoming absurd. At least, one could argue that this was probably true for another unambiguous attempt of creating an ideology for social mobilization that occurred at the peak of the Time of Troubles – a pamphlet entitled *The New Story of the Glorious Russian Tsardom*.<sup>92</sup>

It is known that the pamphlet was written as a patriotic appeal to the population in reaction to the events of December 1610 – February 1611. The author called for armed resistance against the foreign invaders, as well as the traitors from the Seven Boyars government. *The New Story* was created in the context of gathering *levy en masse* on the eve of Moscow rebellion of March 1611; and it tells the story about the siege of Smolensk. The anonymous author used such expressions as ‘great state’ (*velikoye gosudarstvo*) and ‘our great Russian tsardom’ (*nashe velikoye Rossiyskoye tsarstvo*) in relation to Russia with almost no variation throughout the whole text. Yet, the fact that the author always called Russia ‘great,’ while trying to mobilise people for uprising, is a trivial observation, and it is not even closely as interesting as the way he interpreted the greatness he attributed to the Russian state.

It is worth noting that the word *derzhava* is totally absent from the text. Perhaps, this was because at that time it still preserved the direct connection to the power of the tsar and did not have the ‘state’ as its primary and only meaning. The Time of Troubles witnessed the crisis of succession and general mistrust of the population towards the government. In the text of *The New Story* the author even played with the word *praviteli* (‘rulers’) by transforming it into *kriviteli*

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> The Library, *Novaya povest' o preslavnom Rossiyskom tsarstve* [The New Story of the Glorious Russian Tsardom], text prepared, translated and commented by N.F. Droblenkova, <http://goo.gl/ggM0pX>, accessed 5 November 2014.

(‘crooks’), emphasizing their obvious incapacity to bear the god-given *derzhava*. Such crisis of succession was a common challenge for several European countries. In combination with this crisis, those states also experienced a breakdown of religious universalism. In response, there were two important shifts in European political life. “First, the shift from seeing the king’s body to seeing the territory of his state as the locus of government ... Second, ... from being accepted as an empire in the direction of being accepted as a sovereign state.”<sup>93</sup>

However, in Russia, as can be deduced from *The New Story*, the challenge was not met in a similar fashion. The theme of greatness developed by Ivan IV, as a quality established internally, was not recalibrated from religious universalism to the vision of Russia as a strong and sovereign state within the international hierarchy. Instead, the greatness, which continued to be understood in essentially religious terms, shifted from the figure of the long gone rightful monarch, descending, as it was said, from Augustus himself, to the figure of a new sovereign (perhaps only temporarily) this time embodied in the figure of Patriarch Hermogenes.

It is telling that the author of *The New Story* reiterated several times that Hermogenes, who decisively rejected to cooperate with the Polish-Lithuanian forces regarding the change of faith, should have been perceived as a ‘sovereign’ (*gosudar*). Hermogenes was also depicted as performing a truly sovereign function, embodied in the etymology of the word *derzhava* (from *derzhat*, which means ‘to hold’) – he held the polity together:

And here we have the aforementioned unshakable *pillar* that is standing bravely and steadfastly by its own spirit, not only *holding* the walls of our great city, but also comforting those who live beyond them, and teaches them, and saves them from perishing. Moreover, he pacifies and mortifies this great waterless sea with his words. You see it all yourself! And if it was not for this *sovereign, holding everything*, then who else would stand and counter our enemies bravely?! They would have already, under the pain of punishment, seceded, become dispirited and vanished.<sup>94</sup>

Why the idea of necessary greatness was further ‘orthodoxalised’ in a mobilizing ideology of the Times of Trouble, rather than secularised, as this happened elsewhere, is an intriguing

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<sup>93</sup> Iver B. Neumann, “Russia’s Standing as a Great Power, 1494-1815,” in: Ted Hopf, ed., *Russia’s European Choice* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 16.

<sup>94</sup> The Library, *The New Story of the Glorious Russian Tsardom*, emphasis added.

question. Perhaps, the Orthodox faith was still the most widespread and rooted of potential allegiances, and it was one ideology that simply met the demand, for it resonated with the largest share of the population. The ideals of humility and submission that had interweaved into the Russian understanding of appropriate political order, as well as the noumenal greatness attributed to it, made this ideology intelligible for the masses. As a result, despite its seemingly passive premises, this ideology ensured efficient social mobilization.

## 2.11 Conclusion

In this chapter, I tried to reconstruct the inception and the first stage of the conceptual evolution of *velikaya derzhava*. Having originated in the religious discourse, which largely informed political thinking of ancient and early modern Rus', *derzhava* took up relatively independent existence in the XV century, when its meaning shifted from god's power delegated to a grand prince on earth towards a polity or a state. In the XVI century, *derzhava* merged firmly with the adjective *velikaya* forming a political concept that was supposed to describe qualitative superiority of the Russian polity vis-à-vis its neighbours. Importantly, that superiority was discursively amplified in the face of strategic challenges that the Russian ruling elites were seeing behind their western borders. Responding to challenges, Ivan IV emphasised qualitative superiority of his political domain calling Rus' a great power and self-ascribing the highest degree of majesty to himself. Partially, this reflected his then-current aspirations for an imperial rank and highlighted the fact that the polity Ivan governed was the only remaining stronghold of Orthodox Christianity.

While doing so, however, Ivan did not craft his rhetoric *ex nihilo*. In his argumentation, he was drawing on the available discursive resources. The greatness of Russian *derzhava* that Ivan and his contemporaries tried to discursively establish and promote was largely shaped by the religious discourse from where the concept had emerged originally. In the literary sources and diplomatic correspondence of the time, the labels *velikaya derzhava* or *velikoye tsarstvo* (great tsardom) attached to the Russian polity were supposed to emphasise that the power of Russian princes continued to be interpreted as divinely instituted, unconditional and undivided, in opposition to some European

rulers, who, in the eyes of the Russian ruling elite, may have preserved their power, but lost greatness. I call such essentialist understanding of political greatness (as a quality established internally, without international deliberation and comparison) *noumenal*, i.e. proclaimed to exist independently of perception or verification of any kind. Arguably, noumenal greatness was a product of religious universalism that informed Russian, but also European, politics before the universalist foundation of the European political order was shaken during the early modernity. Recovering and amplifying such essentialist thinking was Ivan's way to deal with strategic challenges. Yet, importantly, it was also the way Russian political and religious actors dealt with crises historically, from the time when the first Russian political ideology – the cult of Boris and Gleb – was utilised by Vladimir II to ensure social cohesion. Analogous ideologies based on the proclamation of noumenal greatness of the Russian land and on a curious amalgam of superiority and submission were also used during other challenging periods of Russian political history, including the Mongol-Tartar yoke and the Time of Troubles.

When it comes to linguistic representation, I would argue that, once *derzhava* turned into a compound noun, its constituent parts divided its semantic content. The word *derzhava* preserved the immanent and performative dimension of political power associated with undivided government. Translated literally, this word may also mean 'holding something together', and the Russian polity was this something that a ruler was supposed to hold (during the Time of Troubles, this important function was temporarily transferred to Patriarch Hermogenes). On the other hand, the characteristic *velikaya*, attached to the political domain that a grand prince or tsar oversaw, pointed at what was referred to in Russian by a cognate word *velichestvo* meaning 'majesty', i.e. ordination as opposed to execution, or kingdom as opposed to government. In other words, Russian political greatness was mostly invested into its majesty, which was interpreted in noumenal terms, as some objective truth that required (and stood) no scrutiny or verification.

## CHAPTER 3 – FROM MAJESTY TO GLORY: THE GREAT TRANSFORMATION

### 3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I tried to demonstrate that, having its roots in theology, the concept *derzhava* always contained an element of greatness in premodern Rus'. *Derzhava* was recognised as an attribute of an earthly ruler only insofar as the ruler himself was a transmission link for the Christian god to be able to exercise his divine power over people. Such attribute was god's endowment, and hence, such power was unlimited, nonrelative, all-pervasive, supreme, undivided, transcendental, and *always* great – by virtue of its attachment to the celestial absolute. Of course, supreme political power was conceptualised quite similarly in the overwhelming majority of medieval political doctrines.

The fact that in pre-modern and early modern Russia *derzhava* was a god's attribute implies that it could be associated with the tsaric office, but never with the tsar himself. More precisely, *derzhava* was never an exclusive property of any given monarch. It is true, of course, that in Russia the ruler as 'body natural' was always much more important than in other European political regimes simply because the prince and the faith "were the main if not the only expressions of the Russian State and its continuity both during the Kievan and the Tatar periods."<sup>1</sup> Hence, each prince as a person was considered saintly and ascribed monastic qualities of being pious and humble. Yet, in this position, the prince remained a mediator between man and god, both "in life as a prince [and] after his death as a saint."<sup>2</sup> A ruler possessing *derzhava* was like a master of the private household exercising power that was complete and undivided. However, although he possessed full *potestas*, i.e. power through force, his *auctoritas*, or power through authority, depended crucially on the Orthodox Church. Church hierarchs endowed the tsaric office with *majesty*, or true greatness, mostly through symbolic services they provided.

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<sup>1</sup> Cherniavsky, *Tsar and People*, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 33.

This arrangement was akin to Byzantine *symphony*, i.e. the separation of the supreme power between the tsar and the patriarch. The former had an exclusive mandate for government, while the latter represented majestic authority. And so long as the internal political order was organised along those lines, the regime was perceived as majestic, i.e. truly great, with no external recognition necessary to attest that. Hence, for example, some Russian tsars could openly reject the offers of inclusion into the European political hierarchy through an official recognition of equivalence of the Russian royal title with European analogs, for that title was treated as god's endowment, not as a systemically defined status. The Russian version of symphony also made it impossible to glorify the monarch by comparing him to a deity. It would have been perceived as a clear blasphemy, since the supreme power was not fully invested in the figure of one tsar.

However, by the time of Peter the Great (1682-1725), a notable change occurred in the Russian great power discourse. The idea that Russia was a great polity certainly remained in place, but also it started to manifest itself in the form of panegyric literature and sermons that sang glory to the monarch personally, comparing him (and subsequently her) to a living deity. In Cherniavsky's words, "The saintly prince, Christlike in his being, became the godlike Tsar."<sup>3</sup> Such a comparison would have been unthinkable in the XVI century. The XVII and XVIII centuries were also the time when European travellers started to notice and report that Russian people treated their tsar almost as a divinity.<sup>4</sup> Evidently, the Russian monarch started to be attributed with personal charisma and mystical significance, and the majesty of Russian *derzhava* previously associated with the Orthodox Church turned into glory attributed to the monarch, which was manifesting itself through panegyric appraisals coming from both clerical and secular authors.

In this chapter, I will trace the discursive shift from majesty to glory and, correspondingly, from *noumenal* to *phenomenal* understanding of political greatness that occurred in the XVII century.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 78.

<sup>4</sup> Boris Uspenskij and Viktor Zhivov, "Tsar and God," in: Boris Uspenskij and Viktor Zhivov, *'Tsar and God' and Other Essays in Russian Cultural Semiotics*, translated and edited by Marcus C. Levitt (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2012), pp. 1-112.

Phenomenal greatness depended heavily on appearance and political performance. It lacked universal foundations and acquired force through its own discursive enactment. For that significant shift to occur, a lot should have happened to Russia's domestic political organization and its mode of government. In that regard, the XVII century was a crucial period. Hence, in this chapter, I abstain from giving a full exposition of how phenomenal greatness operated during Peter's reign – I leave this task for the next chapter. Instead, I try to reconstruct the preceding and all-encompassing discursive transformation by looking at the dynamics of two interrelated processes which characterised Russian political and intellectual evolution in the XVII century.

First, I elaborate the logic behind the gradual discursive sacralisation of the Russian monarch, which did away with the dichotomous distribution of the two elements of supreme power – majesty and government – between two different offices. Second, I trace the change in the monarch's status that accompanied the abovementioned process. I argue that this fundamental change was triggered by the dynamics of interaction between the tsaric and the patriarch's offices during the Time of Troubles. Namely, it started when the symbolic border between the state and the church was breached by the latter to fill in the lacuna of legitimate sovereign power. By representing transcendental majesty of the Russian monarch, the patriarchs of the early XVII century also symbolically assumed the performative dimension of the state power, following the dynastic crisis which started in 1598.

During the Schism initiated by Patriarch Nikon in 1653, Russian Orthodox Church attempted to reinstate the border between itself and the state by insisting on its complete independence and full authority. However, the popular exodus from the official religious sphere which followed Nikon's unpopular reforms forced the clerical hierarchy to delegate repressive functions (e.g. the persecution of heretics) to the mighty state, which gradually *de facto* obtained full authority over both spiritual and earthly matters. The new status was subsequently institutionalised by Peter I, and the church became a mere branch of state government, while the function of the head of the church, previously bestowed to the patriarch, was fully appropriated by the monarch.



In the forthcoming reconstruction, I also demonstrate how the idea of appropriate government got firmly linked to autocracy in the Russian discursive universe. For this end, I elaborate on three discursive manifestations of this link: (1) the semantic evolution of the Russian term meaning ‘autocrat’, (2) the argument presenting autocracy as a Russian public good, and (3) the considerations on the appropriate regime of government for the kind of state-church and state-society relations that crystallised in XVII-century Russia.

### 3.2 Greatness and autocracy

A curious interlinking of autocracy and greatness can already be traced in the XVI century in the evolution of the Russian term *samoderzhets* (which appears as a calque of the Greek word *αυτοκρατορ*, meaning ‘autocrat’). As a Russian ‘State School’ historian Vasily Klyuchevsky pointed out, initially, when in the XV century the word *samoderzhets* was first introduced into the title of Moscow’s grand prince Ivan III (the first Russian ruler since XIII century who was called ‘Great’), it “was characterizing not internal political relations, but external position of the Muscovite prince: it was used to indicate a ruler, who was independent of external, foreign authority”<sup>5</sup> – in that case, the Golden Horde. Thus, Ivan III was ‘Great’ in the sense that he *de facto* achieved the independence of Russian polity and gathered a great deal of Russian lands under his control. As the author of *Kazan Chronicle* put this, “And he established his great power [*velikuyu vlast*] over the Russian polity [*derzhavoy*] and, since then, started to call himself grand autocratic [*samoderzhavnym*] prince of Moscow.”<sup>6</sup> Klyuchevsky argued that initially the opposite of *samoderzhets* was ‘vassal’, not ‘constitutional monarch’. However, just like for his grandson later, for Ivan III such independence did not need to be validated by its external recognition. Instead, it was believed to be established from within a polity by god’s ‘enthronement.’ That is why when in 1489 the ambassador of the

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<sup>5</sup> Vasily Klyuchevsky, *Boyarskaya дума Древней Руси* [Boyar Duma in Ancient Russia] (Moscow: Sinodal’naya tipografiya, 1902), p. 248.

<sup>6</sup> The Library, *Kazan Chronicle*.

Holy Roman Empire, Nikolai Poppel, proposed that Ivan III accepted the title of a king, Ivan famously responded

Regarding what you said about kingdom, we are, by the grace of god, the rulers in our land from the beginning, from the first of our ancestors; our ancestors and we alike were enthroned<sup>7</sup> by god. We beg the Lord that he let us and our children be like that forever, like we are now – rulers in our land, *and just like we never wanted to receive enthronement from anyone else, we do not want this today either.*<sup>8</sup>

While such vision of Russia's sovereignty as not requiring anyone's recognition remained relevant for Ivan IV,<sup>9</sup> in the time of the latter the title *samoderzhets* also acquired a slightly modified meaning. In the XVI century, when the greatness of the Russian polity was emphasised and brought to the fore through the expression *velikaya derzhava*, *samoderzhets* began to signify a ruler with absolute power, unlimited by either nobility, or priests. This was the vision of the term that Ivan the Formidable promoted in his debate with Andrey Kurbsky,<sup>10</sup> when he responded to his former associate's criticism by asking "why then is one called an autocrat [*samoderzhets*], if he does not rule single-handedly [*sam*]?"<sup>11</sup> Here one could already see Ivan's conscious deliberation on the problem of government, as opposed to mere independence and sovereignty. As a result of such deliberation, Ivan came up with a discursive construct which presented him as god's vicar on earth having a status which was transcendent in relation to Russian politics and law.

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<sup>7</sup> Ivan uses the word *postavlenie* – a term which today remains in use only in clerical circles and means 'enthronement' of bishops and metropolitans. What is more, according to Nikolai Afanasiev, "In the Church, life, activity and service are only possible on the basis of blessed gifts... That is why ... enthronement for service is neither an appointment, nor an assignation – it is a blessed act by which God sends down gifts of the Spirit for the service in the Church." Hence its greater dependence on divinity rather than formal recognition. See Nikolai Afanasiev, *Ekklesiologiya vstupleniya v klir* [Ecclesiology of Clerical Initiation], <http://goo.gl/I6vQo0>, accessed 11 June 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Vasily Klyuchevsky, *Kurs russkoy istorii* [Russian History Course], <http://goo.gl/8UHL0d>, accessed 11 June 2015, emphasis added.

<sup>9</sup> Klyuchevsky noted, "just like his grandfather, tsar Ivan [IV] in a conversation with Polish-Lithuanian ambassadors said that ... [his] rights are given to him by god and do not require anyone's recognition." See: Klyuchevsky, *Russian History Course*.

<sup>10</sup> There has been a long debate about the authenticity of this correspondence. Yet, no crushing evidence has been provided by either side. For details, see: Charles J. Halperin, "Edward Keenan and the Kurbskii-Groznyi Correspondence in Hindsight," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Neue Folge, Bd. 46, H. 3 (1998): 376-403; and Edward L. Keenan, "Response to Halperin, 'Edward Keenan and the Kurbskii-Groznyi Correspondence in Hindsight,'" *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Neue Folge, Bd. 46, H. 3 (1998): 404-415.

<sup>11</sup> Ivan IV, *Pervoye poslanie Ivana Groznogo Kurbskomu* [The First Letter of Ivan the Formidable to Kurbsky], text preparation by E.I. Vaneeva and Ya.S. Lurye, translation by Ya.S. Lurye and O.V. Tvorogov, comments by Ya. S. Lurye, <http://goo.gl/WFkIAG>, accessed 11 June 2015.

### 3.3 Sacralising the monarch

According to Boris Uspenskij and Viktor Zhivov, it was also with Ivan IV when Russian tsars started to gradually emphasise their special charisma and sacred nature, as special god-chosen persons.<sup>12</sup> While it is debatable to what extent Ivan's belief in his virtually unlimited powers and unaccountability corresponding to his special charismatic status was shared by the population at large (it was certainly not shared by some of his close associates like Kurbsky), this practice did create some prerequisites for further sacralisation of Russian monarchs. Analysing early XVII-century sources, Uspenskij and Zhivov document an important change in the use of the Russian title *tsar*, which mainly occurred during the Time of Troubles and in its immediate aftermath. Borrowed from Byzantium, where it was mainly associated with the imperial tradition and used to describe the office of supreme ruler (basileus as an heir to Roman emperors), the Russian title 'tsar' was also firmly embedded in the religious tradition, where it signified one of god's names (god as the tsar of the world). However, initially, homonyms could be distinguished in writing through the presence of a special abbreviation mark (*titlo*), which was always used to indicate sacred words. Yet, later this mark also began to be used for writing the titles of pious earthly tsars, which meant that pious tsars were effectively included into religious tradition and attributed special divine charisma.<sup>13</sup>

Hence, appropriated by the Russian discourse, this title, when applied to a living person, generated some mystical connotation. In this context, it was not surprising that during the Time of Troubles the formerly relevant opposition between just and unjust ruler (and whether a ruler was just could be established by looking at his deeds) gave way to the new opposition between true and false tsar (which was not subject to rational judgment, for the only difference would be the agent of enthronement – god or devil – and this one could never confidently tell). The latter shift triggered a well-known sequence of impostors in the beginning of the XVII century.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Uspenskij and Zhivov, "Tsar and God," pp. 7-8.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, pp. 10-11.

Yet, this was still only the beginning of the long process that would come to its completion only during Peter the Great, who became the official head of the church, whose personal divine charisma became an established fact, and who was compared in panegyric literature to neither more nor less than Jesus Christ himself (and correspondingly, he was condemned by the marginalised opposition as Antichrist). Although both Boris Godunov (1598-1605) and Aleksey Mikhailovich (1645-1676) developed a predilection towards placing their portraits in the contexts, which could have indicated their claim for holiness (e.g. on a fresco, or inside the bible), this practice still faced significant opposition from the official church, and, in case of Aleksey, from old believers.<sup>15</sup> Quite expectedly, the most adamant critic was Patriarch Nikon, who urged Aleksey to “learn not to prescribe Divine glory prophesied by prophets and apostles to ourselves,” and insisted that “the depiction of the tsar on an eagle and on a horse [was] indeed pride, ascribing to him prophesies prophesied about Christ.”<sup>16</sup> Similarly, archpriest Avvakum, the loudest voice of the old believers, reacted to the emerging practice of calling the tsar holy during church service by invoking the Old Testament “it is unheard of at any time that someone order himself to be called holy to his face, apart perhaps from Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon!”<sup>17</sup> However, a somewhat mixed position in relation to his personal charisma could be found in the letters of Aleksey himself, especially when in 1661 he described himself as “faithful and sinful slave of Christ ... seated on the tsar’s throne of this transient world and preserving ... the sceptre of the Russian kingdom and its borders by God’s will, the perishable Tsar Aleksei.”<sup>18</sup> That is, as becomes clear from this quotation, it was rather the tsar’s throne and the sceptre (i.e. the office of supreme power) that Aleksey ascribed the majestic status to, and not to himself as ‘the perishable Tsar.’

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>16</sup> Patriarch Nikon cited in Uspenskij and Zhivov, “Tsar and God,” p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 23.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

### 3.4 The troubles start

The end of the Rurikid dynasty in 1598 was a serious blow for the then-dominant understanding of supreme power in Russia. Given the emergence of the abovementioned problem of true vs. false tsar, unamenable to rational judgment and no longer resolvable through lineal descent, early-seventeenth-century Russia witnessed a severe succession crisis. This crisis became a bifurcation point in the evolution of the Russian political order. Divine sovereignty, previously invested in the tsaric office and the figure of the tsar as god's vicar for governing earthly affairs needed, even if temporarily, to try out alternative vessels – from proto-oligarchs (Seven Boyars government), to the church elite (Patriarchs Hermogenes and Philaret), to the people (Minin and Pozharsky's militia). Below, I try to reconstruct some of the stages of this bifurcation.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, in *The New Story of the Glorious Russian Tsardom* (1611), the idea of the state, formerly understood as a domain of a particular grand prince, was partially appropriated by the people of the “Great state [*velikoye gosudarstvo*] of Muscovy.”<sup>19</sup> Prior to going any further, it is important to note that the Russian word *gosudarstvo* (which currently means ‘state’) first appeared in the middle of XV century. Yet, back then, it meant something entirely different. As pointed out by Mikhail Krom, when in the 1470s Ivan III asked the citizens of Novgorod – a formerly independent Russian city which he subjected to his control – which *gosudarstvo* they wanted to have over them, this word only referred to the individual power of the prince, as well as a corresponding political regime.<sup>20</sup> Hence, when Novgorodians begged Ivan to spare the city, he could reply,

If [you] admit your fault and now ask yourself, which *gosudarstvo* will be established ... in Novgorod, then we want our *gosudarstvo* in Novgorod to be like in Moscow. And our grand-princely *gosudarstvo* is such that your assembly bell [*vechevoy kolokol*]<sup>21</sup> will be no more; your mayor [*posadnik*] will be no more, and our *gosudarstvo* will be held like we have it [in Moscow].<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The Library, *The New Story of the Glorious Russian Tsardom*.

<sup>20</sup> Mikhail Krom, “Genealogiya russkogo patriotizma [Genealogy of Russian Patriotism],” *Arzamas*, <http://arzamas.academy/courses/3>, accessed 11 June 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Assembly Bell was used in Novgorod to call its citizens for general assemblies. It is often considered to be a symbol of Novgorodian democratic tradition.

<sup>22</sup> Aleksandr Sharymov, *Predystoriya Sankt-Peterburga*, Vol. 1, <http://goo.gl/FHlhRR>, accessed 11 June 2015.

Corrected for Ivan's majestic plural, *gosudarstvo* in the above quote is, first and foremost, 'my *gosudarstvo*', i.e. 'my power' and 'my regime'.<sup>23</sup>

Yet, already in *The New Story of the Glorious Russian Tsardom*,<sup>24</sup> which was written as a patriotic appeal to the population in reaction to the events of December 1610 – February 1611, the author refers to Muscovy almost exclusively as 'our Great *gosudarstvo*' as in

Ill-natured and cruel assailant-king ... and those who were before him, his own brothers ... for a long time ... are thinking how to abduct our Great state [*gosudarstvo*], eradicate Christian faith and establish theirs, which is unholy.<sup>25</sup>

Having analysed this change, Krom rightfully noted that the moment when Minin and Pozharsky's militia besiege Moscow and eventually force the Polish-Lithuanian army to retreat was crucially important for the birth of Russian national consciousness.<sup>26</sup>

### 3.5 Whose sovereignty?

It seems, given the scale of popular mobilization, the people could have become an alternative locus of sovereignty, just like this happened later in the US. The opening appeal of *The New Story* strongly suggests that this could have been the genesis of the idea of a patriotic society,

To the Orthodox Christians of the mother of cities of the Russian Tsardom, the prominent and Great state – to people of all ranks, who still have not turned their souls away from God, and from the Orthodox faith, and have not fallen into misbelief, but hold to piety, and have not given themselves up to the enemies, and have not been seduced by their unholy faith, but are ready to shed their blood for our Orthodox faith.<sup>27</sup>

Yet, the picture becomes quite different, if one looks at other contemporaneous sources. For instance, Ivan Khvorostinin's *Words of the Days, and Tsars, and Holy Hierarchs of Moscow* in the overwhelming majority of cases described the people as a passive object of deceit and

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<sup>23</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the concept's evolution and its equivalence in the XV century to the Latin concept *dominio* see Kharkhordin, "What Is the State? The Russian Concept of *Gosudarstvo* in the European Context".

<sup>24</sup> This source is notably absent both from Kharkhordin's analysis and from Stephanie Ortmann's work (see Stephanie Ortmann, *Re-imagining Westphalia: Identity in IR and the Discursive Construction of the Russian State*, PhD thesis [London School of Economics and Political Science, 2007]). This omission made both authors conclude that it was only in the time of Peter the Great (save for singular occasions during Peter's father's rule) when the concept *gosudarstvo* started to be used to signify something separate from tsar's personal domain. In fact, already in 1612, some used this concept to designate something completely detached from the figure of the sovereign.

<sup>25</sup> The Library, *The New Story of the Glorious Russian Tsardom*.

<sup>26</sup> Krom, *Genealogy of Russian Patriotism*.

<sup>27</sup> The Library, *The New Story of the Glorious Russian Tsardom*.

manipulation.<sup>28</sup> Instead of actively embodying and defending the idea of the Russian land, they were mostly being “pastured,” “dazzled,” “offended,” “patronised,” “killed,” “enlightened,” “aroused,” “attacked,” “saved,” etc., and only occasionally they “ganged up” together or “banished” someone.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, *Pskov Chronicle of the Time of Troubles*, a reconstruction of the political turbulence coming from the most independent and self-sufficient political actor of the time, the people were mostly presented as a disjointed, quarrelsome and “pusillanimous” crowd that was being “agitated,” “seduced,” “captured,” “stoned and burnt,” “robbed,” “tortured,” and that was even called “raving mad [*buyno pomesbannye*].”<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, although one does witness some partial reinterpretation of people’s role in *The New Story*, both Khvorostinin’s work and *Pskov Chronicle* bear no trace of any meaningful political intervention from the people’s side. Thus, the structure of the XVII-century discourse was not yet conducive to fully replanting the idea of the state from sovereign’s divine power to either territory or people.<sup>31</sup> It would also be incorrect to think that the idea of political order entirely loses its transcendental component and begins to be conceived as established from within the community. As I argued in the previous chapter, Russia did not externalise the idea of greatness (as might have been the case with Sweden and some other European polities).<sup>32</sup> ‘Great’ in ‘our Great *gosudarstvo*’, as can be deduced from both long quotes above, was a characteristic which continued to be understood in essentially religious terms.

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<sup>28</sup> Historians believe that Khvorostinin wrote this partially autobiographic account of the Time of Troubles as an apology and a manifest of his own allegiance to the Orthodox Church. This allegiance was questioned by the authorities, when, in 1623, Khvorostinin was accused of having sympathy towards Catholicism and exiled to a monastery. This partially explains a very favourable representation of Patriarch Hermogenes. Yet, what remains interesting is the author’s use of grammatical categories, such as passive voice, in his representation of the people, as well as his choice of vocabulary for representing the patriarch’s sovereign function.

<sup>29</sup> Ivan Khvorostinin, *Slovesa deny, i tsarey, i svyatiteley moskovskikh* [Words of the Days, and Tsars, and Holy Hierarchs of Moscow], text preparation, translation and comments by E.P. Semenova, translation by D.M. Bulanin, <http://goo.gl/iUTASf>, accessed 11 June 2015.

<sup>30</sup> The Library, *Pskovskaya letopisnaya povest’ o Smutnom vremeni* [Pskov Chronicle of the Time of Troubles], text prepared, translated and commented by V.I. Okhotnikova, <http://goo.gl/mpNC36>, accessed 1 October 2015.

<sup>31</sup> Iver Neumann comes to a similar conclusion about the locus of government in Neumann, “Russia’s Standing as a Great Power, 1494-1815”.

<sup>32</sup> Ringmar, *Identity, Interest and Action*, pp. 145-186.

Hence the crucial importance of the figure of Patriarch Hermogenes in *The New Story*, which, unlike Khvorostinin's *Words of the Days...*, was not preoccupied with proving the knowledge of or allegiance to one or another ecclesiastic circle. Through the pamphletic language of *The New Story*, the patriarch began to embody the idea of sovereignty. As a symbol of patriotic movement, Hermogenes was referred to as 'gosudar' and 'father of fathers' [*otets ottsov*]. It is telling that the former of these titles with the addition of the word 'great' (*velikiy gosudar*) – a traditional royal title – was subsequently shared by the crowned tsars of the new Romanov dynasty and their first patriarchs.<sup>33</sup> The later title in a slightly modified version ('father of fatherland' [*otets otechestva*]) was given to Peter the Great together with the title of Emperor in 1721, i.e. in the same year when he established the Most Holy Synod, which effectively subjected the Russian Orthodox Church to secular authorities.

### 3.6 Patriarch as a sovereign

The transmission of the locus of sovereignty to Hermogenes in the *The New Story* was an ambiguous, but important political move, which was crucial for the process I am trying to trace here – the appropriation of the spiritual power by the state. That is, this transfer of political sovereignty to Hermogenes represented the inverse operation, which uncovered the existing contiguity between the spiritual and the earthly powers and opened a general possibility of spill-overs and substitutions – the possibility that Patriarch Nikon was persistently, yet unsuccessfully, trying to close during the Schism. In the beginning of XVII century, the figure of the Russian patriarch was filling in the gap of the transcendental authority by virtue of being previously adjacent to it. Later, when the whole experience of the Time of Troubles was being digested and interpreted in the literature, one could see that this metonymic sequence was extended to connect the two dynasties (Rurikids and Romanovs), while the newly established order was essentialised in the ascription of the royal title to the first patriarchs. The same Khvorostinin, a contemporary of

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<sup>33</sup> The Library, *The New Story of the Glorious Russian Tsardom*.



Hermogenes and the first Romanovs, told his reader that Hermogenes, “the guardian of justice” and “the true shepherd,” chose to send Philaret (the future Patriarch and the father of Mikhail Romanov) to negotiate with the Polish king. In Khvorostinin’s interpretation, Hermogenes’ choice was conditioned by the fact that Philaret “came from the lineage of the former glorious tsars [and] through this union with them he was *endued with a part* of their authority.”<sup>34</sup>

In popular discourse, the figure of Philaret interpreted as a legitimiser of the new tsar is also of great importance. For example, one of the songs written down in Moscow in 1619-1620 for an Englishman Richard James<sup>35</sup> described Philaret’s return to Moscow from the Polish-Lithuanian captivity in the following manner,

Rejoice the tsardom of Moscow  
and the whole of Holy Russian land:  
*gosudar’*, orthodox tsar,  
grand prince Mikhail Fyodorovich entreated.  
‘They say, the father arrived  
*gosudar’* Philaret Mikitich  
from unholy Lithuanian land...  
It is not the red sun  
rolling from the glorious city of white-stone Moscow,  
it is *gosudar’*, orthodox tsar coming  
to meet his father,  
*gosudar’* Philaret Mikitich...<sup>36</sup>

The scene of popular joy was then followed by a warm welcome between the father and the son. In the end, the Patriarch blessed the new tsar:

He blessed his beloved child:  
“May God give health to the orthodox tsar,  
grand prince Mikhail Fyodorovich,  
and strength to rule Moscow tsardom,

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<sup>34</sup> Khvorostinin, *Words of the Days, and Tsars, and Holy Hierarchs of Moscow*.

<sup>35</sup> Richard James was a chaplain to the embassy sent by James I in 1618 (Cherniavsky, *Tsar and People*, p. 112).

<sup>36</sup> The Library, *Pesni, zapisannye dlya Richarda Dzheymisa v 1619-1620 gg.* [Songs recorded for Richard James in 1619-1620], <http://goo.gl/qM20UJ>, accessed 11 June 2015.

and the whole of Holy Russian land.”<sup>37</sup>

Such interpretation of the continuity of Russian statehood through the patriarchal lineage (and hence, the remaining embeddedness of the idea of political order into religious discourse) is also visible in the ‘Millennium of Russia’ monument (fragment in Picture 1) erected in 1862 in Novgorod. The sculptor depicts Hermogenes (left), Philaret (right) and young Mikhail Romanov (centre) using a peculiar composition, in which the first is choosing and guarding, the second is guiding and counselling, and the third, confused and inexperienced, is merely sitting on the throne holding an orb (*derzhava*).



Picture 1. Hermogenes, Mikhail Romanov and Philaret on the Millennium of Russia monument (Source: wikipedia.org)

Consequently, given the critical importance of Hermogenes as a bearer of sovereignty both in *The New Story*

and in *Words of the Days*, it would be fair to conclude that, after the Time of Troubles, the Russian political discourse was slightly restructured in such a way that the idea of greatness, without being radically modified, was preserved in its transcendent form through the hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Khvorostinin’s opus is a unique monument also because it reveals the controversy of the aforementioned substitution. Hermogenes was criticised by some boyars, who participated in the elections of the next tsar, precisely for taking up a function of propaganda and encouragement of popular struggle, which was *unnatural* for his holy rank. Khvorostinin understood potential validity of such accusations and, despite the overall favourable representation of the patriarch, mentioned sceptical opinions about Hermogenes, admitted his own doubts, and reported asking bishop

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<sup>37</sup> The Library, *Songs recorded for Richard James in 1619-1620*.

Theodoret “whether [Hermogenes], in fact, might have pulled down the people and aroused militia army for his own doom?”<sup>38</sup> Yet, it is precisely after this question and after Theodoret showed Khvorostinin a letter written by Hermogenes himself – presumably, to dispel the author’s doubts about Hermogenes’ righteousness – that the text is interrupted in three copies of the manuscript out of four copies that survived (the fourth one interrupts even earlier). Thus, the content of Hermogenes’ address remains unknown. Yet, the sole fact of this interruption may point at one interesting tension: however successful the popular mobilization around the figure of Hermogenes as the patriotic hero and the embodiment of sovereignty and greatness may have been, the role of the Orthodox Church as a leader of an essentially political process was perceived debatable already in XVII century.<sup>39</sup>

During the Schism, initiated by Patriarch Nikon in the middle of the XVII century, the tripartite confrontation between church hierarchs, schismatics (representing large groups of Russian population) and the tsar broke into the open. This clash is what I will return to in due time. The first signs of this debate, however, can be traced by looking at the literature which described and interpreted the 1613 Assembly of the Land (*Zemskiy Sobor*), at which the new Russian tsar was elected.

### 3.7 The end of troubles

The first Assembly of the Land was called by Ivan IV in 1549 to discuss the issues related to the new law code and the reform of tsar’s informal government – *Izbrannaya rada*. It is still up to debate what social factors conditioned the creation of this new political body, and to what extent *Zemskiy Sobor* was comparable to representative organs in Western Europe,<sup>40</sup> yet one could confidently state that by 1613 it developed into an institution. As a matter of fact, in the beginning of the XVII century this institution became established so soundly that it first functioned as a

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<sup>38</sup> Khvorostinin, *Words of the Days, and Tsars, and Holy Hierarchs of Moscom*.

<sup>39</sup> All the surviving copies of Khvorostinin’s story are dated by the end of XVII century.

<sup>40</sup> A good discussion of this can be found in Vasily Klyuchevsky, *Sostan predstavitel’sstva na zemskikh soborakh Drevney Rusi* [The Structure of Representation in Ancient Russian Assemblies of the Land], <http://goo.gl/FQZ45C>, accessed 11 June 2015.

natural legitimizing organ for all frequently changing monarchs of the Time of Troubles; then, between 1610 and 1613, it turned into a body holding the supreme power (both legislative and executive) and governed domestic and foreign affairs; and finally, starting from 1613, after *Zemskiy Sobor* elected the new monarch, it remained active almost uninterruptedly until 1622 as the main deliberative body counselling the new tsar.

Despite the important role of the clergy in the operation of *Zemskiy Sobor*, the sole term *Zemskiy* (from *zemlya*, meaning ‘land’) initially emerged as an opposition to *Holy Sobor* (i.e. the Orthodox Church Assembly). As such, *Zemskiy Sobor* is often, quite justly, looked at as the genesis of the idea of secular government. Such, for instance, was Boris Meleshko’s interpretation of it.<sup>41</sup> In fact, he went even further and claimed that *Zemskiy Sobor* was nothing less than the institutionalization of “democratic tradition at the state level.”<sup>42</sup> Even though Meleshko remained sensitive to the context of the time, in which “enthronement of a new tsar [was] only thinkable as an act of Providence,” and “monarchy, as deisis of one citizen in front of God for all the others, [was] thought as the only possible option of societal political order,” he, nevertheless, suggested that already then “tsar’s and patriarch’s power could not be extra-legal, [and] should have been exercised in accordance with people’s will.”<sup>43</sup> Meleshko argued that the Russian people “were convinced that both in the state and in the church autocracy had to be combined with communalism [*sobornost*] in accordance with the formula ‘power to the ruler, opinion to the people’.”<sup>44</sup>

There is, however, an evident confusion in the above judgment. While it is certainly true that the popular perception of legitimacy must somehow be accounted for in the establishment of any political order (recall, for instance, the thesis that any successful ideology must resonate with what the masses deem right), it is erroneous to believe that in XVII-century Russia the people

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<sup>41</sup> Boris Meleshko, “Chudo zemskogo sobora [The Miracle of the Assembly of the Land],” *Novaya gazeta*, No. 22, 27 February 2013.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

represented a monolithic political force aiming to limit rulers' absolute power, or even that *most of* the people did. The history of Russia's XVII and XVIII centuries, in fact, often confirmed the opposite – that although there certainly had been many attempts on the part of some educated nobility to appropriate the idea of limited monarchy and implement it in Russia, it was not the monarchs, but precisely the popular classes who often prevented the latter from happening.

### 3.8 Representative absolutism

Needless to say, popular attachment to the figure of absolute sovereign had nothing to do with Russians' natural inclination towards submission or slavery. Rather this may have been the case, because in the contemporaneous discursive structure the figure of an absolute monarch was represented as a guarantee of some sort of justice and, quite paradoxically, equality, while a prototype of an oligarchic republic that could have emerged, had the absolute power of the monarch been limited, was perceived as exploitative and unjust.

That is, an absolute monarch was seen as a protector of the masses against corrupt and selfish elites. Klyuchevsky understood this very well when he insisted that the Time of Troubles uncovered “a mismatch between boyars' aspirations and claims regarding the nature of supreme power, and popular vision of it: boyars wanted to put chains on the supreme power, which got accustomed to think of itself as unlimited and which *had to be unlimited* in people's eyes.”<sup>45</sup> Perhaps, the most lucid illustration of this principle was given by a Russian statesman of the XVIII and XIX centuries Dmitry Troshchinsky. In his Note on Ministries, Troshchinsky described and justified Peter I's administrative reform and argued that due to the peculiarities of Russian historical development, in terms of political influence and institutions, there formed only two classes in Russia: the ruling and the ruled. What is more, he attested that there was no possibility for the later to impact the actions of the former (even through the limited amount of rights and privileges guaranteed by law), save for an outright rebellion. Troshchinsky concluded that,

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<sup>45</sup> Vasily Klyuchevsky, *Kratkiy kurs po russkoy istorii* [The Short Course in Russian History] (Prospekt, 2013), <http://goo.gl/BRoJK6>, accessed 11 June 2015, emphasis added.

given such internal political situation in Russia, when all the statesmen are hierarchically subordinated to their superiors, and when the people's power, centred as it was in one class, accumulates in the hands of a small group of higher superiors, the rule would have been utterly oligarchic, if it was not for the Sovereign (*Gosudar*), who is entrusted with the protection of the state from external enemies and with patronage over private individuals aimed at protecting them from assaults internally.<sup>46</sup>

Troshchinsky argued that such political situation demanded the attribution of unlimited power to the monarch,

That is why Russia's Sovereign (*Gosudar*) must connect in its single person all those powers, which are divided across different classes constituting the state in moderate monarchies. That is why Russia's Sovereign must not only be the head of the government, but also be the only representative of the people, which, given its position, cannot have any other representative, except him.<sup>47</sup>

Institutionally, such practice was reflected in "the age-old right of any Russian subject to present petitions to the sovereign,"<sup>48</sup> which existed until 1767. But the corresponding popular perception of such sovereign's role was also obvious in the literature: e.g. in *The Story of 1613 Assembly of the Land*, a source discovered quite recently, long after Klyuchevsky's and Troshchinsky's deaths.<sup>49</sup> Describing the events of 1613, the author of *The Story* reveals that the Assembly was held, while a great number of Cossacks from Minin and Pozharsky's militia were still stationed in Moscow. Furthermore, every other sizable force that could balance this large army had left the city. Consequently, Cossacks could roam the streets of Moscow in large groups, armed and unrestrained by anyone's authority. In such circumstances, based on the author's recollection, boyars "did not dare speak with them and, when encountering them in the street, a boyar would give them a bow and turn in another direction."<sup>50</sup> The main reason for Cossacks to stay was that

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<sup>46</sup> Dmitry Troshchinsky, "Zapiska Dmitriya Prokofevicha Troshchinskago o ministerstvakh [Dmitry Prokofevich Troshchinsky's Note on Ministries]," in A.A. Polovtsev, ed., *Sbornik Russkago Istoricheskago Obshchestva* [Journal of Russian Historical Society], Vol. 3 (Saint Petersburg: Tipografiya Imperatorskoy Akademii Nauk, 1868), p. 56.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 56.

<sup>48</sup> Geoffrey Hosking, "Patronage and the Russian State," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 78, No. 2 (April, 2000): 309.

<sup>49</sup> Voprosy Istorii, "Povest' o zemskom sobore 1613 goda [The Story of the 1613 Assembly of the Land]," text prepared by A.L. Stanislavsky and B.N. Morozov, *Voprosy istorii*, No. 5 (1985): 89-96, <https://goo.gl/1PohdM>, accessed 21 September 2018.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

they wanted to wait until the new tsar was elected, for they needed someone “to pledge [their] loyalty and service to, and to request [their] wages from [so they would not] die of hunger.”<sup>51</sup>

Yet, the Assembly dragged on. After a month and a half of waiting, the Cossacks simply stormed into the metropolitan’s house and demanded that the new tsar was elected immediately. Frightened to death, the metropolitan consulted with the Assembly and asked the Cossacks to advise on a potential candidate among the boyars included in the Assembly’s list. After hearing out the list consisting of representatives of rich and noble Russian families Cossacks’ chieftain discarded all the candidates, invoked a legend about the last Rurikid tsar Fyodor bequeathing his throne to Patriarch Philaret (who was in Polish-Lithuanian captivity at that time) and suggested the candidature of Philaret’s son Mikhail Romanov.

Whether *The Story* provides an accurate reconstruction of the events is certainly questionable – historians hold different opinions on how Mikhail was elected as a tsar<sup>52</sup> – yet, this monument could still be interpreted as an important evidence of popular thinking behind the idea and the appropriate procedure of enthronement. To demonstrate this, Cossacks’ reply to the metropolitan deserves to be quoted at some length:

Princes, and boyars, and Muscovite nobility, it is not by God’s will, but by your own will and dictate that you are electing an autocrat [*samoderzhavnogo*]. Yet, by God’s will and by the blessing of pious, right-believing and Christ-loving tsar, ruler [*gosudar*] and grand prince Fyodor Ivanovich of all Russia ... it is prince Fyodor Nikitich Romanov [aka Philaret] who was bequeathed with his royal sceptre and Russia’s rule [*derzhavstvovat’ na Rossii*]. [Yet,] that one is imprisoned in Lithuania right now, [but] there is a fine branch ... from that righteous root – his son prince Mikhail Fyodorovich. By God’s will, shall grand prince Mikhail Fyodorovich be the tsar and ruler [*gosudar*] in the reigning city of Moscow and in all of Russia.<sup>53</sup>

Although Meleshko used *The Story* to reconstruct the events of 1613, he seemed to remain insensitive to its actual message. Some boyars may certainly have aspired to establish some form

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> E.g. see different versions presented by K. Valishevskiy, *Smutnoye vremya* [The Time of Troubles] (Moscow: IKPA, 1989); G.A. Zamyatin, *Rossiya i Shvetsiya v nachale XVII veka. Ocherki politicheskoy i voennoy istorii* [Russia and Sweden in the beginning of the XVII century. Essays on political and military history] (Saint Petersburg: Evropeyskiy dom, 2008); and Lev Gumilev, *Ot Rusi do Rossii* [From Rus’ to Russia] (Saint Petersburg: YuNA, 1992).

<sup>53</sup> Voprosy Istorii, “The Story of 1613 Assembly of the Land”.

of enlightened and limited aristocratic monarchy akin to the contemporary Scandinavian type – at least, those who supported the candidacy of the son of the Swedish king Charles IX. Cossacks and regional representatives opposed their choice and favoured Russian-born candidates, and especially Mikhail. Yet, their argumentation, as is also evident from the quote above, had little to do with those competitive advantages that one would think of today: better representation, personal merits, or candidate’s charisma.

In fact, Mikhail was a sixteen-year-old, who, similarly to Boris and Gleb mentioned in the previous chapter, was lacking the typical qualities of a good ruler.<sup>54</sup> His youth and lack of experience was, for instance, brought to notice by another candidate, Mikhail’s uncle Ivan Romanov: “That prince Mikhail Fyodorovich is still young and not yet in the prime of his reason – who will rule?”<sup>55</sup> Yet, the Cossacks not only disregarded this point as insignificant, but also, when it came to their private interests – which could have been another thing to defend through promoting their protégée – they manifestly ignored Dmitry Trubetskoy, the only candidate who had been consistently trying to win their support by feeding and paying them during the month and a half of waiting, thereby plunging Trubetskoy into “black grief [and] malady.”<sup>56</sup>

Hence, the Cossacks and regional representatives regarded Mikhail as the right candidate primarily because of two reasons. Firstly, he should have been elected because this would have been in accordance with god’s will, as opposed to boyars’ deliberation and consent. Secondly, he was the right choice because he carried with him a part of the old dynasty’s authority transmitted through Fyodor I’s bequeathal to Mikhail’s father Philaret.

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<sup>54</sup> Mikhail’s youth and controllability are usually invoked as factors in favour of the ‘limitation of absolutism’ explanation: boyars wanted a weak tsar on the throne to be able to control him. Yet, as will be further clarified, Mikhail’s election reflected even better the appropriate regime of enthronement that popular classes would subscribe to.

<sup>55</sup> Voprosy Istorii, “The Story of 1613 Assembly of the Land”.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.



### 3.9 Knowing god's will

As far as god's will is concerned, it is always a big question how it can be manifested. In 1613, one could see that the manifestation of god's will became, for the first time, effectively equated with people's will. More precisely, the great power of a ruler remained transcendental, and so did the ruler's enthronement, yet the enthronement happened not supernaturally, but through the agency of the people understood as a collective subject, and not as a group of individuals who could debate, negotiate and eventually elect a monarch. The author of the *Chronicle of 1617* described the election process as if it was a true miracle:

... orthodox people, great and small, rich and poor, old and young, got enriched with abounding wisdom from the one giving life to everyone, and were illuminated by the light of harmonious goodwill. Although they came from different places, they spoke in one voice; and although they had been living apart and in disagreement, they were like a single and equal council. They decided through reason, chose through word, and arranged through deed to have a good council. For this *was not composed by the people* but was divinely established: they besought and entreated ruler [*gosudar*] and tsar Mikhail Fyodorovich to become their ruler and take the tsar's throne of the Moscow state [*gosudarstva*].<sup>57</sup>

Again, as becomes clear from the quote, the people did not *elect* their ruler. In such constellation, the people (understood as one unified body) was merely a means of application of god's power, rather than an acting subject (or a group of subjects) on their own; individuals did not delegate their sovereignty to a ruler, as this happened later in Hobbes, for the sovereignty was certainly not theirs to give away. To bring in a familiar electoral analogy, a tsar should have been chosen by acclamation, rather than through general consensus or by casting votes. The latter two procedures would, perhaps, be too mundane compared to how the god given great power was supposed to operate.

A very similar theme was a leitmotif of the Charter of Enthronement (*utverzhennaya gramota*) of 1613, a lengthy document confirming the enthronement of Mikhail Romanov that was read at the Assembly and signed by its participants. In it, Mikhail was said to be “a ruler-tsar and a grand prince ... by God's grace and by the election of *all people* of the whole of the great Russian

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<sup>57</sup> The Library, *The Chronicle of 1617*, emphasis added, my translation differs slightly, yet importantly, from Tvorogov and Vodolazkin's translation of this part of the Chronicle.

tsardom.”<sup>58</sup> Here again, the people functioned as a unitary legitimizing tool that allowed to exercise god’s power. Of course, that exercise was only becoming possible, if “by the grace of the all-mighty God, all the people in all the towns of all Russian tsardom achieved a complete consonance between themselves.”<sup>59</sup>

As such, as individuals, the people subsequently remained rightless, and so should have the boyars, in people’s eyes. Therefore, the popular pressure was clearly against any kind of accountability or restraint of the monarch. Within the popular discourse, such limitations remained unthinkable. It is telling that while the participants of the Assembly were required to swear an oath to the new tsar, the tsar himself, quite expectedly, was not supposed to make any oaths. Even though there is a myth that Mikhail actually swore one, or even that he had to sign a document, which would limit his power, there is no hard evidence supporting this claim.<sup>60</sup> It is likely, however, that in the context of the aforementioned popular pressure, as well as the prevailing idea of political power of the time, an oath sworn by the tsar would simply make no sense and would certainly contradict the oath of the Assembly, which ascribed to him the unlimited and transcendently endowed majestic rule.

To sum up, by the end of the first quarter of XVII century, *velikaya derzhava* continued to represent divinely endowed vicarious power to govern (or *derzhat*), which, through its greatness, remained firmly attached to the divine transcendental majesty. As such, it kept being perceived as part and parcel of religious discourse and being ascribed to the tsaric office or the figure of the tsar, as opposed to any particular tsar as a person. At the same time, the border between the spiritual and the earthly powers began to blur, as Patriarch Hermogenes assumed the role of a patriotic hero, became the locus of ineffable sovereignty, and began, “as a sovereign, to hold

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<sup>58</sup> S.A. Belokurov, *Utverzhennaya gramota ob izbranii na moskovskoe gosudarstvo Mikhaila Fyodorovicha Romanova* [Charter of Enthronement of Mikhail Fyodorovich Romanov as Muscovite Tsar] (Moscow: Obshchestvo istorii i drevnostey rossiyskikh pri Moskovskom universitete, 1906), p. 50, emphasis added.

<sup>59</sup> Belokurov, *Charter of Enthronement of Mikhail Fyodorovich Romanov as Muscovite Tsar*, p. 55.

<sup>60</sup> A good overview of the controversy is provided by Dmitry Borisov, “Mikhail Romanov: Tayna izbraniya [Mikhail Romanov: The Mystery of Election],” *Istoriya*, Vol. 3 (2002), <http://goo.gl/PxUJ7h>, accessed 11 June 2015.

[*derzhat'*] everything”<sup>61</sup> in the Russian great polity. The blending of the two continued as some of his successors (e.g. Philaret, but also Nikon) effectively became co-rulers of the first Romanov tsars and adopted the title *velikiy gosudar*. In addition, as already became evident in Ivan IV’s time, the idea of proper government began to solder with undivided absolutism, in which the tsar remained accountable solely in front of Christian god, and not the nobility, or the people.

### 3.10 Religious roots of Russian autocracy

Despite the perceived unnaturalness of the fact that church hierarchs would take up political tasks, one should not underestimate the extremely important role that Orthodox Church played in the evolution of Russian statehood and in the development of absolute autocracy. For instance, Vladimir Solovyov, a Russian philosopher, theologian and poet of the XIX century, maintained that “the creation of an almighty state in Russia happened mainly due to the efforts of the church; it ... ‘nurtured’ Muscovite monocracy, and this was its social and historical task.”<sup>62</sup> Solovyov argued that it was the church that transplanted from Byzantium the idea of grand prince as a ruler appointed by god, as opposed to Slavic, but also Nordic, idea of prince as a kin’s eldest chieftain leading an army (*druzhina*) that conquered territories by fire and sword.

It was the church that transferred ... the [Byzantine] *idea of the state* [*gosudarstva*], eliminating the Nordic idea of land with people, which the prince’s family can endlessly fractionise, as its inheritable property. The church established *the unity of popular consciousness*, binding the people through the single faith as consanguineous and consentient children of one Heavenly Father, calling his ... name in *one language*, which since then became common ... and holy language for all Slavonic tribes... The church nurtured ... the weak Muscovite prince, first, to grand-princely and, then, to tsaric greatness [*velichiya*].<sup>63</sup>

Hence, for Solovyov, but also for Cherniavsky, the church was the educator of Russian cultural and political unity, which would not have been there, if it was not for the common Orthodox faith and Slavonic language. This unity was also reaffirmed through political hierarchy with the figure of an autocrat on its top borrowed directly from Byzantium, but also, perhaps, was

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<sup>61</sup> The Library, *The New Story of the Glorious Russian Tsardom*.

<sup>62</sup> Vladimir Solovyov, “Neskol’ko slov v zashchitu Petra Velikogo [A Few Words in Defence of Peter the Great],” in *Sobranie sochineniy* [Collected Works], Vol. 5 (Saint Petersburg: Prosveshchenie, 1911), p. 167.

<sup>63</sup> Archbishop Nikanor cited in Solovyov, “A Few Words in Defence of Peter the Great,” p. 166-167, emphasis original.

cemented in place at the practical level through several centuries of relations with similarly governed nomadic empires in the East.<sup>64</sup> This constellation came under pressure during the Schism, when Patriarch Nikon, an ambitious and active religious reformer, decided to purify Russian scripture and ceremonial, and to bring it into compliance with the Greek standard. This, in Solovyov's interpretation, was nothing else but an attempt to "suddenly undo, for the sake of church power, that same thing that that power was successfully working on for many centuries."<sup>65</sup>

### **3.11 Decoupling the church from the state**

Nikon's clericalism, highly abstract in essence, had no foundation in Russian practice. On the one hand, it troubled the masses by demanding alterations of the most basic rituals (such as the sign of the cross and bows). On the other hand, it gradually began to trouble the tsar, for, while pushing through unpopular changes, Nikon affirmed the spiritual power of the Church as unconditionally independent not only from the people, but also from the state. This move, however, ran contrary to the position that the Church took up during the Time of Troubles. What was admittedly unnatural, but necessary metonymic transferal of sovereignty to the figure of the patriarch fifty years prior, turned during the Great Schism into unnecessary competition for the tsar and remained equally unnatural for the people.

While Solovyov, due to his strong theological inclination, probably overestimated the exclusivity of the centuries-long influence that Orthodox Church exerted on the formation of the Russian political order, he was certainly correct in his belief that in the XVII century the most interesting transformations of that order were reflected in and around that clerical debate. Nikon's reforms triggered responses from both sides – the state and the people. Each of the disputing parties by promoting their vision of how things should stand, in fact, exposed their respective

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<sup>64</sup> Iver B. Neumann and Einar Wigen, *The Steppe Tradition in International Relations: Russians, Turks and European State Building 4000 BCE–2017 CE* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

<sup>65</sup> Solovyov, "A Few Words in Defence of Peter the Great," p. 168.

understandings of an ideal political community. It is those ideal images that I will try to reconstruct in the following paragraphs.

The Schism was not a debate about Christian dogmas – the reforms mainly touched the procedural side of Orthodox religious practice. In this light, its intensity and longevity were indeed surprising. Hundreds of old believers were faggoted by order of the church. Tens of thousands more committed suicides through self-immolation. Numerous schismatic communities continued living in isolation for centuries after.<sup>66</sup> Trying to explain the reasons behind this, Boris Uspenskij suggested that, instead of being merely procedural, this conflict took place at a much deeper level where the status of language in general (as it reveals itself through the scripture and ritual) was defined.<sup>67</sup> Uspenskij argued that the old believers were so adamant in standing their ground because they perceived the language as, first and foremost, a means of expression, as opposed to the new believers who began to perceive it as a means of communication.

The difference between the two is significant. While in the first case the meaning preserves its transcendence – one proceeds from language to meaning, which means that incorrect language leads to incorrect thoughts – in the second case the meaning is recognised to be immanent to the message, which can be communicated in various ways. Nikon's supporters proceeded from meaning to language, and by correcting the books they were, at the same time, trying to accomplish cultural rapprochement of the Russian Orthodox Church with the Greek Church to subsequently establish the former's universal status, and to dispose of the fetishization of form, which was making it impossible for the Russian Church to speak a universal language. From the old believers' perspective, the form was still not separated from the content. In their view, it was through the sign of the cross and the appropriate prayers that commoners were gradually becoming familiar

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<sup>66</sup> See M.V. Pul'kin, "Samosozhzheniya staroobryadtsev v kontse XVII-XVIII vv. [Self-immolation of the old believers in the end of the XVII-XVIII centuries]," *Novy istoricheskiy vestnik*, No. 1(14), 2006.

<sup>67</sup> Boris Uspenskij, "Raskol i kulturny konflikt XVII veka [The Schism and the Cultural Conflict of the XVII century]," *Izbrannye Trudy* [Selected Works], Vol. 1, Second edition (Moscow: Shkola 'Yazyki russkoy kultury', 1996), pp. 477-519.

with the sacred meaning of holy words. Hence, the reform was taking the only true ritual and scripture away from them, thereby depriving the flock of the possibility of salvation.

Uspenskij provided illuminating examples to support his claim. For instance, one of the reforms altered the procedure of confession for deaf-mute people. If previously the sole fact of a deaf-mute coming to confession had been enough to grant such person an absolution, according to the new rules the person was encouraged to use mimics to repent sins, i.e. to explain what s/he wants to confess in another way. In addition, Nikon changed regulations on how the holy texts should have been pronounced during the service. While formerly different scriptures could have been read out simultaneously, from then on, they could only be pronounced sequentially – this was a clear shift from the understanding of a service as aimed at the deity to that which was perceived as communication with congregation. The new believers saw the need for correct interpretation, while the old believers emphasised the importance of correct reproduction. Finally, the author points at old believers' aversion to metaphors and to their dislike of foreign languages. In their view, any figurative rephrasing (such as, for instance, personification of natural phenomena)<sup>68</sup> could actualise pagan beliefs and, consequently, result in apostasy, while any foreign language was, by default, heretical because of its attachment to an unholy faith.<sup>69</sup>

This widespread linguistic xenophobia was also what Pyotr Shafirov, Peter I's close associate, described as a thing of the bygone and murky past:

... previously, no one from the Russian people could write or read any other language but Russian; moreover, *it was considered shameful rather than praiseful, if one could*. Yet, today we not only see His Majesty speaking German [*nemetskim yazыkom*], but also there are several thousand of His subjects among the Russian people, both male and female, who can speak different European languages.<sup>70</sup>

The trace of such expression-based conception of language can also be found in the writings of archpriest Avvakum, schismatics' spiritual leader. Avvakum argued that there were only

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<sup>68</sup> E.g. to say 'it rains' in Russian one has to literally say 'rain goes', i.e. use a metaphor.

<sup>69</sup> Uspenskij, "The Schism and the Cultural Conflict of XVII century".

<sup>70</sup> Pyotr Shafirov, *Rassuzhdenie kakie zakonnye prichiny ego tsarskoye velichestvo Pyotr Pervyi ...* [A discourse concerning the just causes of the war between Sweden and Russia...] (Saint Petersburg, 1717), p. 5, <http://rarebook.mgimo.ru/book/073818/073818.pdf>, accessed 21 September 2018.

four true names of god, ‘the Truth’ (*Istina*) being one of them. However, the reformers excluded this word from the Creed, and in Avvakum’s interpretation,

secession from the truth is the repudiation of one’s self, for the truth is all the things in existence [*sushchee*]. If the truth is all the things in existence, then the secession from the truth is the repudiation of all things in existence. God, however, cannot secede from all the things in existence, and he cannot be non-existent.<sup>71</sup>

Hence, for Avvakum, “the new believers lost the divine essence [i.e. the true meaning of god] through their secession from the true God [i.e. through the exclusion of his true name from the Creed]... whereas they seceded from the truth, they repudiated the Creator [*ot Sushchego*].”<sup>72</sup> In his argument, one finds precisely that movement from language to transcendent meaning that Uspenskij thought was characteristic of the opponents of Nikon’s reform.

Consequently, far from being merely procedural, Nikon’s reform was, at the same time, a reflection of substantial change in general worldview triggered, perhaps, by the Guttenberg revolution and an attempt to come to terms with this change politically. By taking the Russian Church out of its inward-directed self-righteousness, Nikon aspired to open it for external recognition – for the judgment of all those, who are supposed to accept the Russian Orthodox Church as the new leader of the Christian world, whose greatness should no longer be an internally established matter, as it had been for Ivan III and Ivan IV, but a quality attributed through interdenominational dialogue. Yet, the way Nikon proceeded with this transformation influenced the outcome of the process in a crucial way.

### 3.12 Back into the state’s fold

Similar in its spirit to Protestant Reformation that immediately preceded it, the Russian Schism was also different in several crucially important ways. Essentially humanistic and individualistic ideas of the Reformation, on principle, corresponded to the bottom-up manner, in

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<sup>71</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite cited in Avvakum Petrov “Zhitiye protopopa Avvakuma [The Life of Archpriest Avvakum]” in Natalia Ponyrko, *Tri zhitiya – tri zhizni* [The Life Stories] (Saint Petersburg: Pushkinskiy dom, 2010), p. 5.

<sup>72</sup> Petrov, *The Life of Archpriest Avvakum*, p. 5.

which the Reformation proceeded. However unlikely and unexpected it was in the first place, one has to admit that, once it started, the revolution against the transcendental authority of the pope was driven by local communities, which turned the Reformation into “a vast cultural upheaval, a social and popular movement, textured and rich because of its diversity.”<sup>73</sup> In Russia, however, it was the resistance to the transformation which was bottom-up and diverse, while the reformist drive, as was often the case in the Russian history, was coming from the top.

Therefore, to a Western eye, accustomed to the Weberian tradition, there is something antilogous about the Russian Schism. Without support from below, Nikon could promote his reforms only by also placing the locus of religious truth in church hierarchy, which was supposed to be able to dictate its will. Having no institutional apparatus to impose its truth (e.g. to execute heretics), the Church subsequently delegated this responsibility to the almighty state (which, as Solovyov would argue, had been previously created by it). Thus, the latter *de facto* obtained the full authority over both spiritual and earthly matters. Later, this takeover was institutionalised by Peter the Great, and the church, which Nikon had claimed to be unconditionally independent, became “a branch of state government under supreme authority of the ruler [*Gosudarya*] – ‘the ultimate judge of this collegium’ and under direct command of a special statesman – ‘a good officer, who was brave and familiar with synodic matters.’”<sup>74</sup> As Alexander Gerschenkron argued, among others, the official Church merely initiated the process, while the “actual Russian Reformation was carried out ... by the police state of Peter the Great.”<sup>75</sup>

That is, the ideational transformation was launched by high clergy. Subsequently, the lead was overtaken by the autocratic state. Yet, at the same time, the whole legitimization of the latter was based historically on (and backed from below by) the idea of transcendental enthronement, which contradicted the Reformist ideas of individualism and immanently established order.

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<sup>73</sup> Margaret C. Jacob, *Living the enlightenment: freemasonry and politics in eighteenth-century Europe* (Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 215.

<sup>74</sup> Solovyov, “A Few Words in Defence of Peter the Great,” p. 174.

<sup>75</sup> Alexander Gerschenkron, *Europe in the Russian Mirror: four lectures in economic history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 45.



Consequently, there emerged a curious amalgam in which the newly emerging ideas of public weal and good governance penetrating the state-affiliated rhetoric were mixed with the apology of autocratic regime and unaccountability of the god-chosen ruler. As the ruler himself eventually became the head of the Church, he accumulated the power in full scope: both *auctoritas* and *potestas*, mysterious charisma acquired through the ruler's direct connection to transcendental majesty (as the head of the church) and unlimited power to govern (as the head of the state apparatus).

Arguably, this fundamentally altered the understanding of the monarch's status and transformed the idea of Russia as a great polity. Previously, it had been its *majestic government* that made Russia great, where government belonged undividedly to the grand prince, while the majesty was an attribute of the tsaric office, whose legitimiser and the only source of authority was the Orthodox Church. Such arrangement was, for example, clearly visible in one of Vasily II's (1425-1462) statements which read, "In the name of the holy and life-giving Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and with the blessing of our father Feodosii, Metropolitan of all Rus', lo I, the much-sinning, poor slave of God, Vasily, while living and of sound mind, write this statement."<sup>76</sup> In the Petrine epoch, however, *majestic government* transformed into *great power* meaning quite literally the full scope of monarch's supreme power that had both spiritual and earthly affairs subjected to it and that manifested itself in the monarch's personalised charisma.

Naturally, since then on, it was the figure of the monarch himself, not the legacy of the age-old tradition, that performed the function of gilding Russia with greatness and glory. During Peter I's rule (1682-1725), the new nearly sacred status of the monarch was reflected across the whole spectrum of produced texts: in political writings, religious sermons, and, a bit later, lay literary genres. However, the traces of the abovementioned amalgamation of the newly emerging idea of public weal with the apology for undivided autocracy already appeared at the height of the Schism.

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<sup>76</sup> Vasily II cited in Hosking, "Patronage and the Russian State": 303-304.

### 3.13 Autocracy as Russia's public weal

Yuriy Krizhanich, a XVII century Croatian missionary who lived in Russia for almost 20 years and who, in his *Politika* (1666), proposed a comprehensive program of political and economic reforms for the Russian state, insisted that the true greatness could be achieved through “great, wonderful and all-praised deeds [of kings], deeds that [were] useful and salutary for the widest majority of people for the longest possible time.”<sup>77</sup> These great deeds, according to him, were also king's duties that consisted in providing “godliness, justice, calm and abundance, that is – faith, administration of law, peace and low prices.”<sup>78</sup> In this quote one should be able to see that, in essence, Krizhanich's idea of greatness resonated with what is otherwise referred to as ‘public weal’ achieved through ‘good governance.’ In addition, he also openly rejected that greatness could be based on military achievements,<sup>79</sup> and that some kingdoms were greater than the rest because of their chosenness or some special mission.<sup>80</sup>

The fact that Krizhanich remained a devout Catholic until the end of his life as well as the knowledge of his early 1641 memorandum allowed Gerschenkron, on the one hand, to conclude that he was in fact on an ‘undercover mission’ to bring Russia back into the Catholic fold, and, on the other hand, to quite skilfully use him against Weber's thesis on Protestant ethic.<sup>81</sup> In combination with his analysis of the economic success of old believers, this amounted to a serious challenge for the Weberian doctrine. Yet, even more interesting was Krizhanich's insistence on the extreme merit of Russian *samovladstvo*,<sup>82</sup> i.e. autocratic regime. The Russian polity, in Krizhanich's eyes, was particularly conducive to achieving such greatness because of its Orthodox faith, unity of the state, and, most importantly, *absolute autocracy*.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Yuriy Krizhanich, *Politika* [On Politics], (Moscow: Nauka, 1965) p. 653.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 653.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, pp. 652-654.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, pp. 657-660.

<sup>81</sup> Gerschenkron, *Europe in the Russian Mirror*.

<sup>82</sup> There is no such word in either Church Slavonic or Old Russian languages. The closest equivalent would be *samovlast'e* meaning ‘autocracy.’ Krizhanich wrote his works in the Common Slavonic language of his own creation, which, in practice, was a mix of Russian and Croatian with occasional borrowings from some other Slavic languages.

<sup>83</sup> Krizhanich, *Politika*, pp. 615-616.

For Gerschenkron, this vision made sense only insofar as autocracy functioned as the only suitable means of forced industrialization – a way for backward Russia to catch up with the West. That is, Gerschenkron interpreted “the autocratic State as the primary factor in [Europeanization, which made Krizhanich] ideologically one of the forerunners of Peter the Great, and by the same token an anticipator of Russian mercantilism.”<sup>84</sup> In essence, this argument was similar to the general stance of comparative political economists, which is often supported by the reference to the product cycle theory, as this was done by James Kurth.<sup>85</sup> Yet, at a more careful re-reading, Krizhanich’s position appears more nuanced.

No doubt, Krizhanich saw all practical benefits of autocracy. In *Politika*, he referred to Justus Lipsius in affirming that in autocracy it is easier to enforce general justice and correct the mistakes in government. Yet, he was also very explicit that, in his view, a king should have tried to achieve the true greatness, for “that [was] why God [had] positioned him as a king.”<sup>86</sup> While justifying the monarch’s duties, Krizhanich insistently pointed at the will of god, not economic expedience, let alone some kind of social contract. For him, a king’s duties were a mere consequence of the omnibenevolent providence. Krizhanich argued that “autocracy [was] akin to God’s power; God [was] the first and the true autocrat of the whole world, and every true (or autocratic) king in his kingdom [was] the second autocrat after God and God’s vicar.”<sup>87</sup> Reflecting on the nature and the perceived necessity of such political regime, Marshall Poe maintained that Krizhanich

understood the Bible to say that all subjects, and especially military servitors, are ‘slaves’ of their prince. He distinguished this sort of political dependence from economic bondage, which he condemned. Of political slavery, he wrote: “to be tsar is to serve God, but to be the slave of the tsar of one’s own people, this is honorable and is actually a kind of freedom.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Gerschenkron, *Europe in the Russian Mirror*, p. 61.

<sup>85</sup> James R. Kurth, “The Political Consequences of the Product Cycle: Industrial History and Political Outcomes,” *International Organization*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Winter, 1979): 1-34.

<sup>86</sup> Krizhanich, *Politika*, p. 653.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 548.

<sup>88</sup> Marshall Poe, “What did Russians mean when they called themselves ‘slaves of the tsar’,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 57, no. 3 (Autumn, 1998): 601.

Whether Krizhanich was simply trying to justify his progressive ideas in an understandable way, or, being a good Catholic, he believed in this, his writings clearly reflected the state of the local discourse. Evidently, his position resonated with the understanding of the appropriate kind of greatness of the Russian tsar, as it was operating in the popular discourse during the 1613 Assembly of the Land, but also with the views of his contemporaries. “Do not think,” Krizhanich wrote, “that the privileges [granted by the king gave] you any kind of power or independence, which [the king had] no right to alienate ... for God exalted the king higher than human law. That is why all those privileges always remained subject to king’s power.”<sup>89</sup>

Although Krizhanich did not and could not directly participate in the contemporary religious debate (for his Catholic faith had already been revealed at the time of his writing), he was extremely sensitive to the local context and substantiated all his proposals by grounding them in the established practice. In the assertion cited above, he, in fact, echoed Tsar Alexey Mikhailovich, who eight years earlier, while ousting Nikon from power, had sent the Patriarch the following note:

You neglected the tsaric majesty and sign [your decrees] as the Great Ruler [*Velikiy Gosudar*], yet we have only one Great Ruler – the tsar. The tsar honored you as a father and shepherd, and you did not comprehend this. And now ... you should no longer sing as or call yourself the Great Ruler, and [the tsar] will no longer honour you.<sup>90</sup>

Hence, Krizhanich’s vision of the status and the role of the Russian autocrat was still very similar to that of, for instance, Maxim Grek, who wrote a century earlier that “a righteous prince always has the all-pervasive God as a co-organiser and co-ruler of this earthly kingdom.”<sup>91</sup> As the founder of Russian context-oriented historical methodology Aleksandr Lappo-Danilevsky’s argued in 1914, such thinking “attach[ed] to [prince’s] power transcendental significance and moral force, as well as [gave] him the right to demand unconditional obedience from his subjects.”<sup>92</sup> That

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<sup>89</sup> Krizhanich, *Politika*, p. 601.

<sup>90</sup> Anton Kartashev, *Ocherki po istorii russkoy tserkvi* [Essays on the History of the Russian Church], Vol. 2 (Moscow: Terra, 1992), p. 145.

<sup>91</sup> Maxim Grek cited in Aleksandr Lappo-Danilevsky, “Ideya gosudarstva i glavneyshie momenty ee razvitiya v Rossii so vremeni smuty i do epokhi preobrazovaniy [The Idea of State and the Most Important Moments of Its Development in Russian Since the Time of Troubles until The Great Reforms],” *Golos minushnego*, No. 12 (1914): 5-38, <https://goo.gl/3mdYij>, accessed 21 September 2018.

<sup>92</sup> Lappo-Danilevsky, “The Idea of State...”

is, in Ernst Kantorowicz's terms, what already began to be understood as "a [man-made and] very terrestrial political institution"<sup>93</sup> in European late Middle Ages (although it remained attached to the idea of immortal grace symbolically) developed its own pragmatics in Russia.

On the one hand, the element of divinity of supreme power (but also priesthood), borrowed from Byzantium, was preserved and strengthened. Its unaccountability in front of the population and the autocratic mode of its government continued to be viewed as appropriate manifestations of its direct connection to the divine majesty. On the other hand, the status of both tsars and patriarchs gained a new meaning in the Russian context. The first Russian tsars and patriarchs went even further and in addition to the general element of divinity of priesthood and politics, they, in fact, emphasised through slightly modified rituals of ordainment and coronation the qualitative difference of both tsars and patriarchs from the rest of the clergy and laymen.

For instance, Uspenskij maintained that the first Russian patriarchs, contrary to the Greek tradition, went through the second ordainment during their enthronement, which, in principle, ascribed them a special status that could no longer be interpreted as the first among equals.<sup>94</sup> Similarly, the ritual of the coronation of Russian tsars developed new features and significantly diverged from the Byzantine rite. During coronation, Russian tsars, instead of being merely anointed (*pomazanie mirom*) as their Byzantine counterparts, went through the sacrament of chrismation (*tainstvo miropomazaniya*), which meant that they were being baptised for the second time that, under ordinary conditions, was utterly inappropriate.

Hence, if "in Byzantium, just like in the West, a monarch was conforming onto the kings of the Old Testament, in Russia, the tsar was conforming onto Christ himself."<sup>95</sup> These important alterations of rituals help demonstrate that both the tsar's and the patriarch's offices in early modern Russia got ascribed a specific charisma emphasizing the manifest and complete

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<sup>93</sup> Ernst Hartwig Kantorowicz, *The king's two bodies: a study in mediaeval political theology* (Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 437.

<sup>94</sup> Boris Uspenskij, "Tsar' i patriarkh [Tsar and Patriarch]," *Izbrannye Trudy* [Selected Works], Vol. 1, Second edition (Moscow: Shkola 'Yazyki russkoy kultury', 1996), pp. 184-204.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, p. 187.

transcendence of their status. As the patriarch's religious authority was gradually subjugated by the mighty state, which led to the complete abolishment of patriarchy in Petrine Russia, it was the monarch who maintained such special charisma and transcendental status in the Russian discursive universe in their composite and intensified form.

### 3.14 Conclusion

Throughout the XVII century, the image of the Russian state being a great polity remained an important quality of Russian domestic regime. However, the regime was slowly but surely changing. In this chapter, I presented a reconstruction of this change by focusing my attention on several interrelated processes: (1) the change in the monarch's political status that was an outcome of the shifting relations between the state, the church and the people, (2) the gradual sacralisation of the Russian monarch, which was made possible by his shifting status, and (3) the development of the idea of absolute autocracy as being the most appropriate form of government. This tripartite transformation of the regime prepared the ground for further institutionalization of Russian absolutism. What is more, while in the mainstream discourse Peter's reforms that followed are usually interpreted as gradual secularisation of Russian politics, I would suggest that the rationale behind the operation of supreme power in XVIII-century Russia remained visibly theocratic, even though the lifestyle and institutions certainly started to look more European on their surface.

In the next chapter, I will elaborate on the discursive consequences of the subjugation of the Orthodox Church to the state authority. I will look at how Peter's accumulation of the full scope of supreme power changed the dominant regime of interaction within the state-society complex. I will argue that, because of this process, the transcendental kind of greatness (or *majesty*) of the Russian polity turned into personified *glory*, which manifested itself through excessive glorification of the monarch. I will show that in Petrine Russia, but also throughout the entire XVIII century, the greatness of Russian *derzhava* started to be interpreted as a product of its salvation by Peter the Great, who was functionally equated with another saviour, Jesus Christ. Both his military victories and reforms were presented as sacrifices that nurtured *velikaya derzhava*

and brought it to full maturity. In the XVIII century, Russia's greatness was either believed to be born with Peter or re-born through a fundamental metamorphosis. That is, there was no longer anything primordial about it. Instead, it revealed itself through official panegyric literature and official and unofficial sacralisation of the monarch becoming purely *phenomenal* in its operation, i.e. confined to the discourse itself and needing no external point of reference in the form of a transcendental absolute.

## **CHAPTER 4 – PHENOMENAL GREATNESS: PERFORMING GREATNESS ON THE WORLD STAGE**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Russian historiography often portrays Peter I as the Europeanizer of Russia. By moving Russia's capital to the newly-founded Saint Petersburg, Peter is said to have defined Russia's political and cultural orientation for centuries ahead. Indeed, during his long reign, Russia absorbed a tremendous amount European specialists, goods, and traditions. Its institutions and lifestyle (at least in the capital) became undoubtedly more familiar to a European observer, while regular political communication with Europe began to be carried out through several permanent diplomatic missions.

Historians of Orthodox theology also argue that the abolition of patriarchy performed by Peter should be interpreted as the import of the Lutheran (and Anglican) model of monarchical church. Just like it was the case in the British Empire, but also in Sweden and Denmark, where monarchs took it upon themselves to head national churches, Peter decided to liquidate the Russian version of the Byzantine symphony to become the head of the Orthodox Church and to concentrate both spiritual and earthly power in the hands of one ruler. Allegedly, he got this idea while travelling in Europe with the Grand Embassy in 1697-1698. Hence, the outcome of the XVII-century long-lasting confrontation between the patriarch and the monarch, which ended in the subjugation of the Orthodox Church to the mighty state, could also be interpreted as quite 'European'.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, when it comes to discursive implications of Peter's reforms, there were several important processes that stood out as being specifically Russian. First, starting from the beginning of the XVIII century, the Russian monarch became the target of excessive glorification bordering sacralisation that not only proliferated in its natural religious abode, but also spilt over into lay

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<sup>1</sup> I thank Kristina Stoeckl for drawing my attention to this important fact.



literary genres, fine art and architecture, and produced a bulk of pompous odes, paintings, sermons and monuments. One could say, there emerged a new discursive equivalence between god and tsar.<sup>2</sup> This practice equally applied to Peter's successors, especially Catherine II (1762-1796), the most famous of them, and it did not cease until the beginning of the XIX century, when panegyric genres gave way to classical Russian literature and art.

Second, in its natural abode, i.e. among the clerics, the glorification of the Russian monarch took a peculiar shape that had been yet unseen in Russian religious discourse. On the one hand, religious figures writing sermons about Peter's reforms glorified the monarch by comparing him to a living deity, which was an unthinkable comparison by the standards of the XVII century. On the other hand, many church officials, but also schismatic communities, were criticizing such a practice as blasphemous and even compared Peter to Antichrist, or one of his agents.

Third, the discourse on Russia's political greatness, which had been previously formulated in noumenal terms and attached to Russia's pristine essence, got almost completely disconnected from the state's millennial tradition and proper domestic regime. Instead, it was invested into the figure of the monarch, and began to be presented as a product of the salutary metamorphosis initiated by Peter the Great. Political greatness was no longer formulated in terms of being contiguous to the majestic absolute but started to be a function of all-pervasive and purely phenomenal glorification that had no other foundation except its perceptible appearance. An ostensive symbolic manifestation of this change was the introduction and incessant use of fireworks in Petrine Russia, which Alexander Etkind called "an official language that integrated the sophisticated and the illiterate, those who understood the changing assortment of languages of the Empire and those who did not."<sup>3</sup>

One could, of course, argue that both sacralisation of the monarch and the phenomenal turn in the Russian great power discourse were consequences of the assimilation of Baroque

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<sup>2</sup> Cherniavsky, *Tsar and People*, p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> Etkind, *Internal Colonization*, p. 120.

culture. The latter implied that bold comparisons and symbolic exaggerations were not supposed to be taken seriously. As Uspenskij and Zhivov insisted, “[m]etaphorical usage is but one particular aspect of the Baroque attitude to the word; characteristic of the Baroque was not only play with words but play with meanings.”<sup>4</sup> That is, Baroque Culture exhibited a novel attitude towards language use – instead of faithfully attaching oneself to the meaning, Baroque authors could utilise linguistic tools for mere ornamentation.

However, it was also quite evident that this Baroque approach brought to Russia from the southwest clashed with the world-view adhered to by a large part of the Russian audience, who often took seriously what was meant to simply adorn ideologically motivated speech. To substantiate this point, Uspenskij and Zhivov present two types of evidence: (1) the response to sacralisation practice as blasphemous, and (2) the actual practice of religious adoration of the monarch that spread through some churches in Russian towns and villages. Both phenomena, the authors argued, were springing from the same world-view.

Therefore, in this chapter I look at the outlined discursive changes in their own right and try to reveal their internal logic. I analyse how an assemblage of novel representations of Russian greatpowerhood emerged and operated in their discursive localities. For the purposes of my analysis, I treat them as newly crystalized discursive positions that became the sources for Russian great power discourse in its current shape, the latter being qualitatively different, yet genealogically related to its discursive predecessors. Below, I present some introductory discussion of the glorifying practices that preceded Peter’s reign. Then, I describe the shape the great power discourse took in the beginning of the XVIII century, i.e. during the Petrine reforms. I also address the question of the well-warranted intellectual influence of European thinkers on Peter’s chief ideologues and explain how that influence translated into specifically Russian theory of political order populated by ideas that were cognate but dissimilar to the concepts of European natural law.

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<sup>4</sup> Uspenskij and Zhivov, “Tsar and God,” p. 19.

Finally, I elaborate on the effect that the mentioned discursive rupture exerted on the domestic and international political discourse in the time of Catherine II. That discourse, as I will argue, remained to be structurally and semantically similar to Petrine.

## 4.2 Power *and* glory in Medieval Rus'

Certainly, panegyrics devoted to tsars and grand princes had existed before – it was not a Petrine invention. Yet, in most cases, glorification was embedded in the religious discourse. For example, I have previously mentioned two sources – *The Life of Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich*<sup>5</sup> and *The Life of Aleksander Nevsky*<sup>6</sup> from the XIV and XIII centuries respectively – whose main aim was the glorification of pious lives and military achievements of two important Russian grand princes, both of whom were venerated as Saints by the Orthodox Church.

A comparison of those two hagiographies reveals that the primary means of Aleksander's and Dmitry's panegyric appraisal were very similar. The princes' qualities and deeds were compared to that of some biblical heroes as in

... his face was like Joseph's face, who was appointed as the second tsar by the tsar of Egypt; his strength was a part of Samson's strength; and the wisdom God endowed him with was that of Solomon; his courage was akin to that of Roman tsar Vespasian...;<sup>7</sup>

or as in

... and having acquired Abraham's valour, after praying to God and summoning the assistance from Saint Peter, the new wonderworker and the protector of the Russian land, the prince embarked, akin to old Yaroslav, to fight pagan and wicked Mamay, the second Sviatopolk.<sup>8</sup>

Other important qualities that were invariably emphasised by the authors were the grand princes' humility and piousness. Facing trouble, they would always go to the church to deliver a passionate prayer and to ask for god's help.

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<sup>5</sup> The Library, *Slovo o zhitii velikogo knyazya Dmitriya Ivanovicha* [The Life of Grand Duke Dmitry Ivanovich], text prepared, translated and commented by M.A. Salmina, <http://goo.gl/3Hffvr>, accessed 4 November 2014.

<sup>6</sup> The Library, *The Life of Aleksander Nevsky*.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> The Library, *The Life of Grand Duke Dmitry Ivanovich*.

Yet, the hagiographers never went so far as to call any of the heroes ‘god’ or ‘Christ’, for this was perceived as a clear blasphemy. More precisely, both *Lives* approached that possibility, but stopped one step short. Aleksander was said to have built churches, restored cities and returned people to their homes after one of the Mongol raids, which revealed his meekness and lenity, and in this he was *likened to god* (as in god’s image and likeness). Yet, at the same time, “he loved priests, and monks, and paupers, and he respected bishops and metropolitans, and listened to them as if they were Christ himself.”<sup>9</sup> The latter quote clearly shows his appreciation of spiritual authority as independent and endowed with the idea of transcendental truth. At least, this was how religious writers interpreted the prince’s relations with the church. The author of Dmitry’s *Life*, while trying to find a worthy label for his hero, first, called him an angel, a human, Adam, as well as used several other biblical names, but then rejected all those figures as unworthy, and concluded by his own inability to find a worthy name, yet did not raise his comparative ambition to deities.

## 4.3 Power as glory in the Petrine epoch

### 4.3.1 Peter the Christ

The comparison of monarchs to various biblical personalities was a tool that also remained in use in Peter’s time.<sup>10</sup> However, the abovementioned consolidation of both spiritual and administrative power in the hands of one ruler, as well as the emergence of baroque tradition, allowed his glorifiers to go much further than this. One of the first of Peter’s contemporaries who called him ‘Christ’ was Theophan Prokopovich, the first vice-president of the Holy Synod, who was known for his panegyric sermons devoted to Peter and his political writings, in which he tried to present a more or less systematic political teaching, which would engage with the European doctrines of natural law and could reflect and justify the changes happening on the ground. In *The Praiseful Word about the Battle of Poltava* (1717), written to commemorate one of Peter’s most significant military successes, Prokopovich called Mazepa Judas precisely on the premise that Peter

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<sup>9</sup> The Library, *The Life of Aleksander Nevsky*.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. Theophan Prokopovich, *Sochineniya* [Collected Works] (Moscow and Saint Petersburg: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1961), pp. 57-58

for him was comparable to Christ. He wrote, “O unexpected enemy! O pariah to your own mother! O new Judas! And no one should imagine that to call a traitor Judas is excessive indignation ... The lawfully reigning monarch ... is Christ the Lord ... hence it is fitting to call a Christ’s betrayer Judas.”<sup>11</sup>

A bit later, in his sermon *On the Tsar’s Power and Honour* (1718), Prokopovich even tried to defend the legitimacy of this label, by pointing at its etymology, i.e. at the fact that it literally meant ‘anointed.’ Yet, on Uspenskij and Zhivov’s account, it was certainly not just the matter of etymology – Prokopovich clearly pointed at the “tsar’s immediate likeness to Christ,”<sup>12</sup> which could be supported by the chosen spelling (with titlo) and capitalised ‘C[X]’, but also by the fact that in some other sources Peter was often referred to as ‘Saviour’. For example, Stefan Yavorsky, another Orthodox bishop and Peter’s associate, compared Peter to the Saviour, whose economy of salvation was aimed specifically at the Russian land:

And about our monarch, what will I proclaim? I bring you great joy, for your Saviour is born. Born for you, and not for himself. And what salvation is this? For our eyes have seen his salvation. Oh, great is the salvation of our earthly Saviour – our fatherland unjustly stolen and for many years groaning to be free of the enemy yoke, our forefathers’ subjects, like Israelites, truly in Egyptian bondage, to return to their original state, to purify the province of Livonia and the Izhorian land of infidels.<sup>13</sup>

Yavorsky was not unconditionally uncritical of Peter. In fact, he asked for resignation several times, unhappy with some religious reforms that were curbing ecclesiastic power. Yet, despite his anti-Protestant views, he was still unable to put up an open struggle, opting for convoluted scholastic hints at his dissatisfaction; and Peter kept him close until his own death. Nevertheless, high-principled Yavorsky, whatever his views on Peter’s policies may have been, still adopted the new panegyric language, which made it possible to glorify the monarch with the most holy of names.

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<sup>11</sup> Prokopovich cited in Uspenskij and Zhivov, “Tsar and God,” p. 26.

<sup>12</sup> Uspenskij and Zhivov, “Tsar and God,” p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> Stefan Yavorsky cited in Uspenskij and Zhivov, “Tsar and God,” p. 26.

### 4.3.2 *Peter the Antichrist*

As is often the case, the most convincing evidence of an ideational transformation can be found on the discursive margins affected by or resisting the transformation. In old believers' literature, largely squeezed out of the official discourse, the change in the status of the Russian monarch was strikingly evident. What is more, the history of old believers' resistance to the monarch's sacralisation had been rich and troubled.

If the reformists of the XVII century identified the locus of religious truth (i.e. the agent of connection to the divine majesty) in clerical hierarchy, and criticised the state for claiming spiritual authority on that ground, Avvakum's supporters believed that the religious truth was kept in the pristine piety of the people.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, for them, in the same way as for Nikon, the state's gradual appropriation of spiritual leadership was unacceptable – in fact, as unacceptable as the church reform itself. And since the ancient piety that the old believers so cherished was firmly based on the agreement and harmony between the clergy and the laymen, “who constituted one church in Ancient Rus’,”<sup>15</sup> the whole structure of the old believers' traditional church (and indeed traditional world) was broken. Hence, the “national-democratic”<sup>16</sup> and heterogeneous nature of their dissent was triggered not by the realization of the individual's worth and the people's possible independence from ecclesiastic authority, but by an utmost disaster that happened to their world – a disaster comparable to apocalypse. Consequently, the old believers' communities perceived themselves as autonomous and self-regulated only insofar as they were also the only remaining righteous in the world captured by the Antichrist.

The coping strategies that people chose to adopt, while waiting for the Judgment Day, differed depending on the radicalism of a community's leader and the practical sense of its members. Some, actively persecuted by the authorities, were choosing ‘voluntary martyr's death’, i.e. collective suicides. Others prepared themselves for an endlessly long autonomous existence.

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<sup>14</sup> Solovyov, “A Few Words in Defence of Peter the Great,” pp. 169-170.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 172.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 169.

Ironically, it was the latter who, in Etkind's words, "became the driving and even revolutionary factor of the Russian life ... Dodging all relations with state power, priestless old believers managed to create stable, economically efficient town communities, which became the first independent actors of the Russian market."<sup>17</sup> That is, the old believers' autonomous settlements effectively became the first Russian capitalist subjects.

The amount of attention that eschatologically-minded schismatic authors paid to the figure of the Antichrist was remarkably great. Starting with Avvakum, who was comparing Nikon's genealogy to that of the Antichrist and called the Patriarch Antichrist's "ultimate precursor,"<sup>18</sup> the tradition of bringing in the name of the Beast while writing about religion and politics did not cease for several centuries. The author of *The Life of Monk Korniliy* went even further and already pictured Nikon himself as the Antichrist.<sup>19</sup> As the locus of spiritual authority was shifting from patriarch to monarch, the mentioned label was transferred as well.

Peter the Great was called Antichrist astonishingly often.<sup>20</sup> Among other abundant evidence of such practice, one could mention three notable cases: the 1700 case of "bigot-schismatic" Grigory Talitskiy, who was accused of "compos[ing] a letter in which he spoke [sic] about ... the coming of Antichrist into the world, actually having in mind the tsar;"<sup>21</sup> a monument of old believers' polemical literature *A Collection from Holy Writ about the Antichrist* (end of XVII century), where Peter was consistently referred to as a "false Christ," "Antichrist," and "Christ's

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<sup>17</sup> Alexander Etkind, *Khlyst: sekty, literatura i revolyutsiya* [Khlyst: Sects, Literature and Revolution] (Moscow: Novoye literaturnoye obozreniye, 1998), p. 28-29.

<sup>18</sup> Avvakum Petrov, "Iz sochineniya ob antikhriste [From the Story of the Antichrist]," in: N.S. Demkova, *Neizvestnye i neizdannye teksty iz sochineniy protopopa Avvakuma* [Unknown and unpublished works of archpriest Avvakum], p. 230, <https://goo.gl/YQQqrs>, accessed 22 September 2018.

<sup>19</sup> D.N. Breshchinskiy, *Zhitiye Korniliya Vygovskogo kak literaturny pamyatnik i ego literaturnye svyazi na Vygu* [The Life of Korniliy Vygovsky as a Literary Monument and Its Literary Connections to Vyga], <http://goo.gl/mlgpXN>, accessed 22 September 2018.

<sup>20</sup> For sources and literature on this topic see: Cherniavsky, *Tsar and People*, p. 76 (fn. 12).

<sup>21</sup> Suvorova and Tkachev, eds, "Talitsky, Grigory," *Russkiy biografichesky slovar'* [Russian Biographic Dictionary], Vol. 20 (Saint Petersburg: Izdanie Imperatorskago Russkago Istoricheskago Obshchestva, 1912), pp. 274-275.

adversary;”<sup>22</sup> and a popular historiosophical novel *Peter and Alexis* (1903) written by Dmitry Merezhkovsky.<sup>23</sup>

Undoubtedly, the ascription of such a label to the monarch was reflective of the opposite trend in the dominant ideology to attribute the monarch with the names worthy of the head of the Church – Christ and Saviour – as well as to an important claim coming directly from the monarch’s office. *A Collection from Holy Writ about the Antichrist* described this claim in the following fashion:

... in 1721 [Peter] took upon himself the patriarch’s title, began to call himself the Father of Fatherland ... and the head of the Russian Church, and ruled autocratically, recognizing no equals, and assuming not only the tsaric power, but also the priestly and the godly power of the autocratic pastor, and of the only headless head [*bezglavnaya glava*] above all.<sup>24</sup>

According to the anonymous author of *A Collection*, by doing this, Peter, “that false Christ, exalted himself higher than all the so-called gods, that is, the anointed.”<sup>25</sup> Uspenskij and Zhivov maintained that the old believers interpreted this as nothing else but the fulfilment of the prophesy about the Antichrist, who would reveal his coming by “exalt[ing] himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God.”<sup>26</sup>

#### 4.3.3 *Glory everywhere*

Another important development characteristic of Peter’s reign was that the monarch’s glorification transcended the boundaries of religious discourse. Consequently, the practice of the monarch’s glorification and, indeed, sacralisation penetrated lay literature and established itself in the re-emerging genres of panegyric odes and hymns. But not only. Maria Smorzhevskikh-Smirnova attested that artistic glorification in Petrine time included

a wide array of secular and religious cultural phenomena: triumphal arches, fireworks and their descriptions, theatrical performances and welcome speeches addressed to the monarch, communiqués on victories, conclusions, engravings and commemorative medals, as well as

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<sup>22</sup> The Library, *Sobraniye ot svyatago pisaniya o antikebriste* [The Collection of the Holy Scripture on the Antichrist], text preparation and comments by S.I. Nikolaev, <http://goo.gl/Hp5RYY>, accessed 11 June 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Dmitri Merezhkovski, *Peter and Alexis* (London: Archibald Constable & Co, 1905).

<sup>24</sup> The Library, *The Collection of the Holy Scripture on the Antichrist*.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Uspenskij and Zhivov, “Tsar and God,” p. 20.



sermons and liturgical texts, such as the Service on the Victory in Poltava and the Service on the Treaty of Nystad.<sup>27</sup>

In fact, excessive glorification in the first quarter of the XVIII century was so pervasive that the whole style of official literature and art of this epoch is currently referred to as ‘panegyric.’<sup>28</sup> What is more, one of the essential features of the literature and art of Peter’s time was their multilingualism – it was aimed at the widest audience and was designed for multiple readings and multilevel interpretation.<sup>29</sup> One example of such multilingualism would be various structural allusions. That is, the acquired sanctity of political discourse revealed itself not only in concrete labels and comparisons like in Nikolay Nikolev’s *On the Taking of Warsaw, 1794* (“Tsar – valour! Particular God of the world! / You will not insult the general God”)<sup>30</sup> or in Derzhavin’s later odes to Catherine the Great (“With the majesty of an earthly god / Catherine, casting a glance”),<sup>31</sup> but also in structural similarities between praiseful letters to the monarch and Orthodox hymns, like it was the case for Alexey Kurbatov’s letter to Peter, which was structured exactly like an akathist.<sup>32</sup>

Another important evidence of multilingualism, which is directly relevant to the great power discourse in question, was the confluence of religious and military-historic symbolism. Having analysed the symbolism of one iconostasis, which was built in Tallinn in 1718-1719, Smorzhevskikh-Smirnova concluded that virtually every icon and inscription on it was meant to convey a double meaning: the traditional religious interpretation was always accompanied by a reference to some contemporaneous historical event – as a rule, this or that victory in the Northern War.<sup>33</sup> Allusions to Russia’s military achievements also penetrated many other forms of art. A short walk through Peterhof, Peter’s suburban residence, would convince even the most ardent sceptic

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<sup>27</sup> Maria Smorzhevskikh-Smirnova, “Mnogoyazychie voyennoy panegiriki Petrovskoy epokhi [Multilingualism of Military Panegyrics of Petrine Epoch],” in: L.N. Kiseleva et al, eds, *Lotmanovskiy sbornik*, Vol. 4 (Moscow: O.G.I, 2014), pp. 105-113.

<sup>28</sup> Derzhavina, O. and V.P. Grebenyuk, eds, *Panegiricheskaya literatura petrovskogo vremeni. Russkaya staropechatnaya literatura (XVI – pervaya chetvert’ XVII v.)* [Panegyric Literature of Petrine time. Russian Black-letter literature (the XVI – first quarter of the XVII cent.)] (Moscow: Nauka, 1979), p. 33.

<sup>29</sup> Smorzhevskikh-Smirnova, “Multilingualism of Military Panegyrics of Petrine Epoch”.

<sup>30</sup> Nikolay Nikolev cited in Uspenskij and Zhivov, “Tsar and God,” p. 33.

<sup>31</sup> Gavriil Derzhavin cited in Uspenskij and Zhivov, “Tsar and God,” p. 32.

<sup>32</sup> Uspenskij and Zhivov, *Tsar and God*, p. 34-35.

<sup>33</sup> Smorzhevskikh-Smirnova, “Multilingualism of Military Panegyrics of Petrine Epoch”.

that the glorification of Russia's victories was performed not only in religious and lay literatures, but also through sculptural and architectural genres. Thus, in Peter's time, Russian great power discourse transformed and continued its existence in panegyric literature and art.

Consequently, "there appear[ed] a peculiar atmosphere of glorification around [Peter's] personality, which border[ed] on deification."<sup>34</sup> Almost two centuries later, Solovyov even admitted that it was difficult for him "to call [Peter] a great man – not because he was not great enough, but because he was not enough human."<sup>35</sup> We also know that this atmosphere developed with Peter's help – he supported and sponsored the massive publication of panegyric propagandistic materials.<sup>36</sup>

#### 4.4 From pristine tradition to salutary metamorphosis

One of the potential causes of such a transformation may have been the fundamental change in the status of the Russian monarch and of the Orthodox Church, which I have tried to reconstruct in the previous chapter. When Peter subjected the church to his control, claiming both spiritual authority (the former patriarch's function) and power to govern (the traditional monarch's prerogative), he indeed became functionally equivalent to Christ. The latter, on the one hand, possessed the absolute spiritual authority because of his ontological unity with the Father, and, on the other hand, through the separation of divine acting, oversaw the economy of salvation.<sup>37</sup> Such functional equivalence almost unavoidably led to Peter's personal glorification, for it is precisely the Father and the Son who are worthy of eternal glory. Hence, there was no inconsistency between Peter's personal dislike of pompousness and splendour and the aura of glorification that developed around him. The latter was a consequence of his newly acquired position in the Russian

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<sup>34</sup> Yu.V. Stennik, "Petr I v russkoy literature XVIII veka [Peter I in the Russian Literature of the XVIII century]," in: S.I. Nikolaev, ed., *Petr I v russkoy literature XVIII veka. Teksty i kommentarii* [Peter I in the Russian Literature of the XVIII century. Texts and Commentaries] (Saint Petersburg: Nauka, 2006).

<sup>35</sup> Solovyov, "A Few Words in Defence of Peter the Great," p. 177.

<sup>36</sup> Grebenyuk, ed., *Panegyric Literature of Petrine time*.

<sup>37</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The kingdom and the glory: For a theological genealogy of economy and government* (Stanford University Press, 2011).

discursive universe, while the former was a matter of his personal lifestyle, which by many accounts was very modest, if not ascetic.

One consequence of this shift in the monarch's status was that the greatness of Russian *derzhava* began to be perceived as an outcome of its salvation by Peter-Christ. Be it his military victories or reforms, it was only through his sacrificial policies that the true Russian great power was conceived and brought to maturity. Russia was either believed to be born with Peter (as if it had not existed before) or re-born (i.e. subjected to a salutary metamorphosis). What used to be a backward wasteland, transformed into a *great* polity, but only because of Peter *the Great*. In the Russian XVIII-century discourse, this position became overwhelmingly popular.

For instance, Gavriil Buzhinsky, a Russian bishop and author, and another one of Peter's protégées, openly referred to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* when he accounted for Peter's reforms, but said that in Peter's case it was for real, "Raise your eyes, blessed Russian state [*Derzhavo*], and see the ineffable metamorphosis in your forces, yet not the fable one, but the genuine."<sup>38</sup> It was also Buzhinsky who often described the Muscovite Russian past as utterly murky and sad:

He crowned Russia with flowers and enrobed it in the clothes of immortal glory, when he successfully held down to the Russian sceptre by means of good old, yet unparalleled, prudence, having accepted the sceptre as a young boy in the time so terrible that it is painful to recall it.<sup>39</sup>

Similarly, Peter's political associate Pyotr Shafirov attested that "Peter conceived a metamorphosis in Russia, or, in other words, a transfiguration."<sup>40</sup> Prokopovich also certainly could not have failed to notice Russia's inception in Poltava: "whether it is true or not that the natural historians tell us that daisies are born by the lightning, we know for sure that all trophies and benefits of this Russian state [*derzhava*], like the daisies of the tsaric crown, were conceived and born from the lightning and thunder of the battle of Poltava."<sup>41</sup> Pyotr Krekshin, an XVIII-century

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<sup>38</sup> Gavriil Buzhinsky, "*Sermo pangyricus in diem natalem serenissimi ac potentissimi petri magni*," *The Library*, <http://goo.gl/2McwKt>, accessed 1 October 2015.

<sup>39</sup> Buzhinsky, "*Sermo pangyricus*..."

<sup>40</sup> Shafirov, *A discourse concerning the just causes of the war between Sweden and Russia*, p. 9.

<sup>41</sup> Prokopovich, *Collected Works*, pp. 58-59

historian, in his *History of Peter the Great* also pointed out that Peter, whom he referred to as nothing short of “Our Father [*Otche Nash*],” bringing in another structural analogy with a prayer, “brought us from unbeing into being ... Before [him] everyone called us last, but today they call us the first.”<sup>42</sup>

## 4.5 Peter the Europeanizer?

The argument outlined above runs contrary to the mainstream interpretation of Peter as the ‘Europeanizer’ of Russia. Indeed, the described political trajectory looks anything but European. How, then, could one reconcile the fact that Peter’s Russia did become visibly more like the rest of the European states with a less obvious theocratisation of its political symbolism? I try to accomplish this by looking at the appropriation and transformation of European political doctrines of natural law in the writings of the main Petrine ideologue, Theophan Prokopovich.

It would be unreasonable to deny that during Peter’s reign Russia opened itself to Europe to an unprecedented degree. This openness caused a great influx of people, technologies and ideas coming to Russia from the West. Some of those ideas were brought by the people who were born and educated in what is now Poland and Ukraine. Those people constituted a remarkably large share of Peter’s ideological supporters. Prokopovich was one of them.

I have chosen to pay closer attention to Prokopovich’s legacy mainly due to three reasons. First, his writings present a fairly systematic political teaching addressing precisely the issue at stake – the origin, the qualities, and the application of the supreme political power, which Prokopovich calls *velichestvo* or *maiestat*. Second, being in a position of the main Petrine ideologue, he reflected and justified the changes happening on the ground, i.e. he was one of the most practice-oriented thinkers of his time. Third, Prokopovich was openly trying to adapt the theories of Hugo Grotius, Thomas Hobbes and Samuel von Pufendorf to the Russian context and to reconcile them with the Byzantine influence interlaced in the Ruthenian tradition from which he had emerged. In

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<sup>42</sup> Pyotr Krekshin cited in Uspenskij and Zhivov, *Tsar and God*, p. 35.

addition to Prokopovich's original texts, I also largely rely in my analysis on Georges Gurvitch's book *Theophan Prokopovich's 'The Truth of the Monarch's Will' and Its Western European Sources*, published in 1915 in Tartu.<sup>43</sup>

#### 4.5.1 *Velichestvo and maiestat*

When it came to the origin and the nature of supreme power embodying greatness, Prokopovich maintained that “supreme power ha[d] its beginning and reason in the being itself, [i.e.] – in God, the creator of being.”<sup>44</sup> And although he admitted that the first power was established through the people's agreement, it was the human conscience (which was the seed of god) that forced people to seek for a strong protector of natural law implanted by god into human hearts. Hence, Prokopovich argued that one “[could not] fail to proclaim god himself as the origin of supreme power.”<sup>45</sup> As for the meaning and application of supreme power, Prokopovich discussed this at great length:

Let us approach the Tsaric throne even closer, and let us ask, what is the meaning of that glorious Tsaric title VELICHESTVO, or how other European peoples call it in Latin MAESTAT' or MAESTET'. In simple grammatical use this term means any kind of superiority of one thing over another, in social and natural worlds alike. We, however, do not use the term VELICHESTVO in this wide sense here, but only in the sense related to political philosophy. Yet, even in political philosophy the word VELICHESTVO has a double meaning. Since sometimes, in free use, it indicates the superlative degree of someone's honour and not the supreme one: a few examples of such use can be found in the writings of some ancient Roman writers. Yet, it is accepted by all Slavic and other peoples that this name MAESTET' or VELICHESTVO is used to indicate the most superlative honour and is only attributed to the supreme power. Hence, it does not only point at its highest dignity, which cannot be excelled by any other in the world, but also at its fullest legislative power, holding the ultimate court, and issuing indefeasible judgment, but being in itself not subject to any law.<sup>46</sup>

Further, the author commented on sovereign's responsibilities in front of the divine authority:

When [we] say that the supreme power called VELICHESTVO is not subject to any law, it should be clear that we only speak about human law: for it is subject to god's power ... and

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<sup>43</sup> Georges Gurvitch, *Pravda voli monarshey' Feofana Prokopovicha i ee zapadnoevropeyskiye istochniki* [Theophan Prokopovich's 'The Truth of the Monarch's Will' and Its Western European Sources] (Yuriev: Tipografiya K. Mattisen, 1915).

<sup>44</sup> Prokopovich, *Collected Works*, p. 82.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 82.

<sup>46</sup> Theophan Prokopovich, *Pravda voli monarshey...* [The Truth of the Monarch's Will...] (Moscow: Sinodalnaya tipografiya, 1726), p. 21.

should obey the ten commandments ... Yet, it is subject to god's law in such a way that for its violation should be held liable in front of god alone, and not the human court.<sup>47</sup>

To sum up, for Prokopovich supreme power (1) was characterised by the ultimate degree of greatness and could not have any other human power above it; (2) was not bound by laws; (3) was not accountable for its actions in front of anyone but god; and (4) was also untouchable.<sup>48</sup>

#### **4.5.2 God's will and the people's will**

One curious moment in the above discussion is that Prokopovich tried to reconcile the idea of social contract, borrowed from the European school of natural law, with the then-dominant Russian idea of god's enthronement. The author, in fact, accepted both grounds for a sovereign's right to supreme power, but, of course, he could not escape some necessary clarifications.

Both Hobbes and Pufendorf "derive[d] [the supreme power] with all its qualities and positive content from the initial contract [of association]."<sup>49</sup> Moreover, they could only do this by also developing the idea of *individual sovereignty*, which logically led "to the full rejection of theocratic foundations of power."<sup>50</sup> The Hobbesian contract was at the same time the contract of association, which created *populus*, and the contract of subjection, which created *rex*. Like Hobbes, Pufendorf tended to present separate individuals, not the people, as the opposing side to the *rex*, while the people's sovereignty was resurrected only occasionally when the sovereign was falling away.

For Prokopovich, however, god's revelation remained not only an independent source of cognition, but also an important force in the establishment of any political order. Trying to accommodate the contractual foundation of supreme power, Prokopovich "assume[d] the initial sovereignty of a people, not of an individual. The contract discussed in *The Truth of the Monarch's Will* [was] exclusively *pactum subjectionis*; the people function[ed] in it as a previously constituted unity possessing the common will."<sup>51</sup> At the same time, every sovereign was endowed with the absolute right because of the people's common will and god's enthronement *simultaneously*. That is,

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>48</sup> Gurvitch, *Theophan Prokopovich's 'The Truth of the Monarch's Will'*..., pp. 3-4.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 49.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 59.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 68.

for Prokopovich god's enthronement and the will of the people were always effectively the same. Gurvitch compared this principle with the Catholic formula *omnis potestas a deo per populum* (all power comes from God but through the people). Yet, in Prokopovich's writings this formula received a slightly different meaning. If for Catholic scholars the nature of power in general was divine, but the right for it was given through the people, for Prokopovich it was "the power of *every given ruler* that [came] from god, ... yet, ... not directly, but through the people's will directed by god."<sup>52</sup>

In the above principle one could easily recognise a logic similar to the one which was operating during the 1613 Assembly of the Land. There, the people, understood as a pre-existing entity, performed the function of god's hand. Hence, the people's will should have always been unanimous. Prokopovich left no space for deliberation or debate in his political theory. The ruler was always enthroned by acclamation, which was a mere actualisation of divine providence. Consequently, unlike Pufendorf, who interpreted the second contract as reciprocal, Prokopovich presented his contract as strictly unilateral. What is more, unlike Hobbes, whose contract was also unilateral, but who specifically reserved a semblance of individual rights in his conception of simple obedience, Prokopovich left no space at all for individual freedom. In *The Word on Tsaric Power and Honor* (1718), he complained that many Russian people "[did] not know that the highest power [*vysochayshaya derzhava*] was established by god, and weaponed by him, and that resisting it [was] a sin against god himself, which [was] punished by not only temporal, but also eternal death."<sup>53</sup> In his opinion, this should have been the case, because "Christ did not give us the freedom to disregard god's commandments and to disobey the powers that be, but he specifically affirmed [that we should obey them]."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 13, emphasis added.

<sup>53</sup> Prokopovich, *Collected Works*, p. 77.

<sup>54</sup> Prokopovich, *Collected Works*, p. 79.

#### 4.5.3 *Peter's theocratic absolutism*

Consequently, even though many historians argued that the “theocratic character of power, which [had] existed in Muscovite Russia, in Peter’s time [became] a thing of the past,”<sup>55</sup> and that “at the beginning of XVIII century [the idea of state in Russia became] more secular rather than religious,”<sup>56</sup> the situation was not exactly that straightforward. While it is true that the official Church was distanced from the state government, it is not entirely correct that the power as such also lost its theocratic nature. Of course, Peter the Great sympathised with the utilitarian conception of the state. For instance, Lappo-Danilevsky maintained that “[Peter] took [this conception] as a basis of his system and referred to this principle congruent with his active personality and his aspiration for reforms to motivate most of them.”<sup>57</sup> He even ordered the publication of one of Pufendorf’s books in Russian. Yet, at the same time, having the entirety of absolute power, he could not “recognise the interest of the state as the legal principle of its government.”<sup>58</sup> He also could not entirely “justify [the] principle of legality: as an autocratic monarch, he had a possibility to always intervene in any business and to expose any private individual to the pressure of his bureaucratic machine.”<sup>59</sup> And certainly, in most of his decrees “he [kept referring] to the theory of the Orthodox tsar and the Orthodox state...”<sup>60</sup>

This controversy did not escape the attention of the most susceptible interpreters of Peter’s reforms. Just like Lappo-Danilevsky had argued one century before him, Oleg Kharkhordin, a student of republican thought, also concluded that the way Peter was trying to introduce the notion of common good and the supremacy of the interest of the state over the interests of any private individual, including the monarch himself, was self-undermining. Kharkhordin argued that “the segregation of the body of the state from the person of the ruler was ordered and implemented by a personal whim of an autocratic ruler who controlled this body completely,” for which, as

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<sup>55</sup> Stennik, *Peter I in Russian Literature of the XVIII century*.

<sup>56</sup> Lappo-Danilevsky, *The Idea of State*.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.



presented by Peter's ideologists, he had "divine sanction."<sup>61</sup> For Kharkhordin, this contradiction was, of course, unimportant, because he interpreted the idea of common good as a convenient fiction to exert even more control over the population, not as a popularly instigated model for a just society. Peter's example was useful for Kharkhordin in so far as it made this contradiction more visible, while in the West, where the idea of common good was, in his view, utilised for similar purposes, this manipulation was clouded by the vast presence of republican thinkers.

It becomes evident from Prokopovich's writings that, discursively, the Russian political regime remained explicitly theocratic with providence and god's will being both the sources and the instruments of sovereignty. What seemed as almost complete secularization was, in fact, the consolidation of absolute power in the hands of the monarch-theocrat. Hence, in Peter's time, despite the monarch's negative attitude to Byzantium, "Byzantinization [of the Russian political regime] was not only compatible with Europeanization, but as concerns the sacralization of the tsar's power, it combined with Europeanization, forming a single whole."<sup>62</sup>

This Byzantinization, however, was not a blind replanting of Byzantine tradition, but a reflective reconstruction of the latter that attained an important generative effect, because of which old structures gave birth to new meanings. If in Byzantium the relation between the figure of the basileus and the deity could be characterised as parallelism at most, in the Russian tradition the image of the tsar almost entirely merged with that of the Christian god. A bit later, this important shift received its symbolic manifestation in the altered ritual of coronation. Cherniavsky noticed that, starting from the coronation of Elizabeth in 1742, "the Russian rulers crowned themselves, [and] the senior archbishop only handed the crown to the emperor (or empress)."<sup>63</sup> Thereby, the monarch demonstrated symbolically that he or she owed "nothing to anything outside of himself [or herself] and [was] limited by nothing outside of himself [or herself]."<sup>64</sup> As Cherniavsky rightly

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<sup>61</sup> Kharkhordin, "What is the State? The Russian Concept of *Gosudarstvo* in the European Context": 221-222.

<sup>62</sup> Uspenskij and Zhivov, "Tsar and God," p. 17.

<sup>63</sup> Cherniavsky, *Tsar and People*, p. 90.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p. 90.

pointed out, “the Sovereign Emperor [*gosudar’-imperator*] was emperor *sui generis*, containing within himself all power and the source of all power, completely secular, or, what is the same thing, deified.”<sup>65</sup>

Triggered by the state’s takeover of the church, because of which the monarch was gradually turning into a spiritual leader of the nation (in addition to being a civic one), strong and all-pervasive sacralisation of the monarch developed into an important attribute of the Russian Empire’s discursive structure. This attribute outlasted Peter’s reign and preserved its importance (not without opposition) throughout the whole period of the empire’s existence.

## 4.6 Greatness as appearance

The problem with Russia’s greatness revealing itself through glory, however, was that the latter always remained markedly artificial. To be more precise, glorification was and is always unbreakably tied to appearance. It is actualised through enactment and has no positive content of its own. Glorification merely affirms what has been said or done already. Like ‘amen’ coming in the end of a liturgical utterance to simply validate the statement, not to add any new content to it, political glorification usually capitalises on the words and deeds already said and undertaken, without producing any new discursive stuff (e.g. systems of ideas or arguments). One could, of course, argue that as such it does not become less important for exercising political power. Giorgio Agamben insisted that in theology glory hid the unthinkable majesty of the Father and resolved the problem of the finitude of the salvation economy. He also suggested that political power needed glory for similar purposes – to justify and maintain political order by hiding the hollow centre of sovereignty.<sup>66</sup> Still, the key purpose of glorification is to create an aura. As Yuri Kagarlitsky put it,

deliberate artificiality of panegyric comparisons and their demonstrative conventionality anticipated the creation of specific solemn and ceremonial aura around the tsar and his court; timelessness of appraisals presupposed the conformity of their object to the equally timeless cultural model and canon. Panegyric rhetoric organised the unwinding and reproduction of

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<sup>65</sup> Cherniavsky, *Tsar and People*, p. 91.

<sup>66</sup> Agamben, *The kingdom and the glory*.

power discourse in court ceremonial; it formed the space for gesticulation, emphasizing the speaker's loyalty to the imperial order.<sup>67</sup>

Hence, greatness affirmed through glorification was neither appealing to some pristine essence of Russian polity, nor did it establish itself through international deliberation and recognition. Instead, it was purely *phenomenal*, i.e. it manifested itself through appearance and could only be experienced sentiently. Phenomenal greatness reproduced itself within Russian political discourse by means of its own articulation.

However, phenomenal greatness can only be called 'unreal', if one prioritises consensual deliberation and measurement, or tries to reach some immanent substance behind appearance. Such considerations, however, may be irrelevant for social facts, whose validity can be evaluated on an altogether different scale. One could think of a theatrical performance, for example. It is not necessary for a theatre audience to believe in the historicity of the play on stage or in the truthfulness of all the actors to still admit that their performance can produce profound social effects and be recognised as a great work of art. The point is that, when one attends a performance, one looks at it through a slightly different lens, assesses it using a different set of criteria, and participates in it utilizing a different selection of practices. A theatrical performance is also not subject to consensual validation. It can, of course, be discussed and compared to other performances, but only by means of aesthetic judgment, which is always subjective. The recognition of its success hinges upon the feeling of transcendence that it must be able to create. To become great, it should merely be persuasive.

## 4.7 Political impressionism of Catherine the Great

Indeed, throughout the XVIII century both domestic and international discursive manifestations of Russia's political greatness had a clear element of theatricality to them. They were largely dependent on visibility and creating impression. This is how one of the most

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<sup>67</sup> Yuri Kagarlitsky, "Sakralizatsiya kak priem: resursy ubeditel'nosti i vliyatel'nosti imperskogo diskursa v Rossii XVIII veka [Sacralisation as a Tool: the resources of persuasiveness and influence of the imperial discourse in XVIII-century Russia]," *NLO*, No. 38 (1999).

prominent Russian historians of the XIX – beginning of XX centuries, Vasily Klyuchevsky, described Catherine II's influence on Russia's domestic political order and international standing, "[Catherine] did not give freedom and enlightenment to her people, ... but she gave [people's] minds an opportunity to feel the value of those goods, if not as principles of public order, then, at least, as conveniences of private, individual existence."<sup>68</sup> The historian continued by insisting that,

...this feeling was ever more encouraging, as it was not yet weakened by the realization of all the sacrifices and efforts that need to be made for acquiring those goods, while the congestion of the sphere allocated for their enactment was not yet noticed; the narrowness of the boot could not be felt under the *spell of immortal glory*, which she acquired around the world.<sup>69</sup>

Then, openly utilizing a theatrical metaphor, Klyuchevsky asserted that,

This glory was a new impression for Russian society, and it is in this glory where the secret of Catherine's popularity lies. In her worldwide glory the Russian society felt its own international strength, they discovered themselves through it: *Catherine was admired just like we admire an actor*, who opens and awakes previously unknown feelings inside us; she was admired because through her we began to admire ourselves. Since Peter, Russians hardly thought of themselves as people, let alone true Europeans; under Catherine, however, Russians not only felt they were people, but they also felt as if they were the first people in all of Europe.<sup>70</sup>

Like most representatives of the 'State School' of Russian historiography, Klyuchevsky was probably overestimating the significance of the allegedly all-pervasive state and the gifted rulers for Russia's political evolution. Yet, what remains interesting in his account of Catherine's reign is a very specific mode of state-society interaction, which he pinpointed very lucidly as being theatrical. This interaction hinged upon creating a powerful impression strong enough to forgive the empress for numerous smaller failures and losses in domestic administration. It also seems that Catherine chose to employ a similar strategy in her interactions with foreign intellectuals, who propagated her cause in Western Europe – she preferred to be viewed from a distance. The positive impression she had managed to create on people like Voltaire and Diderot through "an

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<sup>68</sup> Vasily Klyuchevsky, *Imperatritsa Yekaterina II (1729-1796)* [Empress Catherine II (1729-1796)], <http://goo.gl/TuvTzo>, accessed on 17 February 2016.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, emphasis added.

irresistible combination of flattery and spectacular generosity”<sup>71</sup> was carefully guarded. This may have been one of the reasons why Catherine advised Voltaire against visiting her in Russia, justifying her insistence by voicing concerns about his poor health.<sup>72</sup>

Another example of Catherine’s political impressionism in action is, of course, the (in)famous myth about Potemkin villages, i.e. the colourful facades of village houses that Grigory Potemkin, Catherine’s probablemorganatic husband, allegedly installed along the banks of the Dnieper River during the empress’ trip to Crimea in 1787. Like A.M. Panchenko and Andrei Zorin, I abstain from debating the truthfulness of this myth and look instead at its symbolic significance. And when it comes to the latter, the Potemkin villages, instead of being an instance of mere cover-up for real poverty and misery, may, in fact, have had a more important symbolic function. Both Panchenko and Zorin argued convincingly that Potemkin’s ‘performance’, if it ever happened, was more about “symbolic transformation of space, a theatre decoration that allowed the spectators to feel themselves participants in a mythologic act.”<sup>73</sup>

XVIII-century Russia utilised this mode of political interaction in its international relations as well. Klyuchevsky, a contemporary of Monet and Renoir, discerned in such mode of conduct a curious effect of an impressionist painting. The historian wrote that “the Empire ... was seen by law and by general impression as a magnificent and harmonic building, while at a closer look it revealed chaos and disorder, as a painting with sweeping brushstrokes only fit for observing it from the distance.”<sup>74</sup> A similar effect was later reportedly created by Catherine’s grandson emperor Alexander I (1801-1825) during the Congress of Vienna (1814-1815). When Alexander represented

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<sup>71</sup> Antony Lentin, “Catherine the Great and Denis Diderot,” *History Today*, <https://goo.gl/z2kb2R>, accessed 22 September 2018.

<sup>72</sup> E.g. this was Anthony Lentin’s explanation of Catherine’s unwillingness to let the French philosopher come to Saint Petersburg to meet her in person (Voltaire and Catherine the Great, *Selected correspondence*, translated, with commentary, notes and introduction by Anthony Lentin [Cambridge: Oriental Research Partners, 1974]), pp. 31-32.

<sup>73</sup> Andrei Zorin, *Kormya dvuglavogo orla... Literatura i gosudarstvennaya ideologiya v Rossii v posledney treti XVIII – pervoy treti XIX veka* [Feeding the Two-headed Eagle... Literature and State Ideology in Russia in the last third of the XVIII – the first third of the XIX century] (Moscow: Novoye literaturnoe obozrenie, 2001), p. 133. Zorin wrote these lines about another Potemkin’s ‘performance’, a 1779 celebration organized on the occasion of the birth of Catherine’s grandson Konstantin, but he admitted that the principle of his symbolic interaction with the audience was similar to the one used during Catherine’s trip to Crimea.

<sup>74</sup> Klyuchevsky, *Empress Catherine II*.

the “new and enigmatical” Russia at the Congress, he was generally perceived as “a theatrical, mystical, and versatile personage.”<sup>75</sup> Perhaps the French representative, Prince Talleyrand, captured something beyond mere flattery when he told Alexander that “the foremost of [his] interests is the care of that personal glory which [he] has acquired, and whose lustre [was] reflected upon [his] Empire,”<sup>76</sup> because it was solely on the account of this personal glory that the acceptance of “the intervention of Russia in the affairs of Europe ... [had] been suffered to take place.”<sup>77</sup> Pointing in the same direction as Klyuchevsky when he was writing of Catherine, Talleyrand also added, “[His] majesty must guard that glory, not for [his] own sake only, but also for the sake of [his] people, whose patrimony it [was].”<sup>78</sup>

## 4.8 Dispelling the charm

One obvious weakness of political impressionism is disclosure, for it is through disclosure that the charm of performative greatness is dispelled. Russian elites may have understood this quite clearly, but naturally they did not rush to emphasise this explicitly in the international arena. This was not the case for some of their private correspondence though. For instance, in 1795, Grand Chancellor and the architect of Russian foreign policy, Alexander Bezborodko, while complaining to Prince Nikolai Repnin about the lack of resources, wrote, “Fortunately, everyone believes that we [Russia] are stronger than we really are in our essence, and such good impression will help us get out of this chaos, given that we act modestly and with prudence.”<sup>79</sup>

Similarly, the issue of ‘charm’ as an attribute of great powers was brought forth and discussed at the very dusk of the Russian empire. In 1910, Prince Grigory Trubetskoy quoted Baron Roman Rosen, Russian ambassador in Tokyo, who wrote before the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) that Russia could not pursue two foreign policy goals in the Far East

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<sup>75</sup> M.G. Pallain, *The Correspondence of Prince Talleyrand and King Louis XVIII during the Congress of Vienna* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1881), p. xii, hereinafter referred as ‘Talleyrand’.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p. 74.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p. 74.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 74.

<sup>79</sup> N. I. Kostomarov and A.A. Polovtsov, eds, *Sbornik Imperatorskogo Russkogo istoricheskogo obshchestva* [Collection of the Imperial Russian Historical Society], Vol. 16 (Saint Petersburg: Tipografiya Maikova, 1875), p. 207.

simultaneously, and that the only option was “to concentrate all its efforts ... in Manchuria, ... for Russia could not withdraw from it without significant damage to its *charm* [*obayanie*] and *political interests* as a world power in the Far East.”<sup>80</sup> Rosen also believed that the Japanese had been effectively deterred by that “*charm* of Russia as the greatest world power.”<sup>81</sup>

However, already in the XVIII century, the sensitivity of the Russian idea of political greatness to disclosure and measurement became obvious. Perhaps the most telling discursive example revealing such sensitivity was an anonymous opus called *Antidote* (1770), which was often attributed to Catherine the Great herself. This 238-page (!) pamphlet was nothing else but a critical analysis of one “obnoxious, but gorgeously printed book.”<sup>82</sup> Namely, *Antidote* was an outraged response to Abbot Jean-Baptiste Chappe d’Auteroche’s unflattering 1768 book about his journey through Russia.<sup>83</sup> In her autographic rescript from the pamphlet, Catherine bitterly noted, “out of all the agents, who, driven by selfishness and intrigue, have been disturbing peace in the world, I would eagerly believe the abbot to be the most cunning and methodical.”<sup>84</sup> The empress seemed to have been revolted by the fact that the Abbot, “having been warned that Europe holds too high an opinion about Russian power and that this opinion might become too widespread and harmful for general lines of French politics took it upon himself to debunk it and to prove that our empire has nothing to be afraid of and that such opinion exists only due to the lack of research.”<sup>85</sup>

According to the author of the opus, the Abbot “under the pretext of observing the Venus, ... started *measuring* in his own way *the sources of our power* [*mogushchestva*], i.e. bringing out the worst

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<sup>80</sup> Roman Rosen cited in Grigory Trubetskoy, “Rossiya kak velikaya derzhava [Russia as a Great Power],” in: V. P. Ryabushinsky, *Velikaya Rossiya* [Great Russia] (Moscow: Tipografiya P.P. Ryabushinsky, 1910), p. 46, emphasis added.

<sup>81</sup> Trubetskoy, “Russia as a Great Power,” p. 46, emphasis added.

<sup>82</sup> Catherine II (presumably), “Antidot. Polemicheskoye sochinenie Ekateriny II, ili razbor knigi abbata Shappa d’Oterosha o Rossii [Antidote. Polemical Essay by Catherine II, or An Analysis of Abbot Chappe d’Auteroche’s Book About Russia],” in Pyotr Bartenev, ed., *Osmnadsaty vek: Istoricheskiy sbornik* [Eighteenth Century: Historical Collection], Vol. 4 (Moscow: Tipografiya T. Ris, 1869), p. 226, hereinafter referred to as ‘*Antidote*’.

<sup>83</sup> Jean-Baptiste Chappe d’Auteroche, *Voyage en Sibérie fait par ordre du roi en 1761* [A voyage to Siberia by the order of the king in 1761] (Paris: Debure père, 1768), <https://goo.gl/RKrsWP>, accessed 22 September 2018.

<sup>84</sup> A. Polovtsov, ed., *Sbornik Imperatorskogo Russkogo istoricheskogo obschestva* [Collection of the Imperial Russian Historical Society], Vol. 10 (Saint Petersburg: Tipografiya Imperatorskoy Akademii Nauk, 1872), p. 317.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, p. 317.

in our political regime, and in the features and character of our people. In addition, he began to belittle our state's annual profits, its land and naval forces, its population, efficiency of its trade and mines, and the quality of its soil."<sup>86</sup> Because of such exercise, d'Auteroche presented a collection of detailed tables that were supposed to “*measure and expose* all powers and profits of the Empire to the last kopeck.”<sup>87</sup>

The general line of critique employed by the author of *Antidote* was to insist that d'Auteroche's data and observations were either non-credible, non-generalizable, or typical of all European nations and not of Russia alone. As such, the author insisted that the Abbot's observations were nothing but “printed defamation”<sup>88</sup> characteristic of those who “force their minds to believe [that Russia] is insignificant against all evidence and the truth.”<sup>89</sup> The evidence of Russia's significance, however, was not presented in *Antidote* in the kind of format that d'Auteroche would have accepted (e.g. as corrected numbers and charts). Throughout all 238 pages the author did not move beyond deconstruction. Yet one important feature that did, in the author's opinion, make Russia great and that was expanded upon in the text of the pamphlet was the ability of the Russian people to connect in one unified feeling during times of trouble. In *Antidote*, this ability was referred to as *obshchiy golos naroda* (i.e. ‘common voice of the people’) or *soglasie* (i.e. ‘consonance’).<sup>90</sup> Such consonance always emerged when the country was weak and endangered, and it usually brought about breakthroughs and revolutions.

## 4.9 People's unison

This idea of the people's consonance is, in fact, another re-emerging theme in Russia's political discourse. Its importance should not be underestimated, for in it one could see how the two ideas of political greatness, noumenal and phenomenal, overlap. Since the noumenal world is unknowable through human sensation, while phenomenal manifestations are pure appearances

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<sup>86</sup> *Antidote*, p. 298, emphasis added.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, p. 298, emphasis added.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, p. 258.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, p. 299.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, p. 302-303.



detached from a universal foundation, the only way of their collective validation is through a consonance of some sort, because such validation would necessarily need to follow a binary logic.

On the one hand, if appearance does not matter, for greatness is perceived as some objective inner truth, all arguments and discussions become irrelevant. A belief can only be true if it perfectly corresponds to some noumenal entity. If this entity is not there, or if the belief itself is debatable, this belief immediately becomes false.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, I compared such understanding of political greatness with god's greatness. And the only possibility of its collective acclaim is unison.<sup>92</sup>

On the other hand, if there is no real foundation, and it is only appearance that matters, there is no etalon for anything at all, just like there are no universals. Truth, in this case, is internal to the process of signification. And the endless debate and arguing that comes as its consequence can only stop in persuasion.<sup>93</sup> When it comes to political entities, this moment of persuasion is always problematic, for it must be immediately overwhelming to work at all. Therefore, for example, however convincing Leviathan looks in the end, Hobbes could not convincingly demonstrate how an arrangement like this would come about to begin with. Similarly, for the author of *Antidote*, people's consonance was a natural and necessary precondition of breakthroughs and revolutions. Given that greatness is mere appearance, Russia's greatest moments came about when all the people were persuaded as one.

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<sup>91</sup> For more information on philosophical realism and the correspondence theory of truth see: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Truth," <https://goo.gl/XPKaDK>, accessed 27 March 2016.

<sup>92</sup> The importance of unison comes to the fore in a whole number of occasions in Russian political discourse. For example, here is how Lev Löwenson described the procedure of *vieche*, i.e. the adult inhabitants' assembly in the city of Novgorod in pre-modern times: "Whenever the Prince or the city elders had anything of importance to communicate, the *vieche* bell was rung and the adult inhabitants assembled in an open place... There was no secret or individual vote. The assembly made known its will by a mighty shout, and if there was no strong opposition the vote was regarded as unanimous. If, however, the opposition was loud and persistent, the question was finally settled by a free-fight" (Lev Löwenson, "A Thousand Years of Russian Government," UCL SSEES Library Archives, Loewenson Collection (1631-1963) (circa), LOE/2/12, Texts of lecture on Russia given by Löwenson (1936) p. 7-8). Also the unison of the people figures very prominently in the story of the 1613 Assembly of the Land, the 1613 Charter of Enthronement, and Theophan Prokopovich's political philosophy.

<sup>93</sup> For more information on philosophical nominalism see: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Nominalism in Metaphysics," <https://goo.gl/XmpSKV>, accessed 27 March 2016.

## 4.10 Maintaining the appearance

Unsurprisingly, the European tendency towards measuring political greatness and the troubles that Russia seems to have had with it that revealed themselves in *Antidote*, were also characteristic of contemporaneous Russia's diplomatic relations with some of its European neighbours. For example, in 1766, Sir George Macartney, British ambassador in Saint Petersburg, was quick to notice that "the two powers [Russia and Great Britain] [were] under mutual mistakes with regard to each other... [and the British mistake] with regard to [Russia was] in looking upon this nation as a civilised one and treating them as such, [for] it by no means *merit[ed]* this title."<sup>94</sup> Frustrated with the ill success in his negotiations Macartney wrote in a different letter to London that Russians "have such extravagant ideas of their own power, and seem to have so little apprehension from other nations, that they really believe such a method of negotiation (for they seriously call this negotiating) the most suitable to their circumstances, situation of affairs, and convenience."<sup>95</sup> Trying to rationalise such behaviour of the Russian court, Macartney, recalling how much Russia was courted by "the most formidable powers of Europe," suggested that the insolence that Russians were "swelled with" was "generally the attendant of *unmerited* good fortune,"<sup>96</sup> thereby making clear that for a Briton merit was the only measure of greatness.

In another piece of correspondence that took place in 1768, Macartney's successor, Mr. Henry Shirley, wrote to Lord Viscount Weymouth, the British Secretary of State for the Northern Department, about his personal feelings towards Russians:

One cannot help pitying Russians, who think themselves so wise, so powerful, when they are at such an immense distance from the happy situation of some nations in Europe. I confess that their credit and influence is great, that their army is numerous, though not invincible, as they believe; but as the brightness of their power proceeds in a great measure from the weakness of some of their neighbours, and the strength of the King of Prussia ... it would be injudicious to suppose that it will shine for ever.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> A. Polovtsov, ed., *Sbornik Imperatorskogo Russkogo istoricheskogo obschestva* [Collection of the Imperial Russian Historical Society], Vol. 12 (Saint Petersburg: Tipografiya Imperatorskoy Akademii Nauk, 1873), p. 248-249, emphasis added.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, p. 253.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p. 253.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, p. 330.

However, the most interesting diplomatic exchange occurred a year earlier between Shirley and the then-current British Secretary of State for the Northern Department, Lord Henry Seymour Conway. While trying to negotiate a trade agreement with Russia, Shirley assured Conway of his certainty that Russia would “conceive advantageous notions of the grandeur of Great Britain, and ... perceive how beneficial it would be to them to have such a power for their ally ... [and], notwithstanding the late coquetry, [the Empress would] ... accept most readily and alliance with [Britain], although never ... without the Turkish clause, because otherwise this alliance would appear to her dishonourable...”<sup>98</sup>

In response, Conway agreed with Shirley’s opinion on British grandeur, and suggested to him “several topics which [should be] occasionally ma[de] use of in [Shirley’s] future conference with [Count Nikita Panin, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs]” and which should remind him of Britain’s “grandeur and glory.”<sup>99</sup> These topics included “the unparalleled successes of the last war ... important acquisitions gained in every part of the world [which] render[ed] the success of [British] arms not a *vain blaze of glory*, but the source of such a *solid increase of power and riches*, as [would] be of the most durable advantage to the Nation... [and a] revenue of four million sterling... from the rents of land [in the East Indies].”<sup>100</sup> Conway also added that “the finances of the whole Russian Empire [would] not, *on comparison*, be found more superior.”<sup>101</sup> In addition, he also evaluated Russia’s strengths (e.g. its remote position, land and manpower) and concluded that “each State seem[ed] *calculated* by nature to supply the defects of the other, and were their union once established and generally known, it would add consideration to both, and enable them ... to pursue ... those arts of peace and cultivation which form the real grandeur and happiness of a people...”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p. 310.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, p. 311.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, p. 311, emphasis added.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, p. 312, emphasis added.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p. 315-314, emphasis added.

Having discussed the matter of Britain's greatness with Panin, Shirley reported the latter's response, which turned out to be as interesting for the present study as it was puzzling for both British diplomats. Reportedly, Panin, "observing the warmth with which [Shirley] spoke, smiled, and taking [Shirley] by the hand [said that he] could show [him] the same fair prospect on [Russia's] side."<sup>103</sup> When Shirley assured Panin that he did not intend "to under-rate the power of Russia,"<sup>104</sup> Panin interrupted his interlocutor and, promising to open his heart to Shirley, tried to articulate the real obstacle that he saw in front of him. For Panin, those measurements and justifications of greatness were missing the point. And the point was that Russia wanted "to render it unnecessary ... to renew her former connection[s] ... She ought to be not only absolutely independent of every other connection, but the base also of every other connection..."<sup>105</sup> That is, she could not afford, given her unquestionable highest dignity and status, to put herself in a position of needing to seek, in addition to the alliance with Great Britain, some other alliances to protect herself from Turkey. In Panin's opinion, Russia needed to minimise potential further compromises and maximise its independent, almost isolated position, and, together with Great Britain as an equally great power, she should have been able to hold the fate of European war in her hands, which would not have been the case, had the Turkish clause been excluded from the agreement.

In other words, if for Great Britain its political greatness gave her some competitive advantage, which could be measured, explicitly articulated and eventually translated into *leverage* in international negotiations, Russia's political greatness was treated, if anything, as an *obstacle* for international negotiations, because it made it impossible to agree to anything which could be perceived as dishonourable or degrading for the dignity of the Russian great sovereign. The issue of sovereign dignity was also mentioned on several other occasions in Russia's negotiations with Great Britain. One example would be a 1765 document *Pro-Memoria*, in which the Russian side maintained that the British ambassador "[knew] the mindset of the Russian court too well to admit

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, p. 318.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, p. 318.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, p. 317.

a possibility that it could be persuaded to sign a declaration, humiliating its dignity and unacceptable in both its wording and its form.”<sup>106</sup> Another example was a 1766 letter of already familiar Sir George Macartney, who reported Panin saying that Russia “would not so far derogate from her own Sovereignty, honour and prudence as to enchain herself to a foreign power without necessity....”<sup>107</sup>

## 4.11 Conclusion

The acute need to justify Peter’s reforms that fundamentally transformed the Russian domestic regime invariably altered Russia’s essential narrative on its political greatness. Political greatness was no longer perceived as contiguous to Russia’s pristine essence remaining intact throughout the country’s millennial history. Instead, it began to be interpreted as a product of Russia’s salvation by Peter the Great. Entirely attached to the figure of the monarch, it reproduced itself within political discourse by means of its own articulation in panegyric poetry, sermons, architecture and art. After losing its noumenal foundation, greatness turned into *phenomenal glory*, and as such it remained as detached from international hierarchies and comparisons as was its preceding incarnation.

Russian political discourse of Peter’s and Catherine’s times reveals that maintaining the appearance of political greatness was at least *as* important as, if not *more* than, exposing and capitalizing on measurable resources, political institutions and alliances. Russian political impressionism, characterised by implicit theatricality and overreliance on persuasion, became a new mode of discursive representation of greatpowerhood, both domestically and abroad. Such a mode of action was heavily based on grand gestures and impressive breakthroughs and was allergic to the nitty-gritty of institution building and scrupulous accumulation and management of resources. It was also preoccupied with honour and the protection of the dignity of the Russian throne.

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, p. 233.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, p. 259.

Of course, such a discursive position was not unique. Performance and persuasion were (and are) politics' essential parts not only in Russia and not only on the superficial level of diplomatic rituals and political ceremonies. They also mattered, as Erik Ringmar has argued recently, on a more profound level of constructing political subjects.<sup>108</sup> Power needed glory not as a simple adoration or as accommodation of monarchs' selfish caprices. Without glory, sovereignty would not work.<sup>109</sup> Indeed, post-*res publica christiana* Europe largely relied on phenomenal manifestations and appearance in its quest for asserting political identities and having them recognised in the international system. In addition, one could say that Russian political impressionism worked quite well, and as such was not perceived as alien in the European context. Yet, that context, as well as Russia's position within it, was slowly changing.

The dominance of phenomenal representations of greatness in Russian political discourse coincided with two other important international process: (1) Russia's gradual inclusion into the European society of states and the great power club that ran it; and (2) the transformation of the discourse on political greatness in many European states into the story of world history and universal progress. Gradually becoming a full-fledged member of the European system and internalizing some of its foundational narratives, Russia also found itself deficient in terms of the newly established dominant standard and had to reinvent itself and reformulate the phenomenal position that had sustained it so far. This reformulation took place against the background of uneven development and the emergence of the new mode of international conduct that manifested itself in the establishment of great power management as an institution of international society. In the next chapter, I look at how Russia was trying to cope with this new challenge.

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<sup>108</sup> Erik Ringmar, "How the world stage makes its subjects: an embodied critique of constructivist theory," *Journal of International Relations and Development* (2016) 19: 101–125.

<sup>109</sup> Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*.

## **CHAPTER 5 – TROUBLED ENCOUNTER: BACK TO NOUMENON?**

### **5.1 Introduction**

If continuous socialisation brings actors closer together, one common enemy brings them closer together several times as fast. In this respect, the rise of Napoleon and his joint defeat were crucial factors facilitating Russia's speedy rapprochement with Europe. As such, the Congress of Vienna (1814-1815) that immediately followed the Napoleonic Wars and became the main site for the renegotiation of European political order was another transformative moment in the evolution of Russian great power discourse. As I hinted in the previous chapter, this discursive transformation was influenced by two important factors. The first influence was Russia's official assumption of the role of a European great power. The second factor was the evolution of the discourse on political greatness in many European states that started in the second half of the XVIII century and received its institutionalised manifestation in Vienna in the form of the Congress System.

In its turn, the emergence of the Congress System as an institution of international society was accompanied by two intellectual processes in international legal and political thought. First, international law began to distance itself from natural law and transformed into positive international law. Positive international law relied on states practices, as opposed to decontextualised abstract ideals, and was only applicable to 'civilised' states, not colonised territories (the latter continued to be treated through natural law). Second, this shift translated into the story of world-historic progress which conditioned the discursive construction of an international hierarchy consisting of civilised, barbarian and savage peoples, where the civilised lot could legitimately engage in imperial and colonizing practices and assumed the right to manage international order. States' involvement in colonization became one of the most important characteristics of great powers.

Reflecting the abovementioned discursive transformation in its political thinking, Russia found itself in an ambivalent situation. On the one hand, as a recognised participant of the Congress System, Russia could not but adopt the new dominant narrative of the progressive development of universal humanity. On the other hand, as a recent and unevenly developed newcomer, it found itself somewhat deficient in those terms and could not claim to be on par with the most advanced European states, when it came to its civilizational level. Russia spent most of the XIX century trying to devise its own mobilizational narrative that could become a catching-up ideology but would not contradict the already internalised European ideas and challenge the fragile recognition of its great power status.

In 1814-1815, the mismatch between the previously dominant phenomenal understanding of Russia's foundational narrative on its political greatness and the newly established European consensus became especially obvious. However, that troubled encounter was just a culminating point of deeper and longer discursive transformations that took place both in Russia and outside its borders. In this chapter, I try to accomplish five tasks that should help contextualise the crisis of the phenomenal understanding of political greatness that had enjoyed prevalence in Russia's discursive universe up to that point and explain the emergence of a genealogical offspring of the previously marginalised noumenal position.

First, without going too deeply into the ideational evolution that made the emergence of the Congress System and great power management possible (for this is not the focus of my dissertation), I briefly reconstruct this process as it is reflected in the existing scholarship. Second, I trace the path that Russia had travelled before it was recognised as a member of the European society of states, even if provisionally and not completely. Third, I discuss the triumphant entry of the Russian army and its allies in Paris in 1814 to illustrate the specific mode of glorification adhered to by the Russian emperor Alexander I (1801-1825). Fourth, I elaborate on the clash of discursive positions on political greatness that took place in Vienna and possibly triggered Alexander's puzzling individual transformation during and in the immediate aftermath of the



Congress. The sudden shift in his discursive position – from progressive liberalism to religious mysticism – could, as I will argue, be better understood from within the semantic framework I propose in this thesis. Finally, I look at the remnants of the discourse on Russia’s noumenal greatness, which had been marginalised in the XVIII century and stayed in the state of hibernation ever since. I suggest that in the XIX century some of its elements were resurrected to reinforce Russia’s great power discourse and aided the construction of a specifically Russian progressive narrative of political greatness, which was formulated in the terms congruent with the European story of progress, but functionally dissimilar to it. A detailed discussion of the resulting discursive construct in all its complexity will follow in the next chapter.

## **5.2 Emergence of great power management in Europe**

Throughout the XVIII and XIX centuries, Russia’s status as one of the European great powers was always on shaky ground.<sup>1</sup> While its successful participation in the most important continental wars put Western powers in such a position that they had to talk to Russia, the tone of that talk, as well as Russia’s international recognition, were always ambivalent. Why was it difficult for Russia to socialise into the European society of states and adopt the language of relative and measurable greatness that started to dominate the European political arena? Where did this relational language come from to begin with?

According to Hamish Scott, the language of relativity and precise measurement of political power became hegemonic in European politics in the second half of the XVIII century, i.e. at the time when the term ‘great power’ entered the policymakers’ lexicon. Scott argued that “[t]he very notion of ‘great powers’ underlined the extent to which a state’s standing within the international hierarchy was now being assessed both with greater precision and relative to that of other

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<sup>1</sup> Iver B. Neumann, “Russia as a great power, 1815–2007,” *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 11.2 (2008): 128-151; and Neumann, “Russia’s Standing as a Great Power, 1494-1815”.

participants.”<sup>2</sup> This emphasis on precise measurement of states’ relative and potential power coincided with “the appearance of the distinctively German science of ‘statistics’.”<sup>3</sup>

Yet, it was not only the degree of precision that began to matter, when it came to assessing greatpowerhood in the late XVIII-century Europe. If in the early modern system “[s]uccess ... had been measured primarily in terms of military victories and the conquest of new territories to which these led, [during] the eighteenth century a more modern notion of power came to be developed...”<sup>4</sup> In Scott’s words, “measurements [of states’ relative power] took account of the available economic, demographic and even geographical resources in order to calculate [a] country’s political power.”<sup>5</sup> In addition to this, power and status got inextricably intertwined with the matters of culture and civilization. The story of national greatness became the story of civilizational superiority and progress, which translated into a legally codified hierarchization of international society often described as the distinction between civilised, barbarian and savage peoples.<sup>6</sup>

The construction of progressive understanding of world history was accompanied and facilitated by an important transformation of international law. Martti Koskenniemi described this process as an emergence of a liberal internationalist legal ‘sensibility’, which “not only [exhibited a] reformist political bent but [also a] conviction that international reform could be derived from deep insights about society, history, human nature or developmental laws of an international and institutional modernity.”<sup>7</sup> As Duncan Bell attentively noted, for Koskenniemi “a radical break occurred in legal argument between the early nineteenth century and the period between 1869 and 1885.”<sup>8</sup> By that period, international law had already detached itself from “the highly abstract

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<sup>2</sup> Hamish Scott, *The emergence of the eastern power, 1756-1775* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 8; also see footnotes 26 and 27 for a good list of sources on this topic.

<sup>6</sup> William H. McNeill et al, eds, *Berkshire Encyclopedia of World History*, Vol. 1 (Berkshire Publishing Group, 2005), pp. 358-363.

<sup>7</sup> Martti Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law 1870-1960* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Duncan Bell, “Empire and International Relations in Victorian Political Thought,” *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (March 2006): 289.

understandings of natural law that had attracted earlier generations, stressing instead the socially embedded and ever-evolving character of legal systems.”<sup>9</sup> At the same time, the new international legal story remained essentially universalist so long as it considered “the national laws [as] but aspects or stages of the universal development of human society.”<sup>10</sup>

From this perspective, world progress was understood in Hegelian terms as a series of progressive revelations of the universal spirit through concrete historical manifestations of national spirits. This meant that, on the one hand, the evaluation of international status of various political entities was to be undertaken, based on historical and cultural analysis of their civilizational levels, and, on the other hand, those entities which scored low in terms of their civilizational standards could, in principle, be brought into the family of humanity, but only with the help and guidance of those who were already in. These ideas enabled the construction of a legally codified international hierarchy with an exclusive club of great powers on the top and legitimised imperial practices of various degrees of brutality. Great powers’ self-ascribed responsibility for maintaining international order and for civilizing the uncivilised bunch gradually sedimented into an international institution, which Hedley Bull much later called ‘great power management’.<sup>11</sup>

### 5.3 Common discursive trends

The story of universal progress and the idea of great power management stemming from it are good illustrations showing that Russian ideational evolution was not as idiosyncratic, as it may have seemed. The transition from noumenal to phenomenal understanding of political greatness could, in fact, be interpreted as a wider European pattern. The sole fact that in the XVI century Russia started to emphasise the greatness of its *derzhava* (great power) in opposition to some European states by introducing a tautology *velikaya derzhava* (great great power) points in the direction that before the XVI century the two discourses were not in disagreement as to what

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid: 289.

<sup>10</sup> Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations*, p. 46.

<sup>11</sup> Bull, *The anarchical society*, pp. 194-222.

proper polities should have been like. The idea that principalities were princes' private domains, and that princes' right to unconditionally possess and govern them was divinely instituted, was first shaken only by the republican thinkers of the XVI century.<sup>12</sup> Thus, when Ivan IV reproached some European monarchs for not being great enough, he may have merely alluded to a common frame of reference, which, in his opinion, had been broken.

Similarly, an understanding that political greatness was a matter of appearance and the recognition of persuasive performances came to dominate the European political discourse, when the universalist religious foundation beneath the previously existing world order began to crack in the XVI century. In Erik Ringmar's words, "[a]s a result of [the Renaissance and the great geographical discoveries] the Europeans were able to attain new perspectives on themselves, and from these new perspective it became possible for them to question themselves in a radically new fashion."<sup>13</sup> This new fashion was less and less related to associating one's political identity with the idea of the universal Christian empire, and was drawn more to the idea that identities could be enacted and subsequently recognised without being necessarily mounted on the foundation of some sensuously nonperceptible and eternal truth.

In the XVIII and XIX centuries, these two understandings of political greatness merged to constitute a qualitatively new, yet genealogically related, synthetic position. The latter postulated that great power was a relational status in the international system, which depended on concrete cultural-historical manifestation thereof, but, at the same time, was anchored in the idea of the universal progress of humanity. Thus, the new synthesis was neither purely noumenal (as greatness was necessarily established within a community through competitive recognition), nor simply phenomenal (as the recognition was granted not on the basis of a sheer persuasiveness of political performance but based on a state's conformance to the standards of universal modernity). Instead, it was an intermediate progressive position, which relied on the detailed analysis of cultural and

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<sup>12</sup> Kharkhordin, "What is the State? The Russian Concept of *Gosudarstvo* in the European Context".

<sup>13</sup> Ringmar, *Identity, interest and action*, p. 14.

material sources of political might and on the institutionalization of the resulting civilizational spectrum through positive international law.

## 5.4 Joining the club

If it is true that Russia's great power status was constantly questioned by its Western counterparts, as Iver Neuman and Vincent Pouliot showed compellingly well,<sup>14</sup> there is also little doubt that on many levels Russia was still considered to be one of the club members, even if provisionally, temporarily and/or not completely.<sup>15</sup> What explains this ambivalence in Russia's relations with the West, and when could Russia be said to have achieved its imperfect recognition as a great power club member? In his work on Russia's great power standing from 1494 until 1815, Neumann tried to answer this question by tracing the development of Russian-European diplomatic relations and military alliances.<sup>16</sup> He concluded that, even though Russia actually never managed to acquire full recognition of its great power status, since its domestic autocratic regime was perceived as abnormal (viewed against the emerging European governmentality),<sup>17</sup> it nevertheless passed a number of stages of inclusion into the European society of states. Furthermore, by the end of the XVIII century, Russia already became an important participant in the European balance of power.

The initial stage of this process was the establishment of the first temporary diplomatic missions in the XVII century (to Sweden in 1634-1636 and to Poland in 1673-1677), as well as the undertaking of several decisive military moves and alliances (the First Northern War of 1655-1660, and the Eternal Peace with Poland-Lithuania of 1686).<sup>18</sup> During this stage, however, despite the fact that "Russia [began to be] recognised as a factor in the European disposition, [it was still] not

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<sup>14</sup> Neumann, "Russia as a great power, 1815–2007"; and Iver B. Neumann and Vincent Pouliot, "Untimely Russia: Hysteresis in Russian-Western relations over the past millennium," *Security Studies* 20.1 (2011): 105-137.

<sup>15</sup> Scott, *The emergence of the eastern power, 1756-1775*.

<sup>16</sup> Iver B. Neumann, "Russia's Standing as a Great Power, 1494-1815".

<sup>17</sup> The perceived abnormality of Russia's domestic regime, in fact, remained an obstacle for the external recognition of Russia's great power status long after 1815. On this see: Neumann, "Russia as a great power, 1815–2007".

<sup>18</sup> Neumann, "Russia's Standing as a Great Power, 1494-1815," p. 19-21.

being recognised as having *droit de regard* (right of being taken into account)...”<sup>19</sup> Most of the international exercises that were reaffirming the idea of the European system as based on the balance of power (e.g. the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713) did not include Russia.

The second stage of Russia’s entry into the European society of states was marked by the rapprochement and military efforts undertaken by Peter I. During his reign, permanent diplomatic missions became the norm (to the Netherlands in 1699, to Sweden in 1700, to Austria in 1701, etc.). Even more importantly, Russia’s success in the Great Northern War (1700-1721) caused a swift and radical reinterpretation of its role on the European continent. As Janet Hartley noted, “both during and after the Northern War ... Great Britain attempted to restrain Russian ambitions through the formation of coalitions against her, which is itself indicative of a new respect for Russian power.”<sup>20</sup> Neumann also quotes a historian Hans Bagger, who argued that:

the Peace of Nystadt on 30 August 1721 confirmed the position that Russia had attained as a great power during the Great Northern War ... As a consequence of its new status as a great power, Russia became a European state insofar as the Russian Empire had to be incorporated into the system of European international relations.<sup>21</sup>

At the same time, both Peter’s contemporaries and descending generations recognised that that international respect, which Peter had managed to secure, was largely a function of the impression created on the battlefield. For example, Peter’s close associate Pyotr Shafirov admitted he understood very well that:

the greater part of [Russia’s] neighbours view very unfavourably the good position in which it has pleased God to place [Russia]; that they would be delighted should an occasion present itself to imprison [Russia] once more in [its] earlier obscurity and that if they seek [an] alliance [with Russia] it is rather through fear and hate than through feelings of friendship.<sup>22</sup>

Two centuries later, another influential Russian statesman Sergey Witte remarked in his memoirs that, in fact, the Russian Empire was made great “not primarily, but exclusively by its army. Who [sic!] created the Russian Empire, turning the half-Asian Muscovite tsardom into the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 20.

<sup>20</sup> Janet Hartley, cited in Neumann, “Russia’s Standing as a Great Power, 1494-1815,” p. 24.

<sup>21</sup> Hans Bagger, cited in Neumann, “Russia’s Standing as a Great Power, 1494-1815,” p. 24-25.

<sup>22</sup> Pyotr Shafirov cited in Paul Dukes, *The making of Russian absolutism, 1613–1801*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: Longman, 1990), p. 77.

most influential and the most dominant European great power?” the politician would ask rhetorically only to answer in the next line that it was “nothing else but the power of army’s bayonet.”<sup>23</sup> Even more bitterly Witte wrote of other potential sources of Russia’s greatness, “It was hardly our culture, our bureaucratic church, or our riches and prosperity that made the whole world kneel before us. It kneeled before our strength, and once they saw, somewhat exaggeratedly, that we were not as strong ... the picture changed at once...”<sup>24</sup> Hence, it would be fair to conclude that, in Peter’s time, the limited interaction between Russia and international society mostly happened through war and emulation. Peter did not talk to Europe on common terms, he simply fought and imitated it. At home, Russia’s political greatness was predominantly understood in phenomenal terms and it largely depended on the monarch’s personal charisma and the continuous glorification thereof.

Finally, the third stage of Russia’s entry into the international society took place in the second half of the XVIII century. Having gathered the largest army in Europe by the time of the Seven Years’ War (1756-1763), Russia started to play the key role in the great power management and also became “a great responsibility of the system.”<sup>25</sup> Neumann points at several crucial moments that reflected this change: “[1] Empress Elizabeth’s secret negotiations with the heads of France and Austria in 1760 ... [2] the role Russia played in all three of Poland’s partitions ... [and] [3] the Treaty of Teschen concluded in 1779 [when] for the first time [Russia became] a guarantor power.”<sup>26</sup>

Scott came to a similar conclusion identifying 1756-1775 as the decisive years when the rise of the Eastern Powers and their incorporation into the European system took place. In addition, Scott also confirmed that initially Russia’s recognition in Europe rested on the foundation

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<sup>23</sup> Sergey Witte, *Vospominaniya: Tsarstvovanie Nikolaya II* [Memoirs: The Rule of Nicholas II], Vol. 1 (Berlin: Slovo, 1922), p. 343, [http://az.lib.ru/w/witte\\_s\\_j/text\\_0050.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/w/witte_s_j/text_0050.shtml), accessed 23 September 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Witte, *Memoirs. The Rule of Nicholas II*, p. 343.

<sup>25</sup> Neumann, “Russia’s Standing as a Great Power, 1494-1815,” p. 27.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 27.

of its military strength and impressive territorial gains the country had managed to secure.<sup>27</sup> As I have mentioned above, military victories and territorial expansion used to be the currency of the time. Yet, the situation was slowly changing and, towards the beginning of the XIX century, Russia already had a different international society in front of it. This was a society held together by the discursive leitmotif of the progress of universal humanity.

Yet, already in the last third of the XVIII century, whatever Russia was perceived to be in cultural or economic terms, it had to somehow be included into the system to insure the system's stability. Europe started looking at Russia more attentively. First, it was an apprehensive look: in Zorin's words, "the main sphere of application of the balance of power doctrine in European, and particularly French, politics becomes the deterrence of Russia."<sup>28</sup> Finding itself on the gaze, Russia had to look, and eventually talk, back saving its weapons and armies for other occasions (which, however, were not long in coming).

## 5.5 Emperor in Paris: A civilised sovereign

Inside the Russian domestic discourse, Russia's entry into international society was initially reflected from within a typically Petrine stance – panegyric literature of Catherine's time cast Russia's inclusion into the European society of states in terms of shining Russian glory. For instance, in one of his odes, Catherine's librarian and Potemkin's friend, Vasily Petrov compared Russia's symbolic incorporation into European politics to the rise of "another sun" that started to "shine" in Europe, its "blaze" being "annoying" to others.<sup>29</sup> This solar metaphor, one could argue, was not a particularly fortunate one for describing a member of a society regulated through close communication. Usually, a natural reaction to direct sunlight is that those who look at it immediately want to turn away, temporarily blinded. Certainly, this was not what the great power

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<sup>27</sup> Scott, *The emergence of the eastern power, 1756-1775*.

<sup>28</sup> Zorin, *Feeding the Two-headed Eagle*, p. 75.

<sup>29</sup> Petrov cited in Zorin, *Feeding the Two-headed Eagle*, p. 75.



club was supposed to be about. Looking at and talking to each other was the sole most important precondition for preserving the European system's stability.

The same atmosphere of shining glory was purposefully created, when Alexander I, a grandson of Catherine II, victoriously entered Paris in 1814. This time around, however, his political performance was supposed to co-opt the French into accepting Russia's civilizational equality and impress the defeated with Russia's magnanimity and grandeur. British Foreign Secretary, Lord Castlereagh, treated Alexander's "*chevaleresque* tone" with caution insisting that it was of the "greatest danger" and wrote to his Prime Minister Lord Liverpool on 30 January 1814 (i.e. two months before the Battle of Paris) that Alexander "has a personal feeling about Paris [and] seems to seek for the occasion of entering with his magnificent guards the enemy's capital, probably to display, in his clemency and forbearance, a contrast to that desolation to which his own was devoted [i.e. to Napoleon's destruction of Moscow]."<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, Alexander invested a lot of effort into doing precisely this. Officers marching the streets of the capital on 31 March 1814 were carefully handpicked. On the eve of the allies' parade, they were obliged to clean up and mend their uniforms after the exhausting journey. Looting was strictly prohibited and could be punished by death, if it occurred. Many Russian officers were mannerly, spoke excellent French and indeed did not remind a horde of barbarians that Napoleon's propaganda had been portraying – they did not shy away from communicating with ordinary people and the general atmosphere in the streets of Paris was amicable, not antagonistic. As the French historian Marie-Pierre Rey admitted, such behaviour of conquerors who captured the enemy's capital was "a unique occasion in history."<sup>31</sup>

Such a neatly orchestrated spectacle may, in fact, be interpreted as a symbolic response to a conversation that Alexander had with Talleyrand in Erfurt several years prior to the occasion.

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<sup>30</sup> Castlereagh cited in Bertrand Russell, *Freedom and Organization, 1814-1914* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001 [1934]), p. 27, emphasis original.

<sup>31</sup> Marie-Pierre Rey cited in Yuri Safronov, "Tsar' v Parizhe. Vozmezhdie bez krovi [Tsar in Paris. Bloodless Revenge]," *Novaya gazeta*, No. 34, 4 April 2014, <https://goo.gl/YLrPVK>, accessed 16 May 2017.

The Austrian Foreign Minister Klemens von Metternich reported in his memoirs that Talleyrand, having presented himself to the emperor on the first day of his arrival to Erfurt, said memorable (and later oft-cited) words, trying to convince Alexander to be an ally of the French people and to resist Napoleon: “The French people are civilised, its Sovereign is not,” Talleyrand insisted, “the Sovereign of Russia is civilised, and his people are not; it is therefore for the Sovereign of Russia to be allied with the French people.”<sup>32</sup> Hence, the solemn procession that introduced Russian soldiers headed by their civilised sovereign to the French public may have been arranged to demonstrate that not only the tsar himself, but also his people could claim the highest standards of civility.

To what extent this worked on the Parisians is, of course, up for debate. On the one hand, the stunning impression that Alexander and his army managed to produce among the French public was amply reflected by historians and artists.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, however, one could also convincingly argue that throughout the XIX century, the discursive construction of the Russian people in the West was significantly aided by writers and travellers, the likes of Marquise de Custine, who carried on the earlier Western European tradition to portray Russians and other Eastern Europeans as exotic and under-civilised.<sup>34</sup>

Yet, regardless of whether Alexander’s strategy for Russia’s self-inclusion into the European dominant discourse on civilization was effective, what seems important here is the mode of action the emperor chose to employ. While most officers and soldiers left Paris shortly after the march (and those who remained were still looked at with a fair degree of exoticism), the emperor

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<sup>32</sup> Talleyrand cited in Prince Richard Metternich, ed., *Memoirs of Prince Metternich, 1773-1815*, Vol. II (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1880), p. 298, <https://archive.org/details/memoirsofprincem02mettuoft>, accessed 16 May 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Marie-Pierre Rey, *1814, un Tsar à Paris* [1814, a Tsar in Paris] (Paris: Flammarion, 2014); Louis-Léopold Boilly, *Le triomphe du tsar Alexandre Ier ou La Paix* [The Triumph of Tsar Alexander I, or The Peace] (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 1814); F.de Maleque, *Armies of allies entering Paris March 19, 1814* (Moscow: Pushkin Museum, 1815); and Aleksey Kivshenko, *Vstuplenie russkikh i soynuznykh voysk v Parizh* [The entry of Russian and Allied Forces into Paris] (Saint Petersburg: Central Naval Museum, 1880).

<sup>34</sup> Marquis de Custine, *La Russie en 1839* [Russia in 1839] (Bruxelles: Wouters et Co, Impremeurs-Libraires, 1843), <https://archive.org/details/larussieen18390102custuoft>, accessed 16 May 2017. For a detailed account of the XVIII-century literature that ‘invented’ Eastern Europe see: Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: the map of civilization on the mind of the enlightenment* (Stanford University Press, 1994). For primary sources on the exploration of Russia by European travellers see: Marshall Poe, ed., *Early exploration of Russia* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

stayed and, relying heavily on his personal charisma and generosity, he continued to represent Russia's body politic by displaying widely his majestic persona. He attended museums and theatres. He paid visits to hospitals, provoking agitation among his associates, and took it upon himself to be the “‘new Christ’ leading the dispossessed.”<sup>35</sup> He paid spectacular sums for all the works of art he fancied and demonstrated unusual leniency to Napoleon's former circle and family. Alexander provided Napoleon's first and still beloved wife Joséphine with one million francs of yearly rent and even developed a gentlemanly affection towards his step daughter, Hortense.<sup>36</sup>

Virtually everything the emperor did in Paris was meant to show his, and by extension Russia's, civility, but the way this civility was acted out remained essentially Petrine. Alexander relied on grand gestures and his own personal charm. His presence was overwhelming and often theatrical. He engaged in conversations about culture and arts and demonstrated respect towards French laws and customs, for which the French thanked him by composing flattering panegyrics.<sup>37</sup> Just like in the XVIII century, Russia was made great through the metamorphosis carried out by its saviour Peter the Great, in the XIX century, Russia was supposed to be brought into the civilised life of Europe through the actions of Russia's civilised sovereign Alexander. Subsequently, the emperor exhibited a very similar political style during the Congress of Vienna. Below, I will argue that such style, largely idealistic and relying on appearance, was one of the reasons of the discursive mismatch that resurfaced in Vienna and may have conditioned the shift in Alexander's position, which historians find puzzling until today.

## 5.6 Emperor in Vienna: A liberal idealist

As is the case for any critical juncture, the Congress of Vienna, as well as its immediate aftermath, unearthed several ideational clashes between different political actors. Yet, the most

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<sup>35</sup> Rey, 1814, *a Tsar in Paris*, p. 211.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> E.g. Rey cites a panegyric that was sang during a celebration organised by Talleyrand in Alexander's honour: “Long live, Alexander!/Long live the king of kings!/Without demanding anything,/without dictating laws,/this most august prince/with triplicated reputation/of a hero and a righteous man/gave us back the Bourbons” (Rey, 1814, *a Tsar in Paris*, p. 207-208).

puzzling thing occurred on the personal level. It was an unexpected shift in the Russian emperor's position that Andreas Osiander described as "an image neurosis"<sup>38</sup> – from hard-core progressive liberalism to religious mysticism. In other words, the emperor drifted in his argumentation from an almost revolutionary stance to a hyper-conservative position, and while conservative European powers were yet unprepared to accept the former, they also perceived the latter to be doltish and almost insane (even though, despite such perception, they, as the outcome of the negotiations showed, were a bit more comfortable with it).

In the very beginning of the Congress, Alexander truly astounded his counterparts with his radical views. He began with arguing forcefully that there was no coming back to the old European order: "The consequences of the revolutions of our time that changed the relations inside states cannot be eliminated and superseded by a sudden return towards former principles."<sup>39</sup> Alexander admitted that the time he lived in was the time of nationalism: "From now on the only possible order is the order founded on the harmony of interests between nations and governments."<sup>40</sup> It is impossible, Alexander continued, "to only accommodate in the agreements the exclusive and misinterpreted interests of cabinets, as if nations were their property."<sup>41</sup> Such position met a very cautious reaction on the part of the European monarchs. For instance, Talleyrand reported that when Alexander insisted that "sovereigns are obliged to conform to the wishes of the people and to observe them, [and that] the wish of the Saxon people is not to be divided," the Austrian emperor Francis I responded that he "[knew] nothing about that doctrine, [and that he believed that] a prince may, if he likes, give up a portion of his country and the whole

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<sup>38</sup> Andreas Osiander, *The states system of Europe, 1640-1990: peacemaking and the conditions of international stability* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 181.

<sup>39</sup> Andrey Gromyko, et al. *Vneshnyaya politika Rossii XIX i nachala XX veka: Dokumenty rossiyskogo ministerstva inostrannykh del* [The Foreign Policy of Russia in the XIX and the beginning of the XX century: The Documents of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs], Series II, Vol. VIII (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoy literatury, 1974), hereinafter referred to as '*The Foreign Policy of Russia*'.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 146.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 147.

of his people.”<sup>42</sup> This was Francis’s conviction and he was not prepared to depart from it. In Alexander’s opinion, “that [was] not according to the intelligence of the age.”<sup>43</sup>

Notably, in the beginning of the Congress, Alexander also exhibited an acute understanding and appreciation of what his grandmother, Catherine II, was so much trying to avoid, i.e. the fact that Russia could only effectively integrate into the European society of states, if it adopted its principles of competitive recognition and comparability. While outlining Alexander’s principles, Count Karl Robert Nesselrode, who was the head of the Russian delegation in Vienna, was emphasising that the governments:

having estimated the sacrifices [of European] peoples, should ... receive ... a share *proportional* to those sacrifices, and not for expansion, but to guarantee the prosperity and independence of their states by *increasing their relative power* [*otnositel’naya sila*] that could strengthen this guarantee and make others respect it.<sup>44</sup>

The same principles were also communicated to Turkey through the Russian ambassador in Constantinople Andrey Italinsky.<sup>45</sup>

The fact that the emperor desired to tie Russia’s status to some transparent and commonly accepted foundation indicated that Russian political discourse was departing from the positions represented by Bezborodko and Panin and was opening to embrace the understanding of greatpowerhood that was at the core of the great power management institution. Such reasoning also presented a clear departure from the empire’s XVIII-century political rationality that treated greatness as a matter of appearance. Alexander’s initial openness to adopt the dominant language of European great powers was eagerly welcomed by some of his foreign counterparts. Lord Castlereagh attested that he understood clearly what Alexander was after and suggested that it was for the purpose of creating:

a system of real political equilibrium, of reaching in legitimate and orderly ways the provisions from which it must spring, of making it rest *on the solid base of the real and intrinsic strength of each power*, that Russia has taken it upon itself not to anticipate on the dispositions

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<sup>42</sup> Talleyrand, p. 101.

<sup>43</sup> Talleyrand, p. 101.

<sup>44</sup> *The Foreign Policy of Russia*, p. 210.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, p. 339.

of the general settlement [of the Polish question, before] its allies would have taken *the true measure of the power* falling to their lot.<sup>46</sup>

## 5.7 Back to Paris: A puzzling transformation

However, Alexander's liberal stance did not evoke enthusiasm in most of the Congress participants, and quite shortly, the emperor seemed to have radically changed his rhetoric. As Henry Kissinger put it, "as he followed the armies towards France once more, the Tsar began to ascribe the squabbles at Vienna to the lack of religious inspiration of the protagonists and he recurred to a proposal submitted on his behalf to the Congress which had called for a fraternal association of the sovereigns, guided by the precepts of Christianity."<sup>47</sup> This proposal was the Holy Alliance, which significantly reformulated his liberal ideas – at times, to the point of turning them upside down.

As Andrei Tsygankov rightly pointed out, "the Holy Alliance was anything but a diplomatic document"<sup>48</sup> (at least in the European understanding of this term). It had only three articles and none of them preserved any traces of Alexander's idea of the post-revolutionary situation. Instead, the emperor was appealing to the maxims of the Christian faith and admitted that it was necessary to submit "both ... the administration of their respective States, and ... their political relations with every other Government [to] the precepts of [the] Holy Religion."<sup>49</sup> Alexander suggested that religious principles were "far from being applicable only to private concerns, [and had to] have an immediate influence on the councils of Princes, and guide all their steps..."<sup>50</sup> In practical terms, "the Three contracting Monarchs [would need to] remain united by the bonds of a true and indissoluble fraternity [and] regard[d] themselves towards their subjects and armies as fathers of families."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Castlereagh cited in Osiander, *The states system of Europe*, p. 241, emphasis added.

<sup>47</sup> Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the problems of peace, 1812-22* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), pp. 187-188.

<sup>48</sup> Andrei Tsygankov, *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin: Honor in International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 64.

<sup>49</sup> *The Holy Alliance Treaty* (26 September 1815), <http://goo.gl/CGGs6Q>, accessed 17 February 2016.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

Many contemporaries believed that such a drastic turn in Alexander's position happened due to some intimate transformation of his world views that may have been caused by Alexander's intensive communication with Madam de Krudener, "an old fanatic who [had] a considerable reputation amongst the few highflyers in religion that [were] to be found in Paris," as she was characterised by Castlereagh.<sup>52</sup> That is, the adherents of this opinion would simply claim that Alexander became a religious fanatic himself. No doubt, this position was also shared by some of the top European ministers, who occasionally testified in their correspondence that the emperor's mind had "latterly taken a deeply religious tinge,"<sup>53</sup> "was [clearly] affected,"<sup>54</sup> and was "not completely sound."<sup>55</sup> Correspondingly, the project of the Holy Alliance was received as a "piece of sublime mysticism and nonsense,"<sup>56</sup> "insolent and nonsensical document ... claiming to lay down the law,"<sup>57</sup> and "high sounding nothing."<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, it was only signed by some great powers because of the general belief that Alexander was "disposed to found his own glory upon a principle of peace and benevolence."<sup>59</sup> Yet, all of those who originally signed the declaration, as well as those who joined later "realized they needed to be a part of the Alliance, but they each hoped to mold it into something that [could] fit their own worldviews."<sup>60</sup>

I, however, argue that such interpretation of the outlined shift is superficial. It does not take long to discover, for example, that religion, which occupied an important place in Russia's communication with European powers, was absolutely and understandably absent from its contemporaneous correspondence with Turkish diplomats, which changed neither the general theme (construction of durable European political order), nor the tone (fairly benevolent and inclusive) of that communication.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, those Europeans, who actually had a chance to

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<sup>52</sup> Charles Kingsley Webster, *British Diplomacy, 1813-1815* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1921), p. 382.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 382.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 383.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 384.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. 383.

<sup>57</sup> Talleyrand, p. 128.

<sup>58</sup> Metternich cited in Tsygankov, *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin*, p. 64.

<sup>59</sup> Webster, *British Diplomacy*, p. 384.

<sup>60</sup> Tsygankov, *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin*, p. 64.

<sup>61</sup> E.g. see *The Foreign Policy of Russia*, pp. 335-341.

follow Russia's domestic politics a bit closer, also attested that religious fervour was not characteristic of the tsar, as a person. For instance, in July 1816, Lord Cathcart, British ambassador to Russia, was writing to Castlereagh from Saint Petersburg that he knew "of no secret influence [on Alexander], nor [did he] believe that there exists[ed] any excess of predominancy of religious disposition."<sup>62</sup>

It is also important to note that Alexander's position was *always* seen as somehow deviant from the norm. In Western sources, Alexander was constantly presented as mystical, prone to exaltation, fond of ethical and religious maxims, as opposed to his pragmatic counterparts who, allegedly, were always in touch with reality. Be it his early radical liberalism, or his later religious turn, he was invariably thought to be detached from concrete practical matters (ironically, it was Alexander, who consistently argued that it was impossible to effectively govern relying on the ideas that were out of synch with the time). Hence, the problem that European ministers had with Alexander was not his religious fanaticism, but his idealism. As Kissinger put this, while comparing the tsar's disposition to that of Metternich:

Alexander sought to identify the new international order with his will; to create a structure safeguarded solely by the purity of his maxims [liberal or religious]. Metternich strove for a balance of forces which would not place too great a premium on self-restraint. The Tsar proposed to *sanctify* the post-war period by transforming the war into a moral symbol; Metternich attempted to *secure* the peace by obtaining the definition of war aims expressing the physical equilibrium.<sup>63</sup>

As such, the transformation of Alexander's views stops being a real transformation, when one realises that it was his approach and political style that the European audience had most difficulties understanding. Maintaining similar approach to liberalism and religiosity, the emperor simply changed the subject matter, while he continued to insist that the true political greatness lay in the purity of one's moral principles, which could inspire political communities to accept and obey them. Even though the ministers mostly mocked the content of Alexander's propositions, it

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<sup>62</sup> Charles William Vane, ed., *Correspondence, despatches, and other papers of Viscount Castlereagh, Second Marquess of Londonderry*, Vol. XI (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1853), p. 264.

<sup>63</sup> Kissinger, *A World Restored*, p. 111, emphasis original.



is fair to conclude that it was rather his approach than his subject matter that caused their dissatisfaction.

At the same time, I argue that Alexander's approach, instead of deriving from his personality or from the context within which he was acting in 1815, was built upon the assortment of discursive resources that were available to him and that developed in Russian political sphere in the preceding centuries. Read through the lens of noumenal and phenomenal understandings of greatness, Alexander's take on Russia's international status stops being odd. In fact, given the discursive baggage the emperor brought with him to Vienna, it comes as no surprise that he remained misunderstood. Other European great powers, embedded by then into the discourse on world-historic progress and the hierarchies and procedures resulting from it, could appreciate neither the emperor's fixation on transcendent and highly abstract ideas, Christian and liberal alike, nor his theatrical and a bit overwhelming political style, shining with the 'lustre of glory'. Even if what Alexander enacted was, in fact, the spectacle of civilization, as was the case in Paris in 1814 and in the early months of the Congress, this was not appreciated by his audience. However, from within the Russian political discourse, both features of Alexander's conduct, were perfectly normal instantiations of noumenal and phenomenal understandings of political greatness. The former, as one could recall, was based on proclaiming the truthfulness and superiority of an ideological system that should have inspired the masses. The latter capitalised on the persuasive effect produced by an outstanding and glorified royal persona.

## **5.8 Mysterious charisma**

Why did the phenomenal understanding of greatpowerhood, which had the upper hand in the Russian political discourse throughout the XVIII century and worked so well domestically was finally compromised in Vienna and had to be fortified with alternative discursive positions? Arguably, this happened because phenomenal greatness capitalises on mystery and extravagance and comes into force only through its own enactment. For a domestic political regime like Russia's, this may have just been the perfect match. In my third chapter I mentioned the work of Dmitry

Troshchinsky, who insisted that the political bond between the lower and the higher classes in Russia had been weak and unbalanced historically, and it was precisely for this reason that the bond between the lower classes and the monarch had to be strong, as the monarch was perceived as “the only true representative of the people [*narod*], which, given its position, cannot have any other representative, except him.”<sup>64</sup>

In a similar vein, Aleksandr Herzen wrote in 1851 that the Russian peasant “submitted to ... but never believed in either landowners’ rights, or the legitimacy of executive power, [yet] imagined the tsar as a formidable vindicator, the fixer of truth, and the eternal providence.”<sup>65</sup> This was also how, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, most Slavophiles conceptualised the connection between the lower class and the monarch, “the Tsar is the Russian Tsar, peasant’s [*mužhitskij*] tsar, there is no wall of people’s representatives between him and the people.”<sup>66</sup> In such a setup, a semi-mythic figure of the sovereign, imbued with the burden of universal representation and other almost supernatural qualities, was perfectly well fit for glory, i.e. for the kind of greatness that evades scrutiny, measurement, or direct accountability, and acquires substance through its own articulation. Presumably, this is how it worked in the panegyric literature of the Petrine epoch and in Catherine’s political impressionism.

This may have also been the underlying rationality behind the project of the Holy Alliance, which was effectively promoting the privatization of political space. In Russia’s domestic experience, the strong bond between the monarch and the people could not be balanced in any civic or representational sense. The monarch was believed to receive god’s enthronement and was functionally equivalent to an authoritarian head of the household: the ‘father of the fatherland’ (as Peter I was officially called), or the ‘mother of the fatherland’ (this title was proposed to Catherine

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<sup>64</sup> Troshchinsky, *Note on Ministries*, p. 56.

<sup>65</sup> Aleksandr Herzen, *Sobranie sochinenij v tridsati tomakh* [Collected Works in Thirty Volumes], Vol. 7 (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo akademii nauk SSSR, 1956), [http://az.lib.ru/g/gercen\\_a\\_i/text\\_0370.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/g/gercen_a_i/text_0370.shtml), accessed 15 November 2016.

<sup>66</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, “Zapadniki i Slavjanophily [Westernizers and Slavophiles],” *Sobranie sochinenij v semi tomakh* [Collected Works in Seven Volumes], Vol. 2, p. 426.

II, but she rejected it).<sup>67</sup> Consequently, all the interactions inside that dichotomy were limited within the confines of the available sets of representational practices. The monarch was immune to any kind of liability, but, at the same time, was always positioned in the centre of attention and, far from being a mere symbol, had to somehow exert a considerable impact on his or her folk.

The people had no channels of constructive influence on the decision-making processes, but often had very close attachment to the figure of the monarch and could only voice their opinion through what the author of *Antidote* called ‘consonance.’ Thus, the relationship between the monarch and the people proceeded as an exchange of phenomenal manifestations aimed at achieving inspiration and the sense of transcendence on the part of the monarch, and acclamations and mobilizations on the part of the people. This was also the kind of relationship that the Holy Alliance projected on European monarchs and their respective folks.

However, as became clear in Vienna, when it comes to the XIX-century international society, theatricality and inspiration-oriented idealism were not the best currencies to trade in the business of negotiating shared norms and rules for international order. This is not to say that glory and glorification *per se* had no place in international context. On the contrary, apart from Russia’s military performance, as follows from Prince Talleyrand’s discursive representation of Russia’s entry in Europe, Alexander’s personal glory played an important role in securing Russia’s recognition and its right to be accounted in European affairs. In Prince’s view, Alexander should have known better than to dispel the charm.<sup>68</sup> Yet, audience matters. What worked at home, where Alexander enjoyed his uncontested supreme status and absolute authority, which may have, in fact, been necessary within the logic of then-current Russian political regime with all its problems related to the disunity between social classes, did not resonate the same way with the audience mainly consisting of European diplomats and monarchs. There, it was interpreted as unnecessary pomp and naïve idealism.

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<sup>67</sup> A. Polovtsov, ed., *Sbornik Imperatorskogo Russkogo istoricheskogo obshchestva* [Collection of the Imperial Russian Historical Society], Vol. 4 (Saint Petersburg: Tipografiya Imperatorskoy Akademii Nauk, 1869), pp. 61-65.

<sup>68</sup> Talleyrand, p. 74.

The splendour, which saturated Alexander's presence in Vienna, as well as the sceptical attitude it provoked among his somewhat bedazzled spectators, was vividly reflected in contemporaneous British satire. This is how John Wolcot (writing under the pseudonym of Peter Pindar) ridiculed the czar's pretentious and unrealistic claims for greatness in 1815:

Cried Alexander, as he view'd  
The moving, motley multitude -  
"How sweet to strut in gold and gems,  
"Bedeck'd with robes and diadems!  
"How great to stride, with giant span,  
"Over the pigmy breed of man; -  
"See empires tremble at my nod,  
"And hail me more than half a god!"<sup>69</sup>

The last lines of the cited verse allude to the practice of the monarch's sacralisation that was typical for Russia's domestic regime at the time and whose traces the British satirist also noticed in the emperor's self-presentation in Vienna.<sup>70</sup> Abroad, such excessive glorification and pretence could only seem comical.

Characteristically, in Wolcot's bitter stances, Alexander delivered this monolog while dancing, i.e. preoccupied with the most common performance of the time. Whirling his way ahead, the emperor went on imagining both quite realistic and fantastical futures for his majestic persona and his great state:

"I'll have more homage and more sway,  
"Poland my sceptre shall obey,  
"And, spite of statesmens' saucy quirks,  
"I'll overwhelm the impious Turks!  
"Like my great namesake, I will reign  
"Over an unconfin'd domain,  
"And not a fish shall put in motion,  
"Without my great consent, the ocean."<sup>71</sup>

Eventually, Alexander even put his eye on the holy of holies – the British navy:

"Yes, since I have begun my dance,  
"I'll caper from the Don to France,  
"And make Great Britain's tyrant navy,

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<sup>69</sup> Peter Pindar, *The German Sausages or the Devil to Pay at Congress!* (London: James Johnston, 98, Cheapside, 1815).

<sup>70</sup> Uspenskij and Zhivov, "Tsar and God".

<sup>71</sup> Pindar, *The German Sausages*.

“Before I die, cry out *peccavi!*”<sup>72</sup>

This misunderstanding, coupled with a general disillusionment about Russian greatpowerhood that was spreading in British and other European policy circles in the decades following the Congress,<sup>73</sup> may have also affected (or reflected) a shift in the domestic debate. The enchanting and largely positive effect that Alexander’s magnificent presence initially produced on some of his contemporaries was aptly conveyed by the passionate devotion of Nikolai Rostov, Tolstoy’s character from *War and Peace*.<sup>74</sup> As time passed, however, the emperor’s theatricality started receiving more ambivalent characteristics. Aleksandr Pushkin, for example, wrote the following lines after seeing a bust of Alexander sculpted by Bertel Thorvaldsen:

This looks is two-faced for a reason.  
That is how the sovereign was like:  
Accustomed to conflicted feelings,  
A harlequin in face and life.<sup>75</sup>

Another XIX-century Russian poet Pyotr Vyazemsky allegedly<sup>76</sup> called Alexander “a sphinx that remained mysterious until his death” and gave the emperor a very controversial, but still somewhat sympathetic characteristic,

a child of the eighteenth century,  
he was a victim of its passions:  
he both despised the human,  
and loved humanity.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Twenty years after the Congress, British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Henry Palmerston called Russia “a great humbug” and asserted that “if England were fairly to go to work with her we should throw her back half a century in one campaign”. See: Palmerston cited in Adolphus William Ward and George Peabody Gooch, *The Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy, 1783-1919*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge University Press, 2012 [1923]), p. 169.

<sup>74</sup> E.g. Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, translated with notes by Louise and Aylmer Maude, revised and edited with an introduction by Amy Mandelker (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 442.

<sup>75</sup> Aleksandr Pushkin, *K byustu zavoevatelya* [To the bust of a conqueror], <https://goo.gl/HkTKqr>, accessed 11 September 2018.

<sup>76</sup> There is no consensus on who was Vyazemsky’s true inspiration when he wrote this poem. Some literary scholars claim it was Voltaire (e.g. M.I. Gille’son, *P.A. Vyazemsky: zhizn’ i tvorchestvo* [P.A. Vyazemsky: Life and Work] [Leningrad: Nauka, 1969], p. 69). However, as Aleksandr Arkhangelsky pointed out, some XIX-century readers were recognizing Emperor Alexander in these lines (Aleksandr Arkhangelsky, *Alexander I* [Molodaya gvardiya, 2012], p. 293).

<sup>77</sup> Pyotr Vyazemsky, “Sfinks, ne razgadanniy do groba... [A sphinx that remained mysterious until his death...],” <https://goo.gl/btTXMb>, accessed 11 September 2018.

The next emperor, Alexander's brother Nicholas I (1825-1855), was already called 'an actor' in a derogatory sense. In his case, the charismatic splendour of royal persona could already not be interpreted as a positive characteristic that served as a guarantee of Russia's greatness and recognition. Following Nicholas' death which shortly preceded the end of the Crimean War, Fyodor Tyutchev, a Russian poet and diplomat, dedicated to Nicholas the following epitaph,

You served neither God nor Russia,  
You served your vanity alone,  
And all your deeds, good and evil, –  
All those were lies and phantoms:  
You were an actor, not a tsar.<sup>78</sup>

In a similar vein, one of the main charges that both Slavophiles and Westernisers were constantly bringing against the Russian regime throughout the XIX century were related to its grandiosity and superficiality. This bipartisan consensus regarding the lacking substance of the Russian political machine indicated that the appreciation of purely phenomenal manifestations of political greatness were pushed to the margins of Russian political debate in the first half of the XIX century. After the Congress of Vienna, Russian political thinkers started to seek for alternative foundations to mount the country's political identity on. The hibernating discourse on Russia's greatness understood in noumenal terms conveniently came to their aid.

## 5.9 Hibernating discourse

Discursive positions, especially those that have once been dominant, are often slow to disappear. Instead, they may get marginalised and continue living in hibernation until someone discovers and reinterprets them. Such reinterpretation either re-centres an old position in a new discursive context, or, more frequently, re-centres a genealogical offspring of that old position, which bears some resemblance to its predecessor, but constitutes something qualitatively new. Hence, when I argued in the previous chapter that one understanding of political greatness in

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<sup>78</sup> Fyodor Tyutchev, "Ne Bogu ty slyzhil i ne Rossii... [You served neither god nor Russia]," *Byloe*, No. 19 (1922), p. 76, <https://goo.gl/JHjLiF>, accessed 22 September 2018.

Russia (noumenal) gave way to another understanding (phenomenal), this was not to imply that one simply replaced and erased the other.

Of course, the discursive transformation in the beginning of the XVIII century was proceeding according to the principle of stark antitheses. In Viktor Zhivov's words,

the contradistinction between the old and the new Russia was founded on a set of mutually exclusive characteristics, so there was no space for any succession. ... [If] the new Russia was accredited with enlightenment, the old one was associated with ignorance; if the new Russia was perceived as rich and magnificent, the old one was presented as miserable and poor. The new Russia was kind of drawing a caricature of the old Russia.<sup>79</sup>

The same can be said about the utmost importance of patriarchs (especially, starting from the Time of Troubles [1598-1613]) in the old Russia and the complete submission of the Orthodox Church to the mighty state and the ridicule of ecclesiastic hierarchy in the new one.<sup>80</sup> The same is true for the impersonal and transcendent nature of political greatness in the old Russia and the highly-personalised, almost 'biological' ownership of both executive and authoritative power in the new one.<sup>81</sup>

However, as I have inferred above, discursive positions may be extremely resilient. Naturally, the belief that Russia was a great polity in noumenal terms was preserved by those who opposed Peter's reforms and his new status. In the XVIII century, it was nurtured by the old believers, who quit the sphere of the political, for its practice no longer conformed to their conviction that Russia was the last ark of the true faith. Yet, even in the official discourse the traces of this position were sometimes discernible. Even the myth about Potemkin villages may be said

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<sup>79</sup> Viktor Zhivov cited in Sergei Sergeyev, "My ... vse zhelayem emu smerti...": O nepopulyarnom vlastitele i ondoy 'evropeyskoy' epokhe ['We ... all wish he died...': On an unpopular ruler and one 'European' epoch]," *Gefter*, 23 December 2015, <http://gefter.ru/archive/17062>, accessed 17 February 2016.

<sup>80</sup> A prime example of mockery of the Church hierarchy was, of course, the All-Joking, All-Drunken Synod of Fools and Jesters organised by Peter I for debauchery and amusement.

<sup>81</sup> In fact, such 'biologisation' of supreme power started before Peter's reforms. According to Sergei Ivanov, it was already partially characteristic of Ivan IV's (1533-1584) self-perception. This is why Ivan could "seat Simeon Bekbulatovich [the Khan of Qasim] on the tsaric throne [and call him the Grand Prince of all Russia], for the supreme authority anyway remained only his, he was the 'biological' tsar [of Russia]." Such perception of power was very different from Ivan IV's predecessors, but it remained in force for several centuries after. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the most (in)famous Russian rebel, Yemelyan Pugachev (1742-1775), while trying to convince his fellow Cossacks that he was the true tsar, "showed 'tsaric signs' on his body while bathing" (Sergei Ivanov, "Rossiya – naslednitsa Vizantiï? [Russia – the successor of Byzantium?]," *Arzamas*, <http://arzamas.academy/materials/877>, accessed 15 February, 2016).

to have a double meaning. Seeming pretence and theatricality characteristic of the anti-foundationalist take on political greatness, in fact, overlapped with the conviction that greatness was something primordial and predestined. Catherine's Greek Project, which today's Crimea owes all its Hellenic toponymy to, was a claim to some noumenal superiority of Eastern Christianity. That superiority should have manifested itself in the restoration of the Byzantine Empire with its capital in Constantinople, whose throne should have been occupied by Catherine's second grandson Konstantin.<sup>82</sup> The 1783 annexation of Crimea and the empress' 1787 visit to the peninsula, which was associated with the mentioned myth, were two important intermediate steps towards the Project's implementation.

In the XIX century, and especially after the Congress of Vienna, one could already see how the elements of the same idea (of Russia's noumenal greatness) were penetrating the mainstream representations across the whole ideological spectrum. For instance, an early Slavophile Konstantin Aksakov insistently argued that Peter "glorified Russia [by] giving her a lot of *external* greatness, but he also corrupted her *internal* integrity."<sup>83</sup> He then went on to suggest that, "external greatness of imperial Russia is certainly bright, but this external greatness can only be enduring when it emanates from the internal one ... And it is this *internal greatness* that must be the first and the most important goal for the people, and, of course, for the government."<sup>84</sup> For Aksakov, such internal greatness resided somewhere in the arcane and pure might of the pre-Petrine Russia and, no doubt, in the institution of the Orthodox Church.

On the opposite side of the great debate, a similar exchange about internal and external greatness appeared in an 1860 issue of *Kolokol*, a censorship-free London-based Russian newspaper, which was a stronghold of Russian liberal thought (although it severed its ties with liberals after 1861 and took the revolutionary democratic side). One of *Kolokol*'s Polish readers

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<sup>82</sup> Zorin, *Feeding the Two-headed Eagle*.

<sup>83</sup> Konstantin Aksakov, "O vnutrennem sostoyanii Rossii [On Russia's Internal Condition]," in N.L. Brodsky, ed., *Rannie slavyanofily* [Early Slavophiles] (Moscow: Tipografiya T-va I.D. Sytina, 1910), p. 88, emphasis added.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p. 89, emphasis added.



admitted that it was “through no fault of his own that the Russian has been accustomed from his infancy to ... far reaching dimensions and goals, and that therefore even his dreams tend involuntary towards *outward greatness*. [Yet,]” he continued, “with his mental powers fresh, and his mind not yet matured, he develops *every* idea into prodigious dimension and has no presentiment of some other, *inward greatness*. This is childish enthusiasm, not manly thoughtfulness,” concluded the reader.<sup>85</sup> The paper’s editor, Aleksandr Herzen, initially fended off the Pole’s accusations by asserting that “a desire that the ‘Russia of the future should be *democratic and socially just*’ ... cannot ... be called ‘outward’.”<sup>86</sup> Yet, in the following sentences, he also immediately revealed the transcendence and non-relativity of his ideals by insisting that the mode of goal-setting described by the reader was, in fact, “a tremendous strength [and] a mainspring of forward movement, ... [for they] only achieve great things who have even greater things in mind.”<sup>87</sup>

In addition, Herzen added another feature of Russian thought that had been missed out by his correspondent. He asserted that Russia has great intellectual freedom, because “it does not think of political independence and national uniqueness at all; we do not have to prove our nationality, [for] it is such an unshakable, indisputable and obvious fact that we forget about it as we forget about the air we breathe or about our own heartbeat.”<sup>88</sup> The editor also compared this Russian feature with French and British political self-confidence, but he insisted to specify that unlike the old Western nations, whose tradition was as alive as their present, Russia was “as *independent in time*, as it was in space, [for she] forgot [her] distant past and tr[ies] to forget even [her] previous day.”<sup>89</sup> Thus, whether Russia’s greatness was inward- or outward-oriented, Herzen tried to make sure his readers understood that it was non-relative and was part and parcel of its inner nature.

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<sup>85</sup> Aleksandr Herzen, “Rossia i Pol’sha [Russia and Poland],” *Kolokol* [The Bell], No. 67 (April 1, 1860), p. 555.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, emphasis original.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, emphasis original.

## 5.10 Conclusion

In the beginning of the XIX century, the previously dominant discursive position that was about enacting Russia's political greatness through manifesting it phenomenally was seriously shaken. However, if the previous discursive shift – from noumenal to phenomenal greatness – was mostly a consequence of the transformation of Russia's domestic regime, this time around, the discursive shift seems to have been a reaction to Russia's entry into the European great powers club. Idealism and theatricality that Alexander I brought with him to Paris and Vienna did not produce the same effect on the European diplomats and monarchs as they had been producing on Russia's domestic audience. The new interlocutors misunderstood Alexander and treated his political style with great caution. Consequently, to fit in, Russia had to restructure its political discourse and introduce into it several elements that would reflect some solid and universal basis beneath its claim for the great power status.

Initially, those elements were retrieved from the hibernating discourse on Russia's noumenal greatness (hence the religious undertones of the Holy Alliance). This position had resurfaced occasionally ever since it was pushed to the margins of the debate. Yet, in the XIX century, it seemed to have penetrated the mainstream. Those representations, however, were not identical to their early modern predecessors. Since they resurrected as a response to Russia's inclusion in the European society of states which featured a different discursive consensus – the story of progress – they were refashioned to conform to that story and aided the construction of a specifically Russian progressive narrative of political greatness, which was formulated in the terms congruent with the European story of progress, but, at the same time, functionally dissimilar to it.

Importantly, Russia's entry into the European society did not make it abandon the idea of phenomenal greatness altogether. Instead, it facilitated a synthesis of the noumenal and phenomenal stories into a narrative of political greatness that was self-centred and ambivalent. This synthesis reflected both Russia's awareness of its civilizational deficiency and its commitment

to overcome this deficiency by revealing its true greatness that resided somewhere within its inner coffers. In practice, it turned into a catching-up ideology, which was qualitatively different from the dominant Western story about great powers. In the next chapter I will describe and analyse the uses of this ideology in more detail. I will suggest that its functional specificity was a result of Russia's attempts to grapple with the emerging international institution of great power management and the story of universal progress associated with it.

## **CHAPTER 6 – FAILED SYNTHESIS: MODERNISATION THROUGH SELF-REVELATION**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter I argued that the emergence of the international institution of great power management was accompanied by a discursive transformation that brought into being the progressive understanding of world history. The story of progress, in its turn, was engrained with an idea of hierarchical organization of world political order where civilised states occupied the top level of international hierarchy, while savage and barbarian political entities were considered as legitimate objects of patronage and colonization. The European story of progress was formulated in universal and unidirectional terms as referring to the ‘family of mankind’ climbing the ladder of human development, which at that point in time found its most advanced realization in civilised European states. That is, human progress was based on an underlying universal teleology. At the same time, this story was not essentialist, for instead of proclaiming some predestined and unchallengeable superiority of European nations, it presented the level of civilization as a product of those states’ political histories. Their, but potentially any state’s, civilizational level could be subject to cultural-historical analysis, comparison and recognition that allowed for change.

In the end of the XVIII – beginning of the XIX century, Russia was included into the European society of states and claimed the status of a great power. As a full member of the Congress System, it had to adopt the new dominant narrative of the progressive development of universal humanity. On the other hand, it found itself deficient in civilizational terms. From within the European discourse it was still seen as exotic and semi-barbaric. What is more, its previously dominant mode of presenting itself as a great polity was met with misunderstanding at the Congress of Vienna. Russia’s phenomenal greatness was challenged by a newly established European consensus which deemed greatpowerhood to be a relational status in the international system depending on concrete cultural-historical manifestations of political greatness and measurement thereof.

Throughout the XIX century, Russia was trying to devise its own mobilizational narrative that could serve the purpose of modernization but would also be congruent with the already internalised European ideas and would not damage its fragile recognition as a great power. The discussion of Russia's place in the story of progress was mostly taking place within the framework of the debate between Westernisers and Slavophiles. At the official level, that discussion translated into mobilizational narratives in both domestic and foreign policy discourses. The solution to Russia's unwillingness to abandon its great power status coupled with perceived underdevelopment and retardation was a peculiar synthesis of the noumenal and phenomenal understandings of greatness that turned into a mobilizing domestic ideology formulated in foreign policy terms. That is, on the one hand, Russia followed a path that was similar to the core European nations by discursively merging noumenon and phenomena into one universalist, but not essentialist narrative. On the other hand, however, the resulting synthesis applied not so much to the whole of the international society through reproducing boundaries and hierarchical structures and putting Russia on top, but to Russia's own political history, domestic regime and troubled recognition.

Russia's greatpowerhood started to be presented as historically predetermined, yet always unfulfilled and threatened by other actors. Greatpowerhood became, at the same time, the telos and the reason for modernization. Russia tried to compensate for and overcome domestic underdevelopment through intensive self-colonization but justified the need to do this in great power terms, which elsewhere were understood as related to foreign policy. Thus, in the XIX and the beginning of the XX century Russian great power discourse became a cover up for a domestically oriented policy of modernizing self-colonization. Arguably, in the XIX century this discourse was eagerly accepted by the masses, for it capitalised on the familiar and popular stories of salvation coming through suffering and true greatness being the outcome of complete submission to collectivity.

I begin my last substantive chapter with the analysis of selected monuments from the Westernisers-Slavophiles debate. I pay specific attention to the discussions of Russia's place in the progressive development of universal humanity. Then, I address an influential domestic ideology formulated by Count Sergey Uvarov. On the example of Uvarov's 'Theory of Official Nationality' I demonstrate how phenomenal and noumenal understandings of Russia's greatness were synthesised into a mobilizational narrative that utilised foreign policy concepts for achieving domestic ends. Further, I touch upon the legacy of Aleksandr Gorchakov, one of the most influential Russian foreign policy makers of the XIX century. I look at how Gorchakov, akin to Uvarov, utilised foreign policy issues to attend to domestic reforms. Finally, I present my take on the turn-of-the-century Russian politicians, who promoted the policies of intensive self-colonization justifying those by appealing to Russia's international standing and great power status.

## **6.2 The great debate: inception**

Russian XIX century was the age of what Russian students of philosophy call 'philosophism' (*filosofstvovanie*) and what today would probably be called 'opinion journalism' in the West. Stopping short of formulating logically coherent philosophical systems, many Russian thinkers and public intellectuals were nevertheless preoccupied with creating arguments about the logic and laws of history and society. It was mostly this part of the Russian domestic discourse, where the great debate between Westernisers and Slavophiles unfolded.

Below, I analyse some monuments of this debate that I deem to be important for my argument. The reason for such focus is simple. The debate was overwhelmingly concerned with Russia's political status. This status was believed to be largely dependent on Russia's inclusion into or separation from 'the family of mankind', 'the concert of powers', or 'the universal humanity' – i.e. what could be called 'international society' or 'world society' in the terms of the English School, or 'world history' in the Hegelian language. The Westernisers-Slavophiles debate helps me demonstrate that Russian great power discourse in the XIX century transformed under a heavy influence of Russia's interaction with Europe, and particularly with the European idea of progress.

Both Westernisers and Slavophiles tried to apply this idea to Russian history and attempted to find Russia's place in the development of universal humanity.

I certainly do not claim to provide a complete or even a fully representative overview of all the conversations that took place within the 'Westernisers vs. Slavophiles' framework. What I will try to do, however, is to conduct a detailed analysis of a small number of positions that seem to be most illustrative of the general trends and that speak directly to the subject of my investigation: Russia as a great power and a great state.

Arguably, the kickstart of the great debate was given by Pyotr Chaadayev's *Philosophical Letters*, the first of which was published in 1836 (but had been circulating as a manuscript since 1829). The letter immediately caused a great scandal and earned Chaadayev a state-imposed label of a madman and a house arrest. In an oft-cited passage from the first letter, Chaadayev was contemplating a question of Russia's place and status among other nations. He asserted that,

from the very first moments of [Russia's] social existence, [it] produced nothing suitable for people's common good, no useful thought was incubated on [its] fruitless soil ... no great truth was proposed from within [its] environment; [Russia] did not trouble itself with creating anything imaginative, and borrowed only the deceptive appearance and useless luxury from what was created in others' imagination.<sup>1</sup>

This position looked like the kind of approach that had previously been popular among the supporters of Peter the Great. Such approach would imply a complete detachment from the greatness established through millennial tradition and a concentration on the metamorphosis that Russia underwent during Petrine reforms. Yet, Chaadayev did not follow that path, which probably was the main cause of the scandal his letter provoked in Nicholas I's Russia. He went on arguing that Russia "to make others notice [itself] had to stretch from the Bering Strait to Oder" and that it could be said to be great only insofar as it was supposed to "teach the world a great lesson."<sup>2</sup> On

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<sup>1</sup> Pyotr Chaadayev, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniy i izbrannye pis'ma* [Collected Works and Selected Letters], Vol. 1 (Moscow: Nauka, 1991), p. 330.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 326.

its own, however, Russia “belong[ed] to that kind [of peoples] that are not included into the mankind.”<sup>3</sup>

Thus, Chaadayev’s take on Russia’s political status was almost the first of its kind, as far as the official discourse is concerned.<sup>4</sup> Early Chaadayev not only portrayed Russia as a purely emulating and immature nation, but he also stripped it of all attributes of political greatness, however defined, except the military might, which was largely meaningless for the author. In his second letter, written in 1830, he expanded on this subject to pass a decisive verdict: “The thing is that the significance of peoples within the mankind is defined exclusively by their spiritual might and that the interest they manage to arouse depends on their normative influence in the world, not on how much noise they produce.”<sup>5</sup> And it was due to the lack of normative influence and spiritual might, according to Chaadayev, that Russia “was hardly known [by the world], despite all its strength and greatness.”<sup>6</sup>

It was not surprising that such an argument, instead of being recognised as unpatriotic or even treacherous, was simply labelled insane by the Russian officials – after all, Chaadayev was bringing forth a position that had been very marginal before him. In fact, this position was so unusual that Chaadayev himself could not properly stick to it in the *Letters*. One dent, noticed by his Russian translators (the *Letters* were originally written in French), was particularly telling. After claiming that Russia could only teach the world a great lesson, Chaadayev slightly softened his tone asserting that “of course, that [great] lesson which [Russia was] destined to teach, would not go unnoticed, yet,” he continued, “who could know the day when [Russia] would *find itself again* among the mankind and how many misfortunes [it] would suffer before [its] destiny is fulfilled?”<sup>7</sup> In the French original, Chaadayev used the verb *retrouverons* to convey the italicised expression, i.e. ‘find

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 326.

<sup>4</sup> Leonard Schapiro, *Rationalism and Nationalism in Russian Nineteenth-Century Political Thought* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 40.

<sup>5</sup> Chaadayev, *Collected Works and Selected Letters*, Vol. 1, p. 347.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 347.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 326, emphasis added.



again' or 'return', instead of *trouverons* that would simply mean 'find'.<sup>8</sup> Where did Russia have to return and what did it have to find again, when, according to the author, it had never been an integral part of the universal history and the human kind? This is an important semantic contradiction that puzzled both his translators and his first publisher to such an extent that some of the former were subsequently choosing to change the semantics opting for *obresti* ('to find'), instead of *obresti vnov'* ('to find again'),<sup>9</sup> while the later decided to publish this sentence in a significantly altered version.<sup>10</sup>

This seemingly minor detail may, in fact, be interpreted as an important symptom. In the XIX century, there emerged a persistent ambivalence of discursive position on Russia's political greatness. This ambivalence haunted not only Chaadayev himself, making him drift towards a reinvigorated version of the story of Russia's noumenal greatness by the time he wrote *Apology of a Madman* (1837), but also a whole plethora of Russian thinkers and statesmen, who shaped the debate about Russia's international status up until the eve of the October Revolution. I spend the remainder of this chapter on illustrating and trying to understand this ambivalence across the whole ideological spectrum of the Russian political discourse.

### 6.3 Ancient Russian element

The tension between the progressive and the essentialist positions on political greatness revealed itself in both Westernisers' and Slavophiles' circles. In his immediate response to Chaadayev's publication Aleksey Khomyakov, a representative of the opposing camp, contemplated on the meaning of Russia's position in the world and fended from Chaadayev's scandalous escapade by insisting that indeed "[Russia] is nothing, as the author of the 'Philosophical Letter' is saying, but [it is] the centre within the humanity of the European hemisphere, a sea which all the concepts are flowing into. And when it is overflowed with particular

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 93.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 694, endnote 6.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 653.

truths, it will flood its own shores with the truth which will be general.”<sup>11</sup> It was this central all-receptible position that, according to Khomyakov, was responsible for Russia’s disorderliness, or “heterogeneity of concepts”<sup>12</sup> (*raznorodnost’ ponyatiy*), as he called it. Yet, Khomyakov also believed that even in the position of such discharge vessel Russia was generally safe, for “this vessel has an ancient Russian element that would protect [its content] from spoilage.”<sup>13</sup>

All of the above basically reflects Khomyakov’s and other Slavophiles’ essentialist position that renders Russia’s political superiority in noumenal terms, but also harbours progressive universalist aspirations imagining Russia in the process of becoming, while the telos of that process is supposed to have universal significance. For Slavophiles, Russia was a vessel that contained some primordial truth, some element that made it great simply because of what Russia was, not because of what it had managed to achieve in relation to others. At the same time, they believed that Russia had not yet fully realised its potential and the final phenomenal manifestation of its true greatness was yet to come. However, the most interesting part of Khomyakov’s response is the following coda:

One remaining thing that would need to be done is to calculate our natural qualities and acquired weaknesses, as well as those of other enlightened peoples, to weigh them, and to conclude based on that measurement which people is more suited for amalgamating within itself material and spiritual power. But this is a new vast topic of discussion. Enough has been said against the point that [Russia is] negligible.<sup>14</sup>

In this finale, Khomyakov pitched for the possibility of measuring and comparing different nations’ qualities and achievements to then locate them on the line of progress, but he ended very abruptly, emphasizing that his main aim was to counter Chaadayev’s point on Russia’s alleged insignificance. Had he gone a bit further though, Khomyakov would unavoidably face the need to somehow quantify the ‘ancient Russian element’ that alone was keeping Russia from ‘spoilage’ and

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<sup>11</sup> Aleksey Khomyakov, “Neskol’ko slov o ‘Filosoficheskom pis’me’ napechatannom v 15 knizhke ‘Teleskopa’ [A Few Words about the ‘Philosophical Letter’ published in 15<sup>th</sup> Issue of ‘Teleskop’],” [http://az.lib.ru/h/homjakow\\_a\\_s/text\\_0030.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/h/homjakow_a_s/text_0030.shtml), accessed 16 November 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

that other conceptually mongrel nations were lacking. Quite expectedly, he chose not to open that box. Yet, the sole idea that the truth may be established through measurement and comparison and that power can be relational eventually penetrated his thinking, unlike it was the case for his predecessors who represented the purely noumenal stance. Nevertheless, he did not go beyond simply flagging this idea out, for such conceptualization of truth could be detrimental for the transcendent and non-relative essence that Russia was supposed to bear and that was making it great, in the author's opinion.

## 6.4 Sublime glory of the good

Khomyakov was not alone in trying to battle with this contradiction between relationality of political power and power as pristine truth kept intact in the Russian vessel. Several other Slavophiles were also trying to reconcile these accounts in their writings. The most conventional way to do this was to admit the importance of relative superiority achieved through possession/accumulation of material and cultural resources, but to also posit subsequently that all those riches were temporal and not that important, that there was something higher in Russia's possession and this higher good was what made Russia a great nation. Such, for example, was Mikhail Pogodin's take on the problem.

In his *Letter on Russian History* written in 1837, Pogodin initially described at great length all the material and human resources that Russia had come to enjoy. On the material side, in addition to Russia's great size and population, Pogodin mentioned the vast amounts of gold, silver, iron, grain, timber, vine, sugar, wool, coal, the pace of industrial development, and many more items along the same line, invariably emphasizing that in those terms Russia was incomparably richer than any other European country. On the human side, he pointed at Russian people's (and particularly *muzhiks*) *tolk* (insight, good sense) and *udal'* (prowess, courage). Those words, according to him, did not have equivalent translations in other languages. Taken together, he

maintained, “these physical and spiritual forces form a gigantic machine, constructed in a simple, purposeful way, directed by the hand of one single man, the Russian Tsar...”<sup>15</sup>

Yet, even though the above description presented Russia as *already* being superior on all fronts, it was still not enough for the author, as if, while he was writing about Russia’s greatness, he still felt some insecurity and deficiency of his great state. Hence, for Pogodin, who was a Pan-Slavist, such a detailed rationalist account of Russia’s cumulative power was a mere prelude to what he articulated after – that all this power faded in comparison to the higher truth:

But, my Lord, there is another glory, a pure, beautiful, sublime glory, the glory of the good, of love, of knowledge, of right, of happiness. What does power matter? Russia does not admire feats of power, any more than a millionaire is impressed by thousands. She stands calmly and silently – and the world is trembling before her, intriguing [sic!] and busy about her. Russia can do everything. What more does she want? The other glory is more flattering and more desirable. We can shine forth in that glory, too.<sup>16</sup>

When it comes to the content and purpose of this other glory, Pogodin did not go further than Khomyakov in trying to define it. Russia (together with other Slavs), in his opinion, was supposed “to consummate, to crown the development of humanity (which hitherto have been accomplished only separately) in one great synthesis ... to reconcile heart with reason, to establish true justice and peace.”<sup>17</sup> It was meant to produce a “sacred good.”<sup>18</sup> Citing Ján Kollár, a contemporaneous Slovak poet, Pogodin insisted that “it is impossible ... that so great a people [i.e. Slavs led by Russia], so great in numbers, spread over so wide a space, of such talents and qualities, with such language, should accomplish nothing for the good of humanity ... Everything great is destined for great purposes.”<sup>19</sup> However, at the moment when Pogodin wrote these lines, Russia and Slavs were not quite there – their true greatness was still dormant.

Importantly, the glory that Pogodin was writing about was not the same kind of glory that I discussed in the chapter about Petrine reforms. While the latter should be understood

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<sup>15</sup> Mikhail Pogodin cited in Hans Kohn, ed., *The Mind of Modern Russia: Historical and Political Thought of Russia's Great Age* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), p. 63.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 65-66.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 68.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 67.

<sup>19</sup> Kollár cited in Kohn, ed., *The Mind of Modern Russia*, p. 67.

phenomenally and could be said to mostly be about appearance, for there is no solid reality behind it, as nominalists would have it, the former is a “sacred good” with intangible, yet very real presence. The latter works through inspiration invoked by the monarch’s mysterious charisma, the former is validated through popular acclamation, and the monarch is simply a navigator of the ‘gigantic machine.’ The Slavophiles’ position was closer to a formerly marginalised position about Russia’s noumenal greatness that re-emerged after Russia’s entry into the international society and got reinforced throughout the XIX century. Yet, importantly, their position was also markedly unfulfilled. They always presented Russia as being great in potentiality, in some glorious future where it was supposed to consummate and crown the development of humanity. In that, they were constructing a specific teleology of Russian political development that bore the traces of the progressivist paradigm of world history that had become hegemonic in the Western political thought. Thus, in essence, Slavophiles produced a mobilizational discourse, where the rhetorical figure of great Russia functioned as a telos of Russia’s domestic development and a guarantee of the world community’s common future.

## **6.5 From balance of power to power of the common sense**

As already happened many times before, the most important boost to the Slavophiles’ position on Russia’s greatness formulated in noumenal terms was given during a serious political crisis – the Crimean War. In April 1854, i.e. at the height of hostilities between Russia and the European nations, Pogodin directly addressed the issue of great powers’ policies and functions in his *Notes on Russian Politics*. In it, he made two points that are crucial for this analysis.

Making his first point, Pogodin returned to the idea of Russian *tolke*, which in that case was interpreted as a kind of superpower that allowed all Russians to see and access the truth directly.

There is politics, which operates in the darkness and consists of mysteries; there is diplomacy, whose main aim is, according to Talleyrand, if I correctly recall, to conceal thoughts behind words, not reveal them; but there is also common sense, which judges the

actions in this world without further ado and tries to bring everything down to one simple formula: two by two equals four.<sup>20</sup>

Pogodin went on to note that Russians possess a special kind of this common sense, which they call *tolke*, “and it is this *tolke* that [Pogodin was] appealing to when [he] offer[ed his] thoughts about Russia’s politics...”<sup>21</sup> Whether or not the author was simply ironic, the implications of such kind of phrasing were important. The representation of *every* Russian (recall that initially Pogodin also, and especially, attributed *tolke* to peasants) as being capable of simply seeing things straight without complications and confusing details was appealing for his readers, and it was sending a peculiar message: Russians just know the truth, regardless what you, Europeans, should say or do – it is that simple.

Pogodin’s second point touched upon the reasons of how the abovementioned understanding of greatness came to dominate Slavophiles’ discourse. He admitted that the initial principle of Russia’s European politics was, in fact, in line with the function that European great powers were supposed to perform – it was helping to maintain the balance of power (which could only be done after preliminary ranking and measurement of European powers) and to jointly manage the newly established international order:

We now must say a few words about the very inception (principe) [of Russia’s politics in Europe], about this so-called legal order, for whose sake she acted for so long, with such effort and self-sacrifice, to receive such a wretched award ... from the [European] governments and peoples ... [Has Russia] managed to maintain, in accordance with [its] goal, Europe’s legal order? No.<sup>22</sup>

More precisely, as Pogodin formulated a bit further, Russia failed and succeeded in performing its great power function at the same time. It failed in maintaining the legal order but saved Europe from a continent-wide revolution.

A more well-known argument along the same line was, of course, the one brought forth by Fyodor Tyutchev. In his 1848 essay, Tyutchev argued that “there were only two real powers in

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<sup>20</sup> Mikhail Pogodin, *Zapiski o politike Rossii* [Notes on Russia’s Politics], <https://goo.gl/XDL9gM>, accessed 15 November 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Europe: Russia and the Revolution, [and that] the life of one of them means death to the other.”<sup>23</sup> The Revolution for him was akin to a virus that had penetrated the European organism and proved to be immune to “constitutional spells [and] legalistic formulas.”<sup>24</sup> It infiltrated “the public blood [and all the] consensual formulas [were] merely narcotic drugs that [could] sedate the patient, but [were] unable to prevent the further spreading of the disease.”<sup>25</sup>

Hence, both Tyutchev and Pogodin believed that Russia had to change its European policy. As Pogodin put this, it would be better off, “if it stopped patching others’ roofs and started taking care of its own”<sup>26</sup> – not in a sense of going into seclusion and focusing on developing its interior, but in a sense of mounting the greatness of its power on a different foundation: on blood and cultural unity of all Slavs. Thus, in Pogodin’s logic, by ceasing to actively maintain European order, Russia did not stop being a great power. On the contrary, it found a better and truer application for its political greatness, which should have yet again been manifested through its sheer non-relational being, as opposed to its relational superiority and the responsibilities related to the international order that were emanating from it. Just like other Slavophiles, Tyutchev and Pogodin could hardly conceal their dissatisfaction with how Russia’s European affairs unfolded, but not only that. Their positions exhibited an ambition to develop Russia itself to bring it in conformance with a distinctive set of ideas of what a great Russia should be. Both authors were not satisfied with the status quo. Hence, the discourse they produced was mobilizational and ideological.

## 6.6 Ideology of national greatness

The two points made by Pogodin serve as a good illustration of how the progressive understating of greatpowerhood, initially picked and processed by the Russian political discourse in the beginning of the XIX century, created a reinvigorated version of greatpowerhood, mostly

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<sup>23</sup> Fyodor Tyutchev, “Russia and Revolution” (1848), [http://www.tutchev.com/text/laruss\\_ru.shtml](http://www.tutchev.com/text/laruss_ru.shtml), accessed 15 November 2016; for the French original see: [http://www.tutchev.com/text/la\\_russie.shtml](http://www.tutchev.com/text/la_russie.shtml).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Pogodin, *Notes on Russia’s Politics*.

understood in noumenal terms but bearing progressive and universalist connotations also. That reinvigorated noumenal position came to the fore most forcefully precisely in the same kind of moment as did its discursive predecessors – during a political crisis. It re-emerged in the form of a popular ideology that capitalised on all-encompassing claims about the Russian people, their unity and their greatness understood in predominantly Christian terms – as being actualised through “self-renunciation and self-sacrifice, which constitute [the] moral nature [of the Russian people].”<sup>27</sup>

It stands to mention that, compared to the early modern idea of noumenal greatness, the Slavophile version of it got significantly Russianised/Slavisised. If in Ivan IV’s times political discourse prescribed a specific domestic regime that great polities had to maintain regardless of their cultural and linguistic (but not religious) origin, the Slavophile discourse of the XIX century was deeply affected by nationalism (mostly in its ‘civilizational’ form).<sup>28</sup> Russians/Slavs were said to possess something that other peoples did not have simply because the latter were not Russian/Slavic. The take on this context-dependency varied from blatantly messianic to pragmatic and non-essentialist. The former remained true to the idea of Russia’s higher purpose and specific noumenally defined characteristics. The latter moved away from discussing transcendent truths but stayed attached to special qualities of the Russian regime, which, however, were interpreted as transformable and historically-conditioned. It is this latter, non-essentialist, yet still universal, version of the Russian great power discourse visibly affected by the hegemonic paradigm of world history that presents the biggest interest for my analysis. It is primarily so, because it not only informed the most influential XIX-century state ideology (Official Nationality), but also affected Russia’s foreign policy discourse. Yet, before I turn to the discussion of how the Russian great

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<sup>27</sup> Tyutchev, “Russia and Revolution”.

<sup>28</sup> Slavophiles’ ‘civilizational nationalism’ was, in fact, very similar to the kind of nationalism that the Kremlin is promoting today. In 2012, Vladimir Putin published his (in)famous article ‘Russia: The National Question’, where he referred to Russians as a ‘state-forming people.’ In the West, his rhetoric was immediately interpreted in ethnic terms. Yet, at a closer look, in his version of Russian nationalism Russia was presented as a ‘civilizational state’, not a nation state or an ethnically homogenous nation. According to Putin, there existed “Russian Armenians, Russian Azeri, Russian Germans and Russian Tartars” that were connected in one coherent whole by “the common culture and common values” (See: Vladimir Putin, “Rossiya: natsionalny vopros,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 23 January 2012).



power discourse operated in the official policy circles, I still ought to expand on what happened to the Westernisers' discourse about Russia's international status and what kind of fruit the seed of ambivalence planted by Chaadayev eventually bore.

## 6.7 Russia's great essence

Probably one of the most oft-cited lines from Chaadayev's *Apology of a Madman* (1837) is this one: "Peter the Great found only a blank page when he came to power, and with a strong hand he wrote on it the words *Europe* and *Occident*: from that time on [Russia was] part of Europe and of the Occident."<sup>29</sup> In it, Russia is presented as a *tabula rasa*; yet, not in a sense that it had no history, but in a sense that in order to become truly great it had to adopt another, European history. For Chaadayev, Russia so easily submitted to Peter's reforms because "[her] previous existence apparently did not give [her] any legitimate grounds for resistance"<sup>30</sup> – i.e. there was nothing great in it to hold on for. In addition, it had a comparative advantage of "not living under the fatal pressure of the logic of times" and that "it was in [Russia's power] to measure every step [she] is making, to consider carefully every idea..."<sup>31</sup> This may seem as a rejection of the idea that political greatness may be simply embedded by default in a people's life and history. Yet, already on the next page Chaadayev introduced an important twist into his argument.

He began with reiterating the point about the absence of original ideas in Russia: "Look carefully, and you will see that each important fact in [Russia's] history is a fact that was forced on [her]; almost every new idea is an imported idea."<sup>32</sup> However, in Chaadayev's interpretation, this predicament eventually turned out to be the doing of the divine providence:

But there is nothing in this point of view which should give offense to the national sentiment; it is a truth and has to be accepted. Just as there are great men in history, so there are great nations which cannot be explained by the normal laws of reason, for they are mysteriously decreed by the supreme logic of Providence. That is our case...<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Chaadayev cited in Kohn, ed., *The Mind of Modern Russia*, p. 53.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 53.

<sup>31</sup> Pyotr Chaadayev, *Apologiya Sumasshedshego* [Apology of a Madman] (1837), <http://www.vehi.net/chaadaev/apologiya.html>, accessed 22 September 2018.

<sup>32</sup> Chaadayev cited in Kohn, ed., *The Mind of Modern Russia*, p. 54.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 54.

In other words, in Chaadayev's apology Russia's primordial greatness was presented as unquestionable, for it had been overdetermined by god's will, like every other phase of its troubled history. At the same time, this greatness was certainly unfulfilled. This is why Chaadayev also professed Russia "a great future, which will undoubtedly materialise."<sup>34</sup> What is more, he insisted that this "beautiful destin[y] ... will be the result of those special qualities of the Russian people, which were initially mentioned in that ill-fated article [i.e. *First Philosophical Letter*]."<sup>35</sup> Towards the end of his apology, Chaadayev was also quick to admit that "the indictment he brought in against the great nation ... was exaggerated."<sup>36</sup> Subsequently, the author complemented this essentialist version of his argument by adding the all-too-familiar idea of greatness that only comes after complete submission: "Moulded and lined, crafted by our rulers and our climate, we became a great nation, but only due to our obedience."<sup>37</sup> Thus, Chaadayev's take on the Russian nation was quite ambivalent. The way he presented this, Russians were passive, obedient, and, through this, great, yet, only in potentiality, because its true destiny was still unfulfilled.

## 6.8 On great men and great peoples

While Chaadayev was writing his *Apology* in a position where some compromise to the official line was in his best interest, other, better-positioned and more radical Westernisers were also rethinking the meaning of Petrine reforms that launched Russia's descent into the international society. Having fallen under a strong influence of Hegel's philosophy of history, Vissarion Belinsky, one of the most progressive thinkers of his time, reinterpreted the role of Peter the Great in Russia's political evolution. In process, he also accommodated Russia's providentially predetermined greatness into the story of the country's transformation in the preceding century. Without denying Peter's profound importance and paying utmost respect to his glory, Belinsky, nevertheless, re-evaluated his significance. While doing so, he distinguished between *genii* and *great*

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<sup>34</sup> Chaadayev, *Apology of a Madman*.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

men, Peter clearly representing the latter. The main characteristic that set the two apart was their belonging (*great men*) or non-belonging (*genii*) to a great people. In 1841, Belinsky wrote that,

*A genius*, in a sense of having superior abilities and spiritual strength, may appear anywhere, even among the wild tribes, living outside humanity; but a *great man* may come to existence only among a people that is either already belonging to the family of mankind, in the historical sense of this word, or is destined by world-power fate (*miroderzhavnymi sud'bami*) to be brought into kinship with it through the agency of a great man like Peter.<sup>38</sup>

Hence, even though the element of metamorphosis remained in place, it was world-power fate (read *Weltgeist*), not Peter himself, that predestined the greatness of the Russian people. Peter was reinterpreted as a mere agent of this fate who realised an ontologically established potentiality. Therefore, Belinsky continued, “there is a great difference between Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Charlemagne, Peter the Great, Napoleon – and Attila, Genghis, and Tamerlane: the former must be called *great men*, the latter – *les grandes kalmuks* [the great Kalmyks].”<sup>39</sup>

Belinsky called this predetermined potentiality nation’s *substance* (read *Volksgeist*). According to him, “substance is the imperishable and the eternal in a people’s spirit that, without changing in itself, endures all changes, while going through the phases of historical development remaining whole and sound.”<sup>40</sup> He argued that “just like some individuals have ingenious substances, so some peoples emerge with great substances and relate to other peoples like *genii* – to ordinary men.”<sup>41</sup> Peoples with great substances were capable of enduring any hardships, while people with ‘petty’ substances could perish at any moment, and no genius was capable of making them great. Belinsky was also certain that Russia did not belong to the group of nations with ‘petty’ substances, since if it had not had a great substance, “Peter’s reform would merely weaken and kill it, as opposed to animating and strengthening it...”<sup>42</sup> And of course, “such a giant as Peter could not have possibly appeared among a people with petty spirit.”<sup>43</sup> “Nothing comes out of nothing,”

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<sup>38</sup> Vissarion Belinsky, *Rossija do Petra Velikogo* [Russia before Peter the Great], Article 1, [http://obelinskom.ru/kritika\\_belinskogo/017-1.html](http://obelinskom.ru/kritika_belinskogo/017-1.html), accessed 15 November 2016.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. I apologize for having to cite this line, which sounds unacceptably racist by today’s standards.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

– concluded Belinsky, – “and a great man does not create anything new, but only brings into real existence what had previously existed in potentiality.”<sup>44</sup> That is, in his interpretation, Russia was a great nation among other nations, ordinary and great.

This reinterpretation was very close to what Slavophile Khomyakov had argued just a couple of years prior. Moving away from the traditional Slavophile take on Peter the Great as the corruptor of Russia’s pristine essence,<sup>45</sup> he insisted that even though “a lot of mistakes bedim the glory of Russia’s reformer, ... the honour of Russia’s awakening to strength and to the realization of strength remains with him.”<sup>46</sup> Just like his westward-oriented opponent, Khomyakov maintained that “the spiritual forces belong to the people and the church, not the government, while the government is only supposed to awaken or kill their activity by means of some kind of violence, less or more severe.”<sup>47</sup>

## 6.9 Varieties of essentialism

Regarding Peter’s role in bringing Russia into the world history, some Westernisers and Slavophiles managed to achieve a bipartisan consensus by the middle of the XIX century. Yet, this consensus was not unconditional. The difference between their position becomes visible in Vladimir Solovyov’s critique of what he calls ‘the sin of Slavophilia.’ The philosopher maintained that “the sin of Slavophilia is not in ascribing to Russia a higher mission, but in not being insistent enough on the moral consequences of such a mission. Let those patriots glorify their nation even louder, as long as they remember that *greatness brings responsibility*...”<sup>48</sup>

The kind of responsibility that Solovyov (who could hardly be called a Westerniser himself, but who was a harsh and outspoken critic of Slavophiles) was referring to should not, however, be confused with the responsibilities of great powers that Hedley Bull had in mind. For Solovyov,

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Such was, for instance the interpretation of Konstantin Aksakov (See: Aksakov, *Early Slavophiles*, p. 88).

<sup>46</sup> Aleksey Khomyakov, *O starom i novom* [On the Old and the New] (1839), <http://dbs-win.rub.de/personalitaet/pdf/299.pdf>, accessed 16 November 2016.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Vladimir Solovyov, “Idoly i idealy [Idols and Ideals],” in *Sobranie sochineniy* [Collected works] (Saint Petersburg: Prosveshchenie, 1911), Vol. 5, p. 393, emphasis original.

but also for most Westernisers inspired by Hegel, this responsibility was formulated in world-historic terms. What is more, instead of being relevant for the here and now of international order and aimed at preserving the status quo, this responsibility was always formulated as applying to future humanity. The philosopher continued his critique, by charging Slavophiles of “zoological patriotism, which freed the nation from the service to a higher cause and turned it into an object of its own idolatry.”<sup>49</sup> In Solovyov’s view, that higher cause, as he wrote in 1888, was in Russia’s “unbreakable connection with universal family of Christ and in turning all [her] national talents, all [her] imperial power toward the final realization of social trinity, where each one of the three main organic unities, the church, the state and the society, are independent, free and powerful [*derzhavno*].”<sup>50</sup> So, even though Solovyov asserted that “no people can live in itself, through itself and for itself,”<sup>51</sup> the external point of reference for him was still not the international, but the universal, and not the present, but the future.

On the one hand, Solovyov criticised Russian messianism recognizing its untenability for international relations. For him, this was the case because messianic claims must either be declaratory and hollow or result in a struggle for world domination. This struggle “would not prove the fact that the winner had a higher mission, for military preponderance does not mean cultural superiority.”<sup>52</sup> Yet, on the other hand, Solovyov did not entirely subscribe to the idea of greatness established through competitive recognition. His definition of greatness can be said to be relational only in so far as it relates to the universal, because it could only be attained through addressing the great questions, and while resolving those questions, “every nation must only think of its own duty, without looking at, expecting, or demanding anything from other nations.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 393.

<sup>50</sup> Vladimir Solovyov, “Russkaya ideya [The Russian Idea],” *Biblioteka Vekhi*, <http://www.vchi.net/soloviev/russianidea.html>, accessed 24 September 2018.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Vladimir Solovyov, “Nravstvennost’ i politika. — Istoricheskie obyazannosti Rossii [Morality and Politics. Russia’s Historical Responsibilities],” in *Sobranie sochineniy* [Collected Works], Vol. 5 (Saint Petersburg: Prosveshchenie, 1911), p. 10.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 16.

Thus, both Westernisers' and Slavophiles' positions ended up being quite essentialist, but in their own ways. If the former adopted providentialist world-historic outlook, where Russia was (or was predestined to be) one great nation among many, the latter subscribed to the story of Russia's national uniqueness and pristine essence that made it capable of deeds that were supposed to have universal repercussions. Importantly, both Slavophiles and Westernisers also conveyed the idea that Russia's greatness was still in the making, and the country's main responsibility was to develop that greatness to its full potential, not simply project on the rest of the world what has already been achieved.

At the same time, the idea that greatness can be instantiated through mere appearance seems to have lost a major share of its appeal in the XIX century. Thus, the panegyric genre in Russian mainstream literature was largely forgotten, surviving barely on the margins, within ecclesiastic circles. The attitude to glorifying poetry among Russian intellectuals was hardly enthusiastic. In Belinsky's words, all those panegyric writers "both wrote and sang in the same fashion and in one voice, and the form of their phrases was tediously monotonous, which pointed at the absence of substance in them, i.e. the absence of thought."<sup>54</sup>

## 6.10 Official Nationality

Of course, the discourse produced in the official policy circles exhibited much less essentialism. Yet, this discourse was not entirely detached from the debates I have described above. On the one hand, politicians had to deal with real life problems. This made the most successful of them extremely pragmatic. On the other hand, as Russia's 'discursive inhabitants', they had to rely on culturally intelligible categories, while justifying their choices and formulating their policies. This locked them within a given range of representations of what Russia could be seen to be in itself and what international status it had to aspire for. As Jutta Weldes put it, "[s]tate policy and

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<sup>54</sup> Belinsky, *Russia before Peter the Great*.

international politics have a fundamentally cultural basis and state and other international actions are made commonsensical through everyday cultural meanings.”<sup>55</sup>

Official Nationality was the dominant conservative ideology that shaped Russia’s domestic politics starting from its formulation by the Minister of Education Count Sergey Uvarov in 1833 and for several decades after. It included three foundational elements that were presented as being essential for the stable existence and further development of the Russian state: Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality (or National Spirit). This ideology came to symbolise Nicholas I’s era of reaction that began in the immediate aftermath of the Decembrists’ Uprising of 1825 and lasted until Nicholas’ death in 1855.

On Uvarov’s own account, by formulating his doctrine, he was trying to address several pressing issues. Here again, those issues were stemming from and overwhelmingly concerned with Russia’s integration into the European society:

How to establish such national education that would correspond to our order of things and would not be alien to the European spirit? Which rule should be guiding our action in relation to the European enlightenment and European ideas that we can no longer do without, but that also threaten to inflict an imminent death upon us, were they not skilfully restrained?<sup>56</sup>

The cited passage is interesting in several ways. Why could Russia no longer do without European ideas? Why did their unrestrained adoption threaten Russia with an imminent death? (Death of what?) How could those ideas be restrained without any change in their spirit? According to the minister, “each land, each nation has its own Palladium,”<sup>57</sup> i.e. a nation-specific protection of its safety and strength, or what Khomyakov would call the ‘ancient element’. And it was only through preserving that element that “Russia [but potentially any nation] could prosper, become more powerful, [and] live.”<sup>58</sup> At the same time, in Uvarov’s view, the European enlightenment

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<sup>55</sup> Jutta Weldes, “High Politics and Low Data,” in Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, eds, *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research and the Interpretative Turn* (Routledge, 2006), p. 178.

<sup>56</sup> Sergey Uvarov, *Doklady ministra narodnogo prosveshcheniya S.S. Uvarova imperatoru Nikolayu I* [Reports by the Minister of Education S.S. Uvarov to emperor Nicholas I], p. 70, <http://krotov.info/acts/19/1830/1833119.html>, accessed 16 November 2016.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 70.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 70.

with its republican and atheist moods was posing a threat to the most important composite parts of the element that was specific to Russia: its Orthodox faith, its autocratic regime, and its national spirit.

On the surface, such an interpretation of the sources of national power seemed congruent with the familiar idea of Russia's greatness contained in its perceptibly inaccessible noumenon that Slavophiles fell back on. Naturally, the new ideology was eagerly welcomed by the leading Slavophile thinkers. For example, Pogodin took up Uvarov's lead and tried to explicate the mechanism behind Russia's autocratic government that ensured its political success:

the secret of Russian history, the secret which not a single Western sage is able to comprehend: Russian history always depicts Russia as a single family in which the ruler is the father and the subjects are children. The father retains full authority over children while he allows them to have full freedom ... there can be no suspicion, no treason; their fate, their happiness, their peace they share in common. This is true in relation to the state as a whole...<sup>59</sup>

Similarly, Nikolai Nadezhdin, another prominent Slavophile and a specialist on the Russian Schism, wrote that "nationality had always consisted of love of the Tsar and obedience, and which in the future should display in itself, to Europe's dismay, a brilliant lesson of how from the holy unity of autocracy, must arise an exemplary and splendid national enlightenment..."<sup>60</sup>

However, at a closer look, Uvarov's position appears more nuanced and complicated. For him, the question of Russia's integration in Europe was not to be formulated in metaphysical terms. What needed to be achieved was Russia's entry into the international society that would also allow for the preservation of its domestic political stability and regime, which were perceived to be both threatened by European ideas and essential for Russia's successful adaptation to the latter. In Uvarov's own words, the puzzle he was attempting to resolve was straightforward, "how to keep abreast with Europe and not move away from our own position ... what kind of art one needs to master to take from the enlightenment only that which is necessary for the existence of a

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<sup>59</sup> Pogodin cited in Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *Russian identities: a historical survey* (Oxford University Press US, 2005), pp. 138-139.

<sup>60</sup> Nikolai Nadezhdin cited in David Lloyd Hoffmann and Yanni Kotsonis, *Russian modernity: politics, knowledge, practices* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 55.



great state, and [at the same time] reject decisively everything that bears seeds of unrest and disorder.”<sup>61</sup>

As a minister and the chief ideologue, Uvarov certainly took pro-regime position, and it is hardly surprising that he paid tribute to and attempted to preserve autocracy. Yet, how exactly was Russian autocracy perceived to be threatened by European ideas? One possible answer to this question was given by Neumann who argued that by that time “the discourse of great powers [became] embedded in the wider discourse of regime type ... A power [could] also count as great by governing in a way that [was] deemed exemplary by others.”<sup>62</sup> Assessed against the context of emerging governmentality, Russian autocracy seemed despotic, and hence – outdated. Therefore, in Uvarov’s view, had Russia adopted the European ideas and language in an unrestrained fashion, it would have been forced to make an impossible choice: to preserve either its regime, or its great power status.

Why was the Russian autocratic regime considered to be essential for Russia’s political stability and its successful adaptation in Europe? On the one hand, as Troshchinsky, Herzen and Bakhtin have attested, the broken bond between the lower and the higher classes was perceived to be reinstated through universal representation that was believed to be carried out by the monarch, but only insofar as the monarch’s power was absolute.<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, as Kharkhordin and Gerschenkron demonstrated convincingly, the monarch had historically been the everlasting agent of change in the country’s political evolution.<sup>64</sup> Be it the ‘Russian Reformation’ (Gerschenkron) or the inception of nationalism and the idea of common good (Kharkhordin), it was always the case that the ideational and institutional transformation was initiated and carried out in a top-down manner. Thus, by conserving autocracy Russia was believed to also maintain its transformative

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<sup>61</sup> Uvarov cited in Zorin, *Feeding the Two-headed Eagle*, p.367.

<sup>62</sup> Neumann, “Russia as Great Power, 1815-2007”: 132.

<sup>63</sup> Troshchinsky, *Note on Ministries*, p. 56; and Herzen, *Collected Works in Thirty Volumes*; and Bakhtin, “Westernisers and Slavophiles,” p. 426.

<sup>64</sup> Gerschenkron, *Europe in the Russian Mirror*, p. 45; and Kharkhordin, “What is the state? The Russian concept of *Gosudarstvo* in the European context”: 226-227.

potential, even though this brought the risk that its international recognition as a great power would be undermined. This being said, there was nothing in autocracy itself that would make it specifically Russian or perpetually necessary in Uvarov's opinion.

Consequently, the problem that Uvarov was seeing in front of him "was so difficult that even its simple exposition [left] any sensible person flabbergasted."<sup>65</sup> A solution the minister decided to propose was, on the one hand, feeding from the repertoire of ideas about Russia's noumenal greatness (proper religion and regime), and, on the other hand, in its formulation it remained markedly non-essentialist, and hence amenable to potential change. That is, Uvarov's ideology was entirely rooted in the popular image bank, thereby remaining familiar and comprehensible for the masses, but also reserved an opening for political transformation.

While defending Orthodoxy as one of the necessary pillars of his ideology, Uvarov insisted that, "Without the love for the faith of the ancestors, a nation, just like a private individual, must perish; to weaken the nation's faith would be the same as to deprive it of its own blood and to tear its heart out."<sup>66</sup> Despite this bombastic language, as Zorin perspicaciously observed, Uvarov "[could] hardly conceal his confessional indifferentism ... [The minister] purposefully [did] not mention Orthodoxy's divine nature. It [was] significant for him due to its traditionality, not truthfulness."<sup>67</sup> Uvarov appealed not to some noumenal or doctrinal superiority of the Orthodox religion, but to its embeddedness into the Russian tradition. In the French original of his report, this was even more obvious, for he "[did] not mention [the word] Orthodoxy *even once* ... always opting for formulas '*religion national* [national religion]' and '*église dominante* [dominant church].'"<sup>68</sup>

Uvarov's justification of autocracy seemed equally pompous:

Autocracy presents the main condition of Russia's political existence *in its current shape*. The Russian Colossus is supported by autocracy as by a cornerstone; a hand touching the pedestal shakes the whole body of the State. Innumerable majority of Russians feel this truth fully,

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<sup>65</sup> Uvarov, *Reports by the Minister of Education S.S. Uvarov to emperor Nicholas I.*

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Zorin, *Feeding the Two-headed Eagle*, p. 360.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 360.

even though they are positioned at different levels and differ in terms of their enlightenment, mindsets and relations to the government.<sup>69</sup>

Yet, here again, just one phrase – *in its current shape* – gave the minister away. In addition, even though this report was prepared for the monarch himself, Uvarov “did not utter a single word about the providential nature of Russian autocracy, [or] its non-relational merits,”<sup>70</sup> i.e. the qualities of the regime that were foundational for the idea of noumenal greatness, and that were prominently present in the early modern incarnation of that idea.<sup>71</sup>

Thus, Uvarov presented both Orthodoxy and autocracy as historically-conditioned traits of Russian body politique. For his pragmatic mind, however, those elements were neither providentially predetermined, nor inescapable in the long run. They both were thought of as characteristically Russian, yet not in some transcendental way, but as products and attributes of national history, i.e. they “end[ed] up being rooted in the third element – in the proverbial national spirit.”<sup>72</sup> At the same time, when it came to the national spirit, Uvarov defined it by attributing its bearers with certain convictions: beliefs in the omnipotence of the Throne and the Church. In Zorin’s words, “[h]aving defined Orthodoxy and autocracy through the national spirit, Uvarov [then defined] the national spirit through Orthodoxy and autocracy. In formal logic [this] is called a vicious circle.”<sup>73</sup>

## 6.11 Synthesis for domestic ends

The described features of Uvarov’s ideology are crucial for my overall argument. Official Nationality for the first time reflected very explicitly the synthesis of phenomenal and noumenal understandings of Russia’s greatness. What is more, it also admitted that this synthesis emerged through Russia’s interaction with the European political discourse. However, if in the European context a similar synthesis created an international hierarchy, a scale of progress and the idea of

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<sup>69</sup> Uvarov, *Reports by the Minister of Education S.S. Uvarov to emperor Nicholas I*, emphasis added.

<sup>70</sup> Zorin, *Feeding the Two-headed Eagle*, p. 361-362.

<sup>71</sup> E.g. Yuriy Krizhanich, who I discussed in the third chapter, argued that autocracy was the best form of rule in general, irrespective of concrete contexts.

<sup>72</sup> Zorin, *Feeding the Two-headed Eagle*, p. 362.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p. 366.

great power management applied to the world political order, in Russia it took a different shape and was utilised for other purposes.

While justifying his ideology, Uvarov performed the same intellectual operation in relation to Russia's political development that XIX-century international lawyers performed on international law. Orthodoxy, autocracy and national spirit were presented as the fruits of the history of Russia's state practice, like the common conscience and positive international law were the fruits of the historical development of the political society called Europe.<sup>74</sup> Thus, the sources of Russia's greatness were not understood metaphysically in the theory of Official Nationality. Hence, Uvarov's appeal to the utmost value of Russia's 'palladium' was not a return to the noumenal understanding of political greatness. Contrary to how this was interpreted by Slavophiles, Uvarov was telling a different story, which structurally resembled the story of European progress in the sense that Russia's political development was understood progressively as a series of consecutive revelations of its political worth that accumulated and created a great polity, as opposed to simply reflecting its everlasting inner nature. What is more, this story heavily depended on interaction with others and on the internalization of the dominant norms.

At the same time, Uvarov's ideology was still universal, because it exhibited an acute understanding of the common telos, and Russia, in his opinion, had no other choice but to accept the fact that the universal history had a specific direction. Hence, true greatness could no longer be about mere appearance – phenomenal manifestations of political power had to have a foundation in the form of the universal progress beneath it. Russia, however, did not play a leading role in advancing the human development – this was pretty much obvious for all the participants of the Russian political debate. In fact, Russia badly needed to modernise. Moreover, to become a great power proper, it needed to do what normal great powers usually do – to engage in great power management through colonization. Yet, before Russia could effectively do this, it needed

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<sup>74</sup> Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations*, pp. 46, 51.

to colonise and civilise itself, for it seemed obviously deficient for then-current standards. To accomplish this, it utilised the available discursive sources, i.e. the story of its own greatness, refashioned to conform to the European greatpowerhood story, but serving domestic needs.

In the middle of the XIX century, Russian great power discourse became a domestic ideology. This ideology started to present in foreign policy terms what essentially was a domestically-oriented policy of self-modernization and self-colonization.<sup>75</sup> What was, in fact, an internal problem of perceived underdevelopment and civilizational deficiency was externalised and given an appearance of a foreign policy issue. It turned into a story of Russia having to become and to resist Europe at the same time. Without having to accept a straightforward position of a European colony and being unable to claim the status of a proper European great power, Russia opted for an ambivalent position of an under-civilised civiliser, whose main object of colonization was Russia itself. And the ideology of being a great power whose status was insecure and unfulfilled, but, at the same time, historically predetermined, began to function as a popularly accepted and welcomed cover-up for the queer position of a self-colonizing coloniser.

## 6.12 Bringing the Eastern question home

In the second half of the XIX century, domestic agenda was showing through Russian foreign policy discourse very explicitly. Russia contemplated its own incapacity to count as a proper great power through concentrating on what Solovyov perceptively called “great questions,”<sup>76</sup> most of which were, of course, foreign policy questions. One of those questions was the so-called ‘Eastern question’, i.e. the struggle of Eastern Christians (predominantly Orthodox) for political independence from the Ottoman Empire and Russia’s political projects related to their support.

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<sup>75</sup> On Russia as a self-colonizing political entity, see: Etkind, *Internal Colonization*, and Morozov, *Russia’s Postcolonial Identity*.

<sup>76</sup> Solovyov, “Morality and Politics. Russia’s Historical Responsibilities,” pp. 16-17.

In his *Note on Russian Foreign Policy from 1856 till 1867*, Russian Chancellor Aleksandr Gorchakov discussed the Eastern question quite extensively. Some of his thoughts directly relevant to my analysis deserve to be quoted at some length.

... we should expect, – writes the Chancellor, – that the Eastern Christians, left to their own means, will not be able to avoid the influence of Western capital and material progress, which is so powerful today. But can we count merely on their Christian gratefulness and the bonds of our faith and ethnicity connecting our peoples? Undoubtedly, we should not neglect this inner impulsion, for it is our only strength at the current moment.<sup>77</sup>

Gorchakov then went on to insist that “Eventually, they [Eastern Christians] will appreciate this friendship ... comparing it to the dubious sympathies of France that is giving them away at usurious interest.”<sup>78</sup> Yet, in the Chancellor’s opinion, “in order for Russia to have an influence worthy of it in those regions, it needs to fortify these moral ties by military, financial, industrial and trade relations, which could bond Russia’s and those countries’ destinies together inseparably.”<sup>79</sup> Gorchakov concluded his thought by suggesting that the latter could only be achieved, if Russia developed its inner forces, which “[at that] point in time, constituted *the only true source of states’ political greatness*.”<sup>80</sup>

Thus, Gorchakov presented Orthodox Christianity and cultural ties as the only available, but still insufficient instruments of political influence abroad. The main aim of that influence, however, was not as much the realization of Russia’s proverbial mission to build a supranational political entity based on obsolete and incomprehensible spiritual unity of morally upstanding peoples. Instead, Russian foreign policy towards Eastern Christians was somehow meant to aid the development of Russian interior, to make it modern. Hence, it was the restoration of Russia’s material capabilities and domestic reforms that, on the one hand, became the main objective of the Russian Cabinet in the 1860s, and, on the other hand, was justified exclusively in foreign policy terms. What is more, Gorchakov argued that the Russian Cabinet

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<sup>77</sup> Aleksandr Gorchakov, “O vneshey politike Rossii s 1856 po 1867 god [On Russia’s Foreign Policy from 1856 till 1867],” in: Viktor Lopatnikov, *Gorchakov* (Moscow: Molodaya Gvardiya, 2003), p. 350.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 350.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p. 350.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p. 350, emphasis added.

perceives it as a duty to follow this path, without flattering themselves for what has been already achieved, and without retreating before that what needs to be accomplished, remaining convinced that hasty agitation is unbecoming for a healthy nation, just like cunning agility is unworthy of a people, whose future is even greater than its past; 20 years of idleness and stagnation are nothing for the life of such a people...<sup>81</sup>

The Chancellor wrote these lines a decade after Russia's crushing defeat in the Crimean war, and domestic restoration agenda looked quite natural here. Yet, one could also see how in this quote, just like in Uvarov's ideology, political greatness is presented as a product of Russia's national history, while the content of the message is openly mobilizational and inward-looking, instead of being preoccupied with the international status quo and great power management in its Western understanding (i.e. concerted maintenance of international order). The same can be said about Gorchakov's famous aphorism reiterated by Otto von Bismarck: "une grande puissance ne se reconnait pas, elle se revele" (a great power does not have itself recognised, it reveals itself).<sup>82</sup> For the Chancellor, greatpowerhood was about what a country needed to do itself, not about how others reacted to it. For him, recognition was an epiphenomenon of that self-revelation. The latter, however, was still problematic and incomplete in the Russian case, which Gorchakov hinted at in his other famous saying about Russia: "Nous sommes une grande impuissance" (we are a great powerlessness).<sup>83</sup>

## 6.13 Self-colonization in foreign policy terms

### 6.13.1 Sergey Witte

At the turn of the century it became painfully obvious for the Russian elites that the biggest challenge for Russia's modernization was its domestic institutional and economic structures. Those, too, were invariably discussed as primarily related to Russian foreign policy and its quest for the great power status. Sergey Witte, a minister (1892-1903) and a prime minister (1903-1906)

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 351.

<sup>82</sup> Otto von Bismarck, *Mysli i vospominaniya* [Thoughts and Memoirs], Vol. 1 (Moscow: OGIZ – Gosudarstvennoye Sotsial'no-Ekonomichskoye Izdatel'stvo, 1940), p. 201.

<sup>83</sup> P.A. Zayonchkovskiy, ed., *Dnevnik P.A. Valuyeva ministra vnutrennikh del v dveh tomakh* [Diary of Pyotr Valuyev, the Minister of Internal Affairs, in Two Volumes], Vol. 2 (1865-1876) (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo akademii nauk SSSR, 1961), p.326. *Une grande impuissance* is a witty modification of the French 'great power' – *une grande puissance*.

of Imperial Russia, filled a lot of pages with his contemplations about Russia's domestic condition and its international standing. In his memoirs, published in 1911, Witte attested that the turn from free trade to protectionism that took place during the rule of Alexander III (1881-1894), occurred primarily because "Emperor Alexander III realised that Russia could *become great* only when it would be an industrialised country in addition to being an agrarian one; that a country without a well-developed manufacturing industry *could not be great*."<sup>84</sup> Witte also suggested that the primary reason for Russia's retardation was its lack of capital, which it could not accumulate throughout its economic history, for "Russia, having turned within the two preceding centuries into the greatest power in the world, and having concentrated all its efforts on this great task, could not make any savings."<sup>85</sup> Thereby, in Witte's reasoning, Russia's international great power obligations became the primary cause of Russia's domestic underdevelopment.

As an influential econometrician, Witte did not cherish any illusions regarding Russia's economic condition – it was hopelessly behind the leading European states. As a politician, however, he also believed that Russia deserved "full greatness, corresponding to the spirit and strength of the great Russian people."<sup>86</sup> Why was the Russian people still great for Witte, if the state was so weak and challenged? Apparently, in Witte's opinion, Russia was still great in potentiality, because it was more democratic than any other Western European state, but democratic in a '*muzhik*-ian' sense, i.e. its peasantry and lower classes were the main source of Russia's greatness and strength.

At the same time, the so-called 'peasant question' (i.e. the problem of re-integration of liberated peasants into Russian society as independent and free economic subjects) was still unresolved. Peasants' mistrust in Russia's judicial system, their scepticism towards regional

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<sup>84</sup> Sergey Witte, *Vospominaniya. Detstvo. Tsarstvovanie Aleksandra II i Aleksandra III* [Memoirs. Childhood. The Rule of Alexander II and Alexander III] (Slovo: 1923), pp. 373-374, [http://az.lib.ru/w/witte\\_s\\_j/text\\_0010.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/w/witte_s_j/text_0010.shtml), accessed 23 September 2018, emphasis added.

<sup>85</sup> Sergey Witte, *Protokol'naya zapis' vystupleniy ministra finansov S.Yu. Witte i ministra inostrannykh del M.N. Muravyova* [Minutes of the speeches by the Minister Finance, S.Yu. Witte, and the minister of Foreign Affairs, M.N. Muravyov] (1899), [http://az.lib.ru/w/witte\\_s\\_j/text\\_0100.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/w/witte_s_j/text_0100.shtml), accessed 16 November 2016.

<sup>86</sup> Witte, *Memoirs: The Rule of Nicholas II*, p. 288.



bureaucracies, as well as the strength of traditional peasant commune, were the main obstacles for the re-integration. Therefore, to make Russia great again, Witte expected Nicholas II (1894-1917) to instil legality into his subjects' everyday life, to eradicate lawlessness, to educate and truly emancipate his subjects. It was obvious for him, that a peasant needed to be turned into a person (together with Konstantin Pobedonostsev, the Ober-Procurator of the Most Holy Synod and the emperor's advisor, Witte thought peasants were still "semi-persons" at that point in time).<sup>87</sup> It was necessary to free the peasant from the ties of their local community, which would bring about the actualization of Russia's potential greatness.

Thus, in Witte's discursive universe, the question of Russia's modernization was inextricably connected to civilizing Russia's own peasants and turning them into modern political subjects. This, and only this, would ensure successful reforms of Russian domestic institutions. At the same time, this policy of self-colonization was formulated and justified in foreign policy terms. Witte presented Russia as a great power that had earned this status through centuries of political practice, had internalised the telos of European civilization, found itself temporarily deficient in those terms, and was sprinting towards its resurrection. The heaven-sent opportunity to finish this sprint resided in the yet unploughed and exotic spirit of the Russian peasant.

### 6.13.2 Pyotr Stolypin

The intimate connection between the domestic and the international was discussed very widely in the Russian official discourse of the early XX century. Pyotr Stolypin, who became the prime minister the same year Witte left the office, agreed with his predecessor regarding the peasant question and the improvement of land use, which he saw as "the issues ... of existential importance for Russia as a great power [*voprosami bytiya russkoy derzhavy*]."<sup>88</sup> What is more, Stolypin claimed consistently that he intended to keep Russia away from participating in any military

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p. 470.

<sup>88</sup> Pyotr Stolypin, "Deklaratsiya pravitel'svennoy programmy [Declaration of the Government Program]," 16 November 1907, in: Pyotr Stolypin, *Sbornik rechey Petra Arkadyevicha Stolypina, proiznesennykh na zasedaniyakh gosudarstvennogo soveta i gosudarstvennoy dумы (1906-1911)* [Collection of speeches by Pyotr Arkadyevich Stolypin delivered at the sessions of the State Duma and the State Council (1906-1911)] (Saint Petersburg: Izdaniye V.V. Logacheva, 1911), pp. 45-46.

disputes – primarily due to Russia’s internal institutional fragility and the ongoing agrarian reform.<sup>89</sup> In addition, Stolypin emphatically abstained from engaging in foreign policy making and, reportedly, once refused to meet the last German Emperor Wilhelm II, believing that their meeting “could bring more harm than good.”<sup>90</sup> Yet, in this light, it becomes even more interesting to see how and why Stolypin spoke about Russia’s great power status, which he did regularly and with passion.

For instance, in one of his speeches, the prime minister argued for the necessity of allocating a vast amount of resources for the restoration of the Russian navy that had been destroyed during the Russo-Japanese War. This is how he justified his call:

However high our aspiration for peace and however pressing the country’s demand for appeasement, if we want to preserve our military power, which protects the dignity of our motherland, and if we do not agree to lose our rightful place among the great powers, we would not retreat in front of the need to make these expenditures, which we are obliged to bear for the sake of Russia’s great past. Of course, the emergency nature of these needs can only be satisfied by emergency expenditures.<sup>91</sup>

Thus, navy, which elsewhere was mainly perceived as a precondition of prosperity and a means of trade and colonization, turned for Stolypin into the shield of the motherland’s violated dignity and of its great past. Russia’s present, however, was such that emergency measures were required to restore and maintain its place among the great powers, which for him was as uncertain, as it was rightful. Coming from a person, who was primarily preoccupied with Russia’s domestic development and who was against its involvement in international disputes, such a take on Russia’s great power status seemed again very inward-looking. More precisely, Stolypin’s discussion of Russian greatness was a mobilizational narrative with a domestic agenda, which was formulated in foreign policy terms.

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<sup>89</sup> Stolypin cited in M.P. Bok, *Vospominaniya o moyom otse P.A. Stolypine* [Memoirs about my father P.A. Stolypin] (New-York: Izdatel'stvo imeni Chekhova, 1953), p. 300.

<sup>90</sup> Bok, *Memoirs about my father P.A. Stolypin*, p. 282.

<sup>91</sup> Pyotr Stolypin, “Deklaratsiya pravitel'stvennoy programmy [Declaration of the Government Programm],” 6 March 1907, in: Stolypin, *Collection of speeches by Pyotr Arkadyevich Stolypin delivered at the sessions of the State Duma and the State Council (1906-1911)*, p. 24.

Another illustrative example of such fusion of the domestic and the international was Stolypin's take on the obligations of great powers:

Great world powers have global interests. Great world powers must participate in international combinations; they cannot reject their right of vote in the resolution of global problems. Navy is that lever, which provides an opportunity to exercise this right, it is a necessary attribute of every great power that has access to the sea.<sup>92</sup>

It is clear from this quote that Russia had an obligation to participate in great power management not because otherwise the world order would be in crisis, but because if Russia abstained from this duty, it would cease being a great power. That is, Russia needed to engage in great power politics for the sake of self-preservation.

As Stolypin made clear in one of his other speeches delivered in the State Duma in 1908, the continued colonization of Russia's interior was the main strategy of that self-preservation. Defending the need to build the Amur railway, he confessed that he understood "the position of [his] opponents, who say that it is first necessary to restore the centre ... but it is wrong to heal our wounded motherland in just one place."<sup>93</sup> To justify this position, Stolypin resorted to the kind of rhetoric that one also hears very often in today's Russia – either Russia will be a great power or will not be at all:

If we do not have enough lifeblood to skin over all the wounds, the most remote and tormented parts of our motherland may painlessly and imperceptibly fall off ... And ... the future generations will bring us to account for allowing this to happen. We will be held accountable for the fact that, while minding our own internal matters, preoccupied with the country's reconstruction, we overlooked more important worldly matters, worldly events, we will be held accountable for becoming discouraged, for slipping into stasis and senile anaemia, for losing faith in the Russian people and its life force.<sup>94</sup>

In Stolypin's rhetoric, the narrative of Russian greatpowerhood and its involvement in the resolution of global problems went hand in hand with another narrative concerned

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<sup>92</sup> Pyotr Stolypin, "Rech' o zadachakh morskogo ministerstva [Speech on the Tasks of the Naval Ministry]," 13 June 1908, in: Yu. G. Felshtinsky, ed., *Nam nuzhna velikaya Rossiya... Pyotr Arkadyevich Stolypin. Polnoe sobranie rechey v Gosudarstvennoy dume i Gosudarstvennom soвете, 1906-1911* [We Need Great Russia... Pyotr Arkadyevich Stolypin. Complete Collection of Speeches in State Duma and State Council] (Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya, 1991), <https://goo.gl/MP1eqP>, accessed 23 September 2018.

<sup>93</sup> Pyotr Stolypin, "Rech' o sooruzhenii Amurskoy zheleznoy dorogi [Speech on the Construction of the Amur Railway]," 31 March 1908, in: Felshtinsky, ed., *We Need Great Russia...*

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

overwhelmingly with Russia's internal fragility and retardation. This perceived retardation was an outcome of many factors, including Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War. Yet, most importantly, it was measured against the internalised scale of universal progress. By manifesting its capability to engage in great power politics, Russia was believed to be modernizing itself and bringing itself closer to the desired ideal of a highly-developed nation. This ideal, however, was a distant potentiality that required an emergency mode of governance for catching-up development. For Stolypin, such emergency measures mostly included self-colonization through resettlement and agrarian reform supplemented with very cautious foreign policy of avoiding conflict.

### 6.13.3 Pyotr Struve

Almost all other discursive positions that were gaining ground in the early XX-century Russia kept in their core the ambivalence of Russia being great and inferior at the same time. They also exhibited the sense of urgency and trauma that Russia needed to recover from. The recipes they prescribed differed from the self-centred strategies proposed by Witte and Stolypin – they put more emphasis on assertive foreign policy. Yet, despite such emphasis, one could still see that the main problem they were supposed to resolve was the discrepancy between the level of Russia's development and the ideal of a civilised nation it had internalised in the preceding century. Similarly, the main resource that should have been deployed to clear that discrepancy was located at home.

In 1910-1911, Vladimir Ryabushinskiy, the brother of a famous liberally-minded banker and old-believer Pavel Ryabushinskiy, edited a two-volume book *Velikaya Rossiya* (Great Russia). Disillusioned with Stolypin's repressive reforms, Ryabushinskiy was standing in opposition to his government. The book was addressing military and social issues related to Russia's political and economic development and "proclaimed 'love towards the motherland and the army' as the way to restore the great power status, which Russia had historically possessed."<sup>95</sup> The contributing

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<sup>95</sup> Yu. Petrov, "Ryabushinskiye – tselaya epokha v promyshlennoy zhizni Rossii [The Ryabushinskiys – Whole Epoch of Russia Industrial Life]," *Nauka i Zhizn'*, No. 7 (1992): 20-28, <http://muzeum.mc/index.php?page=subj&order=4>, accessed 23 September 2018.

authors were an impressive collective of politicians, academics and military officials, whose positions differed in some ways, but who all agreed that Russia needed to build-up a material and, most importantly, military foundation beneath its claim for political greatness. Some contributors to Ryabushinskiy's volume spoke bitterly of the 'virus of pacifism' and insisted that "the restoration of Russia's military might [was] its main and the most urgent objective."<sup>96</sup>

The mastermind behind the publication of *Great Russia* was said to be Pyotr Struve, a Russian academic, one of the founding fathers of Russian Marxism, who later drifted towards the liberal conservative position and participated in the White movement. Struve was also an editor of *Russkaya Mysl'* (Russian Thought), one of the most popular Russian journals in the late XIX – early XX centuries. Earlier, Struve already published an essay with an identical title in the abovementioned journal.<sup>97</sup> He wrote this essay as a response to Stolypin's 1907 speech, which the prime minister crowned with a rhetorical formula that later became famous. Criticizing radicals' approach to his land reform, he exclaimed, "They want great shocks, we want Great Russia!"<sup>98</sup>

This exclamation resonated with Struve's thinking to such an extent that he decided to elaborate on what he saw as the true profound significance of this statement. As one could find out from the subtitle of Struve's essay, in it, he contemplated the 'problem of Russian power (*mogushchestva*).'<sup>99</sup> He started approaching this issue by criticizing 'banal' radical position on states' political greatness:

The common, I would say, banal point of view of good-minded ... radicalism is that the state's foreign policy and external greatness are unfortunate implications, incurred by racial, national and ... other historical moments into the real content of state's life, its domestic policy, which is aimed at achieving the true meaning of statehood, the state's "internal" well-being.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> \*\*\*, "Mirosozertsaniye naroda i dukh armii [The world-outlook of the people and the spirit of the army]," in: V. P. Ryabushinskiy, *Velikaya Rossiya* [Great Russia] (Moscow: Tipografiya P.P. Ryabushinskiy, 1910), p. 19.

<sup>97</sup> Pyotr Struve, "Velikaya Rossiya: Iz razmyshleniy o probleme russkogo mogushchestva [Great Russia: Thoughts on the Problem of Russian Power]," *Russkaya Mysl'*, Vol. 1 (1908): 143-157, [http://dugward.ru/library/struve/struve\\_velikaya\\_rossia.html](http://dugward.ru/library/struve/struve_velikaya_rossia.html), accessed 23 September 2018.

<sup>98</sup> Pyotr Stolypin, "Deklaratsiya pravitel'stva po agrarnomy voprosu [Government's Declaration on the Agrarian Issue]," 10 April 1907, in: Stolypin, *Collection of speeches by Pyotr Arkadyevich Stolypin delivered at the sessions of the State Duma and the State Council (1906-1911)*, p. 40.

<sup>99</sup> Struve, "Great Russia: Thoughts on the Problem of Russian Power".

Then, Struve observed that such a position was in fact in conformance with the position of the opposite camp, 'banal' conservatives:

When a radical ... speculates: the external strength of a state is a phantasm of reaction, the ideal of exploiting classes, when he, guided by such understanding, rejects foreign policy for the sake of the domestic one, he ... talks exactly like [the Russian Minister of the Interior] V.K. von Pleve ..., who pushed Russia towards the war with Japan, ... for the sake of the preservation and reinforcement of autocratic-bureaucratic system.<sup>100</sup>

The author argued that both camps were misguided. In his turn, Struve maintained, approaching the problem of state power anthropomorphically, that "psychologically, any emergent state is a kind of personality, which has its own supreme law of existence."<sup>101</sup> That supreme law attested that any healthy and strong state wanted to be powerful. And to be powerful, in Struve's view, meant that a state had to necessarily strive towards external greatness. One consequence of such reasoning was that any weak state, when it was not defended by the conflict of interests of strong states, "was always potentially ... and ... de facto a prey for a strong state."<sup>102</sup> Hence, Struve argued that the main measure of success for governments' domestic policy was the answer to only one question: "To what extent does that policy advance the so-called external power [*vneshnee mogushchestvo*] of the state?"<sup>103</sup> Thus, maximizing this external power was presented as the sole and absolute end of any state's existence.

In Struve's opinion, Russia had to restore its inner strength by maximizing its external power, but since external power was also the main measure of the inner strength (and in Russia's case this meant that Russia was weak on all accounts), Struve could only conceive and present the idea of Great Russia as creative and "revolutionary, in the best sense of this word."<sup>104</sup> He thought of Stolypin's formula as "a motto of the new Russian statehood that relies on [Russia's] 'historical past' and living 'cultural tradition,'" i.e. on some future state that would be mounted on the foundation cast from the fruits of Russia's political history.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

It stands to mention that by restoring Russia's external greatness Struve did not mean expansionist or aggressive foreign policy. He was writing this in 1908, when Russia barely recovered after the war with Japan and the 1905 revolution. Struve believed that Russia's far-eastern foreign policy was a logical outcome of Alexander III's reaction that was overly preoccupied with preserving Russia's internal regime. What he suggested instead was a form of cultural hegemony, which would need to gradually turn into an economic one. In his opinion, too great a focus on the far-eastern dimension was Russia's mistake, because that region was neither culturally compatible (Russia did not have any religious or linguistic connections with either Japan or China), nor economically attractive (due to its remoteness and the difficulty to ensure competitiveness resulting from it). Struve urged Russia, in its then-current position of weakness, to turn to the Black Sea basin, where it had cultural ties, which could potentially become economic ties in future.

He believed that the most solid foundation of real greatness and might was a strong economy, which Russia did not have at that time. Hence, for becoming great again it had to utilise the means available to it – cultural leadership. Importantly, that cultural leadership was still a potentiality for Struve, a potentiality that could be made real only through the eradication of Russia's domestic vices: the anti-statist spirit of its people and the break between the authorities and the most cultured classes. The former undermined labour discipline, which Struve presented as the main foundation of power and culture. The latter led to the disconnectedness of the elites and the people in general. To correct those vices, Struve proposed a form of domestic population management reminiscent of colonizing practices. This was supposed to alleviate Russia's "deeply abnormal"<sup>105</sup> condition complicated by the country's multiethnicity, breach the proverbial gap between the state and the people and turn Russia into an exemplary civic nation.

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

Two concrete policies that Struve proposed applied to Russia's Jewish and Polish minorities, whom he called *inorodtsy* (i.e. non-Russians), which could be translated in some contexts as 'indigenous dwellers'.<sup>106</sup> Essentially, the ultimate purpose of the proposed policies was the co-optation of Jews into the process of Russian economic recovery as "invaluable pioneers and mediators,"<sup>107</sup> and the appeasement of the Polish elites for turning them into loyal and satisfied Russian subjects. Struve concluded his argument by suggesting that, "only if the Russian people is bitten with the spirit of true statehood and defends it bravely ... only then the Great Russia will be created on the basis of the living traditions of the past and the precious acquisitions of the current and forthcoming generations."<sup>108</sup>

Thus, the core problem Struve was trying to address in his essay was a peculiar condition of Russian domestic society, which was an outcome of its imperial experience and the evolution of its domestic political institutions. That condition was caused by the lack of national consciousness in the lower classes and the disconnectedness of the educated classes from the state. As such, it was hampering the establishment of Russia's cultural leadership in the Black Sea basin and the construction of a strong economy. That is, it did not let Russia acquire the two main preconditions of power and might – the supposedly natural goals of every healthy nation.

Having formulated the problem, Struve then introduced an important twist. Allegedly, power and might made sense for him only if they were manifested externally. Thus, Russia was supposed to solve the problem of its domestic underdevelopment by foreign policy means – through engaging in great power politics. At the same time, in its early XX-century shape, Russia was weak and fragile. Hence, Struve's argument about political greatness that was only achieved through external manifestations did not reflect the status quo. Instead, it was a mobilizational

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<sup>106</sup> Vladimir Solovyov also believed that the Jewish and the Polish questions were the 'great questions' that Russia was supposed to found its greatness upon.

<sup>107</sup> Struve, "Great Russia: Thoughts on the Problem of Russian Power".

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.



ideology, “revolutionary, in the best sense of this word,”<sup>109</sup> which formulated in foreign policy terms what was utterly and completely a domestic problem.

## 6.14 Conclusion

Contemplating the evolution of Russian nationalism in his 1889 essay, Solovyov concluded that this evolution proceeded in three distinct phases. He maintained that

[t]he three successive stages of [Russian] nationalism appear as, first, the cult of [the Russian] people as the privileged bearers of universal truth, then, the veneration of this people as an elemental force irrespective of all truth, and finally, the cult of its exclusive cultural and historical character – a negation of the very idea of universal truth.<sup>110</sup>

Thus, the philosopher traced a discursive succession, in which the idea of the Russian nation was first conceived in fantastic terms, then shifted to being completely amoral (i.e. lacking any moral sensibility whatsoever), and finally turned into an autistically self-centred narrative in the XIX century.

Of course, such description of this discursive process fitted Solovyov’s purpose very nicely. After all, his main philosophical task was to reinstate the idea of universal morality and, by proclaiming the absence of universals in the Russian nationalism of the XIX century, he (mis)represented the position of his philosophical opponents whom he intended to debunk. Yet, this reconstruction was, at the same time, very ingenious and revealing, for in it, Solovyov also managed to unwittingly capture the transformation of Russian great power discourse throughout centuries. He illustrated how the reflection of the belief in the superiority of Russia’s unchanging noumenon gave way to the idea of greatness that came into force by means of its phenomenal manifestation. The philosopher also described how the idea of political greatness was detached from appearance and invested into Russia’s cultural and historical substance in the XIX century.

Where Solovyov may have got it wrong, however, was his assertion that the resulting discursive construct negated the idea of universal truth altogether. As I have shown in this chapter,

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Solovyov cited in Kohn, ed., *The Mind of Modern Russia*, 222-223.

throughout the XIX century, Russia was trying to grapple with the idea of universal progress. It could hardly see any meaningful alternatives to it but found it difficult to relate to it unproblematically. This was mostly the case because Russia found itself in an ambivalent situation, when it came to its positioning in the international hierarchy and on the civilizational spectrum. On the one hand, Russia assumed the role of a full-fledged European great power and a member of the Congress system after the Napoleonic Wars. On the other hand, it kept being exoticized within the European discourse and sensed its ascribed civilizational and economic deficiency very clearly.

That deficiency only made sense, however, if it was measured against a universal standard and discussed in a common language that Russia, as a member of European society, could not help internalizing. Indeed, the proverbial “exclusive cultural and historical character” that Solovyov was referring to was never an isolationist narrative indifferent to reactions and opinions coming from abroad. On the contrary, Russia was always extremely concerned about its international image. This fact even convinced some IR scholars that honour was an unchanging transhistorical category in Russia’s relations with the West.<sup>111</sup> In my turn, I argue that the persisting emphasis on the cultural and historical character came as a response to Russia’s encounter with the dominant European discourse about universal progress and reflected the ambivalent position that Russia came to occupy within it. Russia utilised the resources found in its cultural and historical character to overcome the perceived abnormality of its position. Historically and culturally constructed national greatness (that had an important international dimension to it) served as a cover-up for domestically oriented policy of (self-)colonization, which was perceived as essential for catching-up modernization, but also necessary for any great power embedded into the dominate European discursive framework.

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<sup>111</sup> Tsygankov, *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin*.

## CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUSION

### 7.1 Uses of greatness in Russia's international politics: A brief summary and the main takeaways

Returning to where it all began, i.e. the present, one can now approach the questions I formulated in my introductory chapter with much more certainty and contextual depth. What is more, those questions can now receive both short, present-oriented answers and answers that are more comprehensive and historically informed. I try to do both in this concluding chapter. I start by spelling out the main takeaways from my analysis as succinctly as possible, in a form of brief and straightforward answers to the questions I originally posed. This, of course, comes with a cost, as so much more has, in fact, been going on there that those short answers cannot possibly do both: to be concise and policy-relevant, and to relate the reader back to all the multiple stages of the conceptual evolution I have reconstructed in this study. To ensure that the latter is sufficiently represented as well, I supplement the short answers with a more detailed discussion, in which I relate the main takeaways back to the main body of my argument. In this discussion, I reflect on the relevance of my findings for the wider debate on political greatness, as well as bring them into a dialogue with the operations of the great power discourse in contemporary Russia. In addition, I devote a substantive section of this chapter to the discussion of the missing one hundred years and argue why this investigation should stop where it stops, i.e. before the First World War and the October Revolution, which effectively excludes most of the XX century from my analysis. I conclude by bringing forth a few observations about post-Soviet Russia and the workings of its great power discourse.

#### 7.1.1 *The main takeaways*

*Why is the idea of being a great power so important to Russia?* At present, but also historically, the great power status operates discursively in the Russian political space not only as something related to international prestige and foreign policy opportunities, but as something unbreakably connected to the health and survival of Russia's domestic regime. This connection of *velikaya derzhava* with

domestic politics is an outcome of the concept's evolution, as well as its interaction with the transforming discursive frameworks of the European society of states. As a result of those processes, Russia managed to both internalise the progressive understanding of world history with all the hierarchies and modes of conduct pertaining to it, and apply it self-referentially, reinterpreting its own greatness as, on the one hand, a fruit of its political history and, on the other hand, the only viable means to overcome its perceived/imagined underdevelopment.

*Why does Russia stick to this identity even when doing so may compromise its international standing and damage its economic health?* Russia often insists on being a great power to the detriment of its own prosperity and well-being, because, in the Russian symbolic universe, greatpowerhood, among other things, is a mobilizational ideology. This ideology is future-oriented and is supposed to help overcome precisely the condition of economic weakness and deteriorating international recognition. Hence, it makes perfect sense from within the Russian frame of reference that the great power identity is rearticulated and brought to the fore precisely in the moments when Russia's international standing is compromised, and its economic health is far from being ideal. The same thing happened many times before in Russian history.

*What does Russia, in fact, mean when it speaks about being a great power, given that its subsequent actions often do not conform to other actors' expectations about proper 'greatpowerly' conduct?* The meaning that Russia attaches to the concept *velikaya derzhava* is a local meaning with a reach history, which, nevertheless, developed in interaction with the discourses of Russia's significant Others. In this sense, *velikaya derzhava* and 'great power' are both the same and different. They are the same because whenever Russia speaks about being a *velikaya derzhava*, this is usually translated into English as 'great power' which carries a load of very distinct connotations related to foreign policy in the perception of Russia's interlocutors. They are different because the set of connotations that 'great power' carries with it – foreign policy, relative superiority and the management of international order – is not fully equivalent to the semantic baggage of *velikaya derzhava*. While Russian officials can and sometimes do use this Russian concept (usually, in relation to other states)

referring to the institution of international society with its English-language semantics, when they talk about Russia itself, the concept is usually filled with a slightly different meaning. It describes a status allegedly earned by the centuries of Russia's political practice and, at the same time, the telos of its current development which is proceeding in the mode of a normalised emergency conditioned by a failed synthesis of the noumenal and phenomenal understandings of political greatness attempted first in the XIX century.

*Why does the Russian story about its political greatness often include an element of dissatisfaction and unfulfillment?* Russia's great power rhetoric often exhibits signs of dissatisfaction and unfulfillment because the synthesis I mentioned above was a failed one. Instead of fully rejecting the progressive paradigm, or, on the contrary, adopting it in its entirety and accepting the role of a learner, Russia seems to have internalised the Western discursive framework, but did not find a way to relate to it unproblematically. Viewed as an ambivalently positioned latecomer from within the progressivist paradigm, Russia never came to terms with that role, refused to leave the club altogether, but also was unable to greatly improve its relative position vis-à-vis the core. Consequently, it ended up oscillating between the two poles: (1) the forceful assertions of its own greatness (retrieved in different genealogical variations from its cultural image bank), and (2) the acute realisations of its underdevelopment, which was supposed to be mitigated through an emergency modernization program that Russia was believed to be capable of, empowered by the ideology of being a *velikaya derzhava*. This created an uneasy tension in Russia's self-image, as well as in its interactions with the outside world.

Those brief answers, however, require a contextualisation, for the concepts like 'noumenal greatness', 'phenomenal greatness' and 'failed synthesis' do not really speak for themselves. Their appreciation depends on a detailed elaboration of their usage. In addition, while they may partially satisfy a reader who simply wants to make better sense of seeming irregularities of Russia's great power discourse, they will certainly be insufficient for someone willing to understand the dynamics of and the ruptures in the conceptual evolution of *velikaya derzhava*. Neither will they tell much

about the exact details of Russia's discursive interactions with neighbouring states. To remedy this omission, I further provide a more nuanced reconstruction of the conceptual evolution of *velikaya derzhava*. By doing so, I also expose a bigger story that I have been telling in the preceding chapters. This story combines Russian local specifics with global discursive process. The ruptures in the Russian conceptualization of political greatness, as I have tried to demonstrate, were not only affected by inter-lingual encounters with Russia's significant Others, but also reflected the conceptual evolutions that were taking place on the regional and global scales. As such, the conceptual evolution of *velikaya derzhava* was reflecting larger discursive developments: namely, the evolution of how political actors conceived greatness in the European discourse. Consequently, the following discussion is not only about Russia, it is also about the international society and the dynamics of interactions therein.

### **7.1.2 The main takeaways, contextualised**

#### **7.1.2.1 Noumenal greatness**

Initially, the idea of political power in Russia, just like in the West, was deeply embedded in the religious discourse. The concept they use to signify 'great power' in modern Russian – *derzhava* – back then was first and foremost god's attribute. God, in his turn, was enthroning a grand prince temporarily endowing him with great power. The prince, however, did not possess any personal charisma of their own. Then, around the XV and XVI centuries the word *derzhava* began to signify 'a polity' in addition to 'great power', and the greatness of Russian polity and power started to be explicitly emphasised through the addition of the word 'great' to it – it became *velikaya derzhava*, which could be tautologically translated as 'great great power'. I suggest that, arguably, the vision of Russia being a 'great great power' emerged as a conservative response to European modernity.

As follows from contemporaneous literary sources and diplomatic correspondence, the labels *velikaya derzhava* or *velikoye tsarstvo* (great kingdom) used to characterise the Russian polity not only reflected its claim for an imperial rank but were also supposed to emphasise that the power

of Russian princes continued to be interpreted as divinely instituted, unconditional and undivided. While some European rulers, who were elected by the nobles (e.g. Stephen Báthory) or shared supreme power with the ruling class (e.g. Johan III of Sweden), in the eyes of the Russian political elite, may have preserved their power, but lost greatness. In other words, the first disagreement on what constitutes the true political greatness emerged as a result of the shifting normative consensus regulating the operations of domestic regimes. Facing what would later become a new norm for some European polities, Russia held firmly to the idea that the supreme executive power must be undivided, while the relation it takes with regard to its subjects could better be described as possession rather than management.

Notably, such political regime, whose practices may have either been adopted and adapted from the Byzantine standard, as Boris Uspenskij would probably argue,<sup>1</sup> or experienced the influence of the steppe tradition, as Iver Neumann and Einar Wigen suggested, was believed to be superior to its European analogues, and hence – greater.<sup>2</sup> That is why, Russian monarchs of the XV and the XVI centuries were not explicitly looking for endorsement from other European rulers. And when they were offered that endorsement, it was common to reject it (see the discussion of this in Chapter 3). This was the case because, among other things, the greatness of Russian polity was conceived as an noumenal fact, rather than a matter of international consensus and recognition.

### 7.1.2 From majesty to glory

It is important to reiterate that *derzhava* was god's attribute, i.e. it could be associated with the tsaric office, but never with the tsar himself. Endowed with *derzhava*, the tsar was perceived as a father of the family holding his daughters and sons in complete possession. Yet, although he had full *potestas*, i.e. the performative dimension of power to govern through force, his *auctoritas*, or power through authority, was still very much dependent on the Orthodox Church and the Russian

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<sup>1</sup> Uspenskij, "Tsar and Patriarch".

<sup>2</sup> Neumann and Wigen, *The Steppe Tradition in International Relations*.

patriarch. It was only through them that the tsaric office was endowed with *majesty*, or true greatness. This arrangement was very close to the Byzantine idea of *symphony*, when the tsar and the patriarch shared supreme power between them. One was executing majestic authority, while the other one was representing it. As long as things remained like this, Russian domestic regime was perceived to be great, or *majestic*, regardless of whether any foreign polity actually recognised it to be so.

By the time of Peter the Great (end of the XVII – beginning of the XVIII century), the narrative on Russia's greatness not only remained in place, but also intensified significantly. However, it also turned entirely into a bulk of panegyric poetry and sermons glorifying the monarch himself and comparing him to a living deity. This was an unthinkable comparison by the standards of the XVI century. It was also in the XVII and XVIII centuries when many Western travellers were noticing that Russians considered their tsar almost as god. The monarch seemed to have acquired some personal charisma and mystical significance.<sup>3</sup>

Political greatness remained an important quality of Russian domestic regime, but it changed its meaning, because the regime changed as well. By subjugating the Church to the state authority, Peter became the head of the Church. Thus, he accumulated the power in full scope: *auctoritas* and *potestas*, mysterious charisma acquired through the ruler's direct connection to transcendental majesty (as the head of the Church) and unlimited power to govern (as the head of the state apparatus). Consequently, the transcendental kind of greatness (or *majesty*) of the Russian polity turned into personified *glory*, which manifested itself through excessive glorification of the monarch.

### 7.1.3 Phenomenal greatness

In Petrine Russia, the greatness of Russian *derzhava* was perceived as an outcome of its salvation by Peter-Christ. (Correspondingly, those who opposed the official line labeled him

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<sup>3</sup> Uspenskij and Zhivov, "Tsar and God".



Antichrist). Be it his military victories or reforms, it was only through his sacrificial policies that the true Russian great power was conceived and brought to maturity. Russia's greatness was either believed to be born with Peter or re-born through a fundamental metamorphosis. That is, there was no longer anything primordial about it. Instead, it revealed itself through official panegyric literature and official and unofficial sacralization of the monarch.

These two understandings of greatness were of fundamentally different kinds. In the first case, political greatness was perceived as a *noumenal characteristic*, as some objective truth that required (and stood) no scrutiny or verification. This was a very religiously rooted understanding, both substantively (it was just like god's greatness) and procedurally (there was no point in trying to verify or measure it – it was the truth which was absolute, non-relative and transcendental – hence, it was supposed to be a matter of belief). In the second case, greatness was understood *phenomenally*. It was thought of as sheer power instantiated through the act of performance. That is, it was intrinsic to the discourse itself: it justified and reproduced itself in the public space by means of its own articulation.

Importantly, both models of greatness were neither uniquely Russian, nor exclusively modern for that matter. The pristine essence of the Christian faith served as a foundation of European politics for many centuries. Similarly, appearance always had an important role to play when it came to representations of state power. What is more, in post-*res publica christiana* Europe, all states relied increasingly often on phenomenal manifestations and appearance to assert and shape their political identities, moving away from proclaiming divine entronement as the primary foundation of their political regimes. In that sense, Russia was reproducing a set of practices that certainly had some contextual specificity (discussed in detail in Chapter 4), but, in general, were more about adopting the common normative ground, and seeking recognition from the European society of states. Yet, once it finally gained that recognition during the reign of Catherine the Great (1762-1796), the latter was shortly after challenged due to a new set of norms that was developing in the European context. That set of norms was informed by the ideas about world history and

universal progress that subjected all states to relational assessment of measurable resources (material and not) constituting their civilizational levels.

#### **7.1.4 Troubled encounter**

Evidently, calculable resources and relational superiority have not always been the primary foundation of political greatness. In Europe, they only came to occupy an important place in the second half of the XVIII century, at the same time when the term ‘great power’ became an established signifier in European political communication.<sup>4</sup> This coincided with the emergence of the science of statistics which made it possible to assess the position of every state in the international hierarchy both with greater precision, and relative to other states (see Chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion). The practice of measurement of states’ demographic, economic and geographical resources was accompanied by the construction of a progressivist understanding of world history. The latter phenomenon triggered (and was facilitated by) the emergence of the liberal internationalist legal sensibility, which postulated the social embeddedness and permanent evolution of national legal systems. At the same time, those legal systems were interpreted as different “aspects or stages of the universal development of human society.”<sup>5</sup> This understanding of universal development had its roots in the XVIII century but became fully dominant and legally codified only in the second half of the XIX century. The new hegemonic normativity meant that humanity as a whole followed the line of the universal progress but did so unevenly. That is, different countries were passing through different stages, and the most advanced of them (aka great powers) had a legitimate right ‘to help’ backward political entities in catching up and could not be held accountable for treating them unequally.

Russia was socialised into this system in the second half of the XVIII century but continued encountering challenges when it came to relative assessment. Even though it had gathered the largest army in Europe by 1756 which proved its worth in the Seven Years’ War,

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<sup>4</sup> Scott, *The emergence of the eastern power, 1756-1775*.

<sup>5</sup> Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations*, p. 46.

whenever it was subject to closer scrutiny, it invariably scored quite low in economic, demographic and civilizational aspects. Lack of civility, for example, was continuously reported by (Western) European travellers that visited Russia in the XVIII and the XIX centuries. These accounts, as Larry Wolff has shown in his seminal study, contributed to the discursive construction of Eastern Europe, which was turned into a marginal and under-civilised part of the expanding European world.<sup>6</sup> The unattractive portrayals of Russian life invariably triggered disgruntled reactions among the Russian ruling circles.

One of the first instances of a visible irritation on part of the Russian authorities was an outraged response to Jean-Baptiste Chappe d'Auteroche's unflattering book about his journey through Russia, which the Frenchman published in 1768.<sup>7</sup> *Antidote*, a book attributed to either Catherine II or one of her associates, seemed to have one and only purpose – to refute one by one each and every claim the author made about Russia that were based on his personal experience and mathematical calculations. Instead, of correcting the abbot's assessment, however, by proposing alternative figures, the author of *Antidote* contented themselves with deconstruction. They also put forth a proposition that one of the most important foundations of Russia's greatness was people's unison, which invariably solidified into a large-scale mobilization in the times of trouble. It goes without saying that people's union, which was, in fact, a re-emerging theme in the Russian political discourse, could not be measured at any moment in time. Yet, it constituted a source of greatness allegedly always present in potentiality.

Different approaches to what constitutes a country's grandeur and to what can be done with it transpire through the contemporaneous diplomatic correspondence (see Chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion of this). While it was clear for the British, for example, that the most important sources of their country's glory were national wealth, colonial acquisitions and military successes, the Russian cabinet claimed that the measurement and exposition of those

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<sup>6</sup> Wolff, *Inventing the Eastern Europe*.

<sup>7</sup> Chappe d'Auteroche, *A voyage to Siberia by the order of the king in 1761*.

characteristics was missing the point, and that the greatness of the Russian Empire was a simple fact independent of nitty gritty calculations. As such, that greatness endowed the Russian sovereign with the highest measure of dignity, which, as the dynamics of some international negotiations could show, often turned into an obstacle for entering international agreements instead of giving Russia a leverage in the negotiation process.

Most visibly, the contradictions revealed themselves during the Congress of Vienna. Alexander I's theatrical and largely idealistic style – first, while he entered Paris, and then, during the Congress itself – was received coldly by European diplomats and monarchs (for a more detailed discussion, see Chapter 5). However spectacular was the impression the emperor himself was making on his audience, the question of civilizational belonging was not solely about impressions any longer. It was about the measure of progress. Consequently, his foreign interlocutors misunderstood Alexander and treated his extravagance with great caution. To find a better fit, the emperor had to change his rhetoric backing his political impressionism with a solid universal foundation. That foundation, however, was retrieved from Russia's own image bank, and the resulting construct – The Holy Alliance – was a curious mix of world history and national essence. It was the story of the family of humanity united by the most progressive ideas about the management of international order, and, at the same time, the Christian faith combined with a privatised relationship between the monarchs and their peoples. Alexander's new proposition was accepted with no less scepticism, but less caution.

#### **7.1.5 Failed synthesis**

As time passed, some Russian officials started admitting that economic, financial and industrial resources (or 'inner forces', as they sometimes called them) were "the only true sources of states' political greatness"<sup>8</sup> (see Chapter 6 for a more detailed discussion). The author of the latter quote, Chancellor Aleksandr Gorchakov, also realised that Russia did not possess the

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<sup>8</sup> Gorchakov, "On Russia's Foreign Policy from 1856 till 1867," p. 350.

mentioned assets in sufficient degree to pursue effective foreign policy and hence it had to utilise what was available to it – cultural ties with the Eastern Slavs – but only as a replacement measure. Ever since Gorchakov was contemplating the Eastern Question in the 1860s, many Russian statesmen after him also demonstrated they had internalised the hegemonic consensus about the sources and the process of measurement of political greatness. They realised that political impressionism that Russia successfully utilised in the XVIII century (described in Chapters 4 and 5), was no longer working. Impressive performance on the battlefield, great messianic projects and grandeur of imperial glory could not replace scrupulous relational assessment of various factors that came to constitute the then-current consensus about greatpowerhood. Russian population was poor, and the institutions did not work too well. The country's intellectual milieu became divided into Westernisers, who admitted that Russia was lagging behind and needed to modernise in accordance with the European model, and Slavophiles, who were seeking to cure their dissatisfaction with how things stood through reinventing Russia's pristine essence. Notably, both were unhappy with the status quo and interpreted European ideas as either the main corroding influence, or the strongest empowering factor.

The status quo, of course, was not disastrous. Russia did manage to secure international recognition, but not on the grounds fully equivalent with the leading European states. The areas where the full recognition was still missing were (1) Russia's civilizational level and (2) the nature of its domestic regime. As a result, Russia was taken for an actor to be accounted with, but it could not really claim the role of a proper champion of civilization that other great powers were self-ascribing. In response, instead of suggesting that Russia should learn from the West, many Russian statemen argued for the need to carry out an emergency modernization program. To accomplish the latter, they proposed to rely on the available mobilizational resources, Russian autocratic regime and the fabled national spirit being among the most important. What made this situation difficult for Russia was that perceived civilizational inferiority and the fruits of Russia's political practice (autocracy, orthodoxy, etc.) that were supposed to help bridge the gap, did not seem to

work against each other in the imagination of the Russian elites, while they most certainly did from the position of Russia's interlocutors. In other words, Russian statemen recognised the legitimacy of normative universals underlying the story of progress, and they also recognised the necessity to catch up. Yet, to catch up, they sought to use the things that no longer counted as fully appropriate for a civilised great power, and to rely on them seemed self-defeating.<sup>9</sup> This created several paradoxes that pierced Russia's modernization projects throughout the XIX century, and Russia got permanently caught up in a loop of trying to become a 'proper' great power by 'improper' means and self-referentially legitimizing that process by presenting those means as, in fact, the proper foundations of its political greatness. Thus, the great power narrative turned into a powerful domestic ideology which was supposed to solve the problem of perceived underdevelopment and civilizational inferiority. This essentially domestic problem was externalised and began to appear as a foreign policy issue according to which Russia had to resist and become Europe at the same time. The ideology of greatpowerhood was welcomed by both the Russian elite and the broader audience as a convenient rationalization for the odd position of a self-colonizing coloniser.

This happened on the eve of two fundamentally important events that seemingly changed Russia's politics and international standing completely: the First World War and the October Revolution. As a consequence of those pivotal moments, Russia turned into a socialist country and reimagined both its internal political organization and its relations with other states. One could even say that the old Russia disappeared to give way to a new political entity of a totally different breed that had little to do with the previous tenant of that hostile geography. To be sure, this is what many Bolsheviks would have said. Does it make sense, then, to draw a discursive continuity that connects late Imperial Russia with an even newer political entity that came in the Soviet Union's place after 1991? I believe it does. What is more, I believe it makes more sense to draw a

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<sup>9</sup> On this also see Neumann, "I Remember When Russia Was a Great Power."

connection between these two Russias than to compare either of them with the Soviet Union. Below, I try to support this statement.

## 7.2 Reimagining the world

### 7.2.1 *The missing one hundred years*

If the primary goal here is to understand the specifics of the great power discourse in contemporary Russia, why stop a hundred years back from now? What can the analysis of relatively ancient discursive monuments and debates tell us about contemporary Russia? Even though genealogical and conceptual historic approaches are naturally predisposed to long time spans, would it not make much more sense to devote the biggest attention to the times most recent from now?

Indeed, throughout the turbulent XX century, Russian ideas about greatpowerhood underwent a few very notable transformations related to the Bolshevik revolution, the Second World war, the prolonged Cold War confrontation, and the democratic transition of the 1990s. Vladimir Lenin, for example, harshly criticised great power chauvinism in his writings,<sup>10</sup> and it was precisely this formulation – i.e. ‘great power chauvinism’ – that Putin used during a 2007 meeting with pro-Kremlin youth groups, when he admonished them about xenophobic sentiments.<sup>11</sup> Another Bolshevik, Nikolai Bukharin, called great powers “fortresses of capitalist exploitation” during the XII Party Congress (1923).<sup>12</sup> He compared them to “octopuses [that spread] their arms all over the world [and] sucked out juices from all the globe’s corners.”<sup>13</sup> Bukharin conceded that

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<sup>10</sup> Vladimir Lenin, “O natsional’noy gordosti velikorossov [On National Pride of Great Russians],” *Sotsial-Demokrat*, No. 35, 12 December 1914, <https://goo.gl/p5gPzh>, accessed 31 May 2018.

<sup>11</sup> RIA-Novosti, “Putin zayavil o nedopustimosti velikoderzhavnogo shovinizma [Putin Claimed that Great Power Chauvinism Was Unacceptable],” *RIA-Novosti*, 24 July 2007, <https://ria.ru/politics/20070724/69592674.html>, accessed 31 May 2018.

<sup>12</sup> Nikolai Bukharin, “Otchet Rossiyskogo predstavitel’sstva v Ispolkome Kominterna [A Report of the Russian Representative in the Executive Committee of Communist International],” in *Dvenadtsaty s’ezd RKP/b/. Stenograficheskiy otchet* [The Twelfth Congress of RCP/b/. Verbatim Records] (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo politicheskoy literatury, 1968), p. 304.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 304.

the Left could thrive in Russia only because Russia's "greatpowerhood collapsed in the imperialistic war."<sup>14</sup>

Joseph Stalin, in his turn, re-appropriated Russia's millennial history, embraced the idea that the USSR was a great power and aided the "startling elevation of both Ivan [IV] and Peter [I], among other tsarist figures, as heroic predecessors, models of leadership, and touchstones of Soviet collective identification."<sup>15</sup> Putin, as attentive observers know too well, also appeals to Russia's millennial history very often, always insisting that Russia's greatpowerhood is a fruit of Russia's political development and international practice.<sup>16</sup> After the Second World war, the great power paradigm gave way to a bipolar confrontation between two superpowers, which transformed the practice of power balancing and drew a sharp dividing line between two ideologies, each positing their own idea of a better tomorrow that seemed incompatible at first, but then allowed a possibility of (almost) peaceful coexistence. The extent to which the Cold War legacy affected Russia's contemporary great power discourse can hardly be overestimated.

When the Cold War ended and Russia was a superpower no more, Boris Yeltsin insisted in the very first sentence of his historic speech in the US Congress that he was "a citizen of a great power (*velikoy derzhavy*), which has made its choice in favour of liberty and democracy," and also appealed to Russia's millennial heritage.<sup>17</sup> Symptomatically, *velikaya derzhava* was mistranslated into English as 'a great country' – perhaps, because in 1992, Russia was neither a superpower, nor a great power by the Western standards. Yet, there is little doubt Yeltsin claimed some uninterrupted continuity there, which reappeared in and allegedly affected the current discourse as well. Still, I believe that interrupting my inquiry in the very beginning of the XX century is analytically admissible, because the then-current structure and shape of that discourse can arguably tell us

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 304.

<sup>15</sup> Kevin M. F. Platt, *Terror and Greatness: Ivan and Peter as Russian Cultural Myth* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Putin, "Address to the Nation at the Presidential Inauguration Ceremony," 7 May 2004; and Putin, "Interview with the Newspaper Welt am Sonntag (Germany)".

<sup>17</sup> Boris Yeltsin, *Speech in the US Congress*, 17 June 1992, <https://goo.gl/MYRz1S>, accessed 23 September 2018.



more about today's situation than all the discursive perturbations of the XX century – especially if the primary goal is to understand where the current discursive clutches come from. Below, I try to explain why exactly this might be the case.

### **7.2.2 Different images, different worlds**

The most important reason to stop my inquiry before the First World War is related to the shifts of the dominant sets of guiding assumptions that people use to think about world politics. Jean-François Lyotard famously distinguished between two representational models for society.<sup>18</sup> Society may be thought to form a functional whole, in which case the primary goal may be progress for all, while the primary mechanism for achieving it is stabilization of socio-economic processes and optimizations of relations within the social body. Alternatively, society may be conceived as an entity divided in two, in which case the driving force of history is class struggle, while the ultimate goal may be an emancipation of some sort or a cancellation of that dialectics in a classless society. The first model underpins the thinking of functionalists like Talcott Parsons and Niklas Luhmann. The second model guided Karl Marx.<sup>19</sup> Thus, depending on a set of assumptions one chooses to adhere to when thinking about social processes, their diagnoses of societal conditions and proposed solutions will differ drastically.

Similarly, there is no one single way to think about the world and its politics. For instance, the lately popular version is to treat the world in a functionalist manner, as one undivided whole, where everything is connected and interdependent. One world has a plethora of common problems (like ecological degradation, global warming, international terrorism and rising inequality). Naturally, the best way to solve those problems is through some coordinated effort of all states. Yet, there have also been alternative perspectives. One could argue, for instance, that that global whole may not be as undivided, that there exists a visible developmental trajectory which groups different states in clusters depending on their socio-economic performance. The

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<sup>18</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 11-14.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, pp. 11-14.

differences in the latter may create a few problematic patterns of interaction and exchange between these clusters. For instance, less developed states get stuck in their role of raw material suppliers and providers of cheap labour, while more developed states profit from high added value on their technologically sophisticated produce. Risking an oversimplification, one could claim that the Marxist and Leninist versions of this division would be binary: the fiercest struggle unravelled between capital and labour and, by extensions, between capitalist states (or rather capitalist ruling classes of those states) and the states allegedly run by peasants and workers (i.e. those states where the interests of peasants and workers were represented on the state level). On the other hand, Immanuel Wallerstein would insist that the modern world system is subdivided into three parts: core, periphery and semi-periphery.<sup>20</sup> It is also very common to speak about three worlds, although it is always the Third World that gets the most attention.

The XIX century progressivist paradigm that I have described in the previous chapter is a version of a tripartite division of the world according to cultural, historical, economic and other indicators. In concrete terms, the Eurocentric progressivist vision implied the existence of civilised, barbaric and savage political entities. What is more, one essential marker of civility was the right and ability to manage and rule savage and barbaric societies. Russian rulers of the XVIII and XIX centuries understood this very well and infrequently self-ascribed this right in relation to other ambivalently positioned polities, such as the Ottoman Empire. In Viktor Taki's words, "[t]he symbolic construction of a rival empire as the 'Orient' served to sustain the representation of Russia as part of 'Europe' against claims to the contrary."<sup>21</sup> Russia's 'civilizing mission' in relation to the Ottomans was also willingly accepted and even encouraged by some European Russophiles, such as Voltaire.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *The modern world-system I: Capitalist agriculture and the origins of the European world-economy in the sixteenth century*, Vol. 1 (University of California Press, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Viktor Taki, "Orientalism on the Margins: The Ottoman Empire under Russian Eyes," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Vol. 12, No. 2, Spring 2011 (New Series): 323.

<sup>22</sup> Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, pp. 195-234.

I argue that a very similar tripartite division of the world based on the levels of development and the possession of resources shapes Russia's political imagination today. Numerous forecasts and reports produced by Russian think-tanks speak about 'three leagues' of states<sup>23</sup> and organise their presentations around three levels of politics: global, regional and sub-regional.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, they always embed these levels in a unified global whole. Russia's exact position and perspectives in such tiered world structure is yet again questionable. Even though some Russian analysts do not lack self-confidence and place Russia within a "triangle" of great powers together with China and the US,<sup>25</sup> others admit that Russia "is facing a risk to remain backward forever," if it does not take urgent measures to prevent that.<sup>26</sup>

Such thinking, as well as the symptoms of insecurity it exhibits, also penetrates the rhetoric of Russian officials. For instance, responding to a German journalist, who mentioned Barack Obama's words about Russia being a regional power (i.e. belonging to the second tier of states), Putin immediately went defensive, without questioning the whole tripartite setup however. In an elegant rhetorical move, he proposed to look at what, in fact, was Russia's region and concluded that it was the whole world:

If we say that Russia is a regional power, we should first determine what region we are referring to. Look at the map and ask: "What is it, is it part of Europe? Or is it part of the eastern region, bordering on Japan and the United States, if we mean Alaska and China? Or is it part of Asia? Or perhaps the southern region?" Or look at the north. Essentially, in the north we border on Canada across the Arctic Ocean. ... I think that speculations about other countries, an attempt to speak disrespectfully about other countries is an attempt to prove one's exceptionalism by contrast. In my view, that is a misguided position.<sup>27</sup>

This vision not only has obvious structural resemblances to how a similar progressivist discourse operated in the XIX century, but also contains the same problems related to Russia's recognition and perceived inferiority. Even though elsewhere the modernization model has been

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<sup>23</sup> E.g. A.A. Dynkin, V.G. Baranovsky et al, *Rossija i mir: 2016. Ekonomika i vneshnyaya politika. Ezhegodny prognos* [Russia and the World: 2016. Economy and Foreign Policy. Annual Forecast] (Moscow: IMEMO RAN, 2015), p. 88.

<sup>24</sup> Karaganov et al, *Strategy for Russia*.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> Dynkin et al, *Russia and the World: 2016*, p. 92.

<sup>27</sup> Vladimir Putin, "Interview to German newspaper Bild. Part 2," Sochi, 12 January 2016, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/51155>, accessed 23 September 2018.

criticised and actively undermined from various sides,<sup>28</sup> the present-day Russian political discourse seems to be still embedded within the paradigm that represents the world as a uniform and hierarchical three-tiered structure. That is why, for example, the contemporary academic discussions of Russia's national interests in Africa sometimes look suspiciously similar the colonization discourse of the XIX and XX centuries, corrected for the exclusion of delegitimised practices of violence and direct domination.<sup>29</sup> The present discourse also clearly exhibits Russia's insecurities related to its relative position within the global system, otherwise Putin would probably not have found anything 'disrespectful' in Obama's words. Interestingly, the actors that Russia chooses to marginalise from time to time to symbolically boost its own status are also familiar and include Turkey and Greece.<sup>30</sup>

Some got accustomed to think that the 'Three Worlds' paradigm is an old invention. It is also common to infuse this paradigm with modernization-related connotations, i.e. to present the First World as the most developed, the Third World – as the most backward, and the Second World – as possessing the characteristics of both.<sup>31</sup> Yet, at a closer look it becomes evident that this paradigm not only has its origin in the second half of the XX century, but also that its relationship with the ideas of development and modernization is not as straightforward. While in its most recent shape the tripartite division of the world imagined by Russia may be said to resemble the progressivist paradigm of the XIX century, this was not the case throughout the whole of the XX century. I would even claim that the history of the XX century can be viewed as the history of the crisis, revival and iterated domination of a particular way to think about world politics that implies a functionalist understanding of the world as one big whole subdivided into three tiers that can be differentiated through measurement against a number of various indicators. Importantly, the intermediate tier performs two crucial functions: (1) it soothes the tension

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<sup>28</sup> E.g. Frederick Cooper, et al, *History after the three worlds: post-Eurocentric historiographies* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

<sup>29</sup> Kirill Aleshin, "Africa and the National Interests of Russia," *Presentation at the Conference "Eastern Europe – Global Area,"* GWZO, Leipzig, 4 July 2018.

<sup>30</sup> Dynkin et al, *Russia and the World: 2016*, p. 88.

<sup>31</sup> E.g. Parag Khanna, *The second world: empires and influence in the new global order* (Random House, 2008).

between the most advanced and the most backward that revealed itself very vividly in Marxist thought; and (2) it helps creating a vector of unilinear development that is proclaimed to be desirable for all states. As such, the worlds of the XIX century and the late XX and early XXI centuries are, in fact, similar when it comes to their imagined structures, while throughout the most of the XX century (since the Bolshevik Revolution until the end of the Cold War) the world was imagined differently, at least by the Soviet Union. Hence, to understand why Russia places itself the way it does in the contemporary world order – i.e. as an aspiring great power whose recognition is undermined, but unjustly, – as well as the rhetoric about greatpowerhood it currently produces, it is much more useful to look at how it spoke about being a great power in the XIX and the early XX centuries than to analyse the great power discourse produced in the Soviet time.

Further, I try to substantiate this claim by briefly reconstructing the process of making and remaking of the ‘Second World’ in the XX century. I show how the tripartite progressivist paradigm was replaced by a binary antagonistic model, which, in turn, was followed by another antagonistic model based on competing modernities and finally gave way to yet another tripartite universalist development-oriented model that, not without serious challenges, still reigns the day in Russia’s political imagination. If my interpretation of this semantic evolution is convincing, then Russia is much closer today to the structure of meaning that underpinned international relations before 1917 than one would normally imagine. Of course, when I draw this comparison, I do not mean to say that those worlds are similar in any way other than with regards to the most basic relations and oppositions texturing the fabric of international life.

### ***7.2.3 Making and remaking the Second World***

#### **7.2.3.1 Early Soviet representations**

The Eurocentric progressivist model of thinking about world politics that had shaped Russian political discourse in the XIX century went into hibernation after the October Revolution. After Socialist Russia appeared on the world map, Russian leadership naturally reimagined the world in Marxist terms. Lenin wrote about global divisions often and with great passion. On most

occasions, he divided the world into two worlds, sometimes basing this separation on different principles. In 1921, i.e. when there was still only one socialist country, Lenin symbolically divided the world into the old and the new. He wrote that “there are two worlds in the world now: the old one – capitalism, which got confused and would never retreat, and a growing new world, which is still very weak, but which will grow, for it is invincible.”<sup>32</sup> A year earlier, Lenin constructed a similar binary and antagonistic division, but in more political-economic terms: “One key characteristic of imperialism is that the whole world... is currently divided into a great number of oppressed peoples and a tiny minority of oppressing peoples that possess tremendous wealth and great military power.”<sup>33</sup> Early Stalin advocated a similar vision. In his 1919 article, Stalin insisted that “the world has split, decidedly and irreversibly, into two camps: the camp of imperialism and the camp of socialism.”<sup>34</sup>

Occasionally, both Lenin and Stalin also proclaimed the existence of more worlds than two, but in most cases their models were still driven by acute antagonism between imperialist and socialist forces. For instance, in a report from 1920, Lenin suggested that the three worlds that were present back then on the planet were (1) the majority of powerless colonies (including Germany, Bulgaria and Soviet Russia), which the powerful capitalist states preyed upon; (2) the states that maintained their positions, but got into a military dependence from the US, and (3) the prosperous few (including the US and the UK), where capitalist classes profited from the division of lands.<sup>35</sup> Stalin, in his turn, presented the following calculations at the XV Party Congress in 1927: “Judge for yourselves. Out of 1,905 million people inhabiting the Earth. 1,134 million live

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<sup>32</sup> Vladimir Lenin cited in Zeri i Popullit, “Teoriya i praktika revolyutsii [Theory and Practice of Revolution]” (Tirana: 8 Nentori, 1977), p. 8, <https://goo.gl/4LMSZa>, accessed 23 September 2018.

<sup>33</sup> Vladimir Lenin cited in Renmin Ribao, “Teoriya Predsedatelya Mao Tszeduna o delenii na tri mira – ogromny vklad v marksizm-leninizm [Mao Zedong’s theory about three worlds is a great contribution to Marxism-Leninism],” *Renmin Ribao*, 1 November 1977, <https://goo.gl/TjhQF7>, accessed 8 June 2018.

<sup>34</sup> Joseph Stalin, “Dva lagerya [Two camps],” *Sobranie sochineniy* [Collected Works], Vol. 4 (Moscow: OGIZ, 1947), p. 232; See also Joseph Stalin, “Ob osnovakh Leninizma [On Foundations of Leninism],” *Sobranie sochineniy* [Collected Works], Vol. 6 (Moscow: OGIZ, 1947), p. 94.

<sup>35</sup> Vladimir Lenin, “II kongress Kommunisticheskogo Internatsionala. Doklad o mezhdunarodnom polozhenii i osnovnykh zadachakh kommunisticheskogo internatsionala [The 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of Communist International. Report on the State of International Affairs and the Main Tasks of Communist International],” *Sobranie sochineniy* [Collected Works], Vol. 41, p. 218, <https://goo.gl/Ch9Vjz>, accessed 30 July 2018.

in colonies and dependent countries, 143 million live in the USSR, 264 million – in intermediate states, and only 363 million – in large capitalist countries that oppress the colonies and dependent states.”<sup>36</sup> While it is obvious from this quote that Stalin did not want to include the Soviet Union in the ranks of exploited colonies, as Lenin did, he had in mind a similar antagonistic setup, where the USSR was on the side of the dispossessed, who, despite their economic backwardness, were in the majority and hence were destined to triumph in the global struggle with imperialism.

It is evident that in the early Soviet representations of the global structure the USSR did not and could not occupy the position that was ascribed to great powers before 1917 – i.e. of champions of universal civilization whose standard was consensually accepted by all major actors. It could not do this not only because of the dire state of its economy, but, more importantly, because the paradigm within which that position was rendered meaningful was replaced in the Soviet political consciousness by historical materialism. The latter, of course, preserved the evolutionary and progressivist connotations that allowed for international stratification and measurable inequality. As such, this paradigm was also leaning towards historical determinism. However, the dialectical underpinnings of the process of social change, as well as its stark rejection of philosophical idealism, made historical materialism a doctrine primarily focused on antagonism as opposed to universal consensus, revolution as opposed to reform, and qualitative paradigm shifts as opposed to catch-up development.<sup>37</sup>

Most lucidly, the curious relationship between the incremental universal progress and revolutionary ruptures that was moving Soviet political ideology away from a more classical Western, as well as Menshevik, versions of Marxism based on Stagism<sup>38</sup> was presented by Stalin’s ideological opponent Leon Trotsky. In his essay *The Permanent Revolution*, Trotsky grounded his

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<sup>36</sup> Joseph Stalin cited in Renmin Ribao, “Mao Zedong’s theory about three worlds is a great contribution to Marxism-Leninism”.

<sup>37</sup> Joseph Stalin, “O dialekticheskom i istoricheskom materialisme [On dialectical and historical materialism],” *Politicheskoye prosveshchenie*, No. 1 (72) (2013).

<sup>38</sup> Stagism is a theory postulating that every society must pass a series of consecutive stages in the process of its progressive development and none of those stages can be skipped, i.e. a feudal society cannot transition directly to socialism without passing the capitalist stage. For more information on Stagism, see: Marxist Internet Archive Encyclopedia, “Stagism,” <https://goo.gl/xdaNpy>, accessed 31 August 2018.

revolutionary theory in the idea of uneven and combined development, which postulated that different countries progressed independently from each other, developing their local specifics, but also that they were interconnected in a world society, influenced each other in various ways and experienced spill-overs and borrowings, which opened various political possibilities.<sup>39</sup> Thus, on the one hand, Trotsky accepted the premise that the world society was developing in line with a specific progressive trajectory, but did so unevenly, which approximated his views with those of the XIX-century Marxists, but also, on a very general level, with the progressive paradigm more generally. On the other hand, however, Trotsky also argued that that development was combined. This meant that underdeveloped countries could utilise the fruits of development achieved elsewhere and thus skip a stage in the unilinear trajectory of universal progress, thereby – paradoxically – both breaking and maintaining this unilinearity. The logic behind this process, however, was a revolutionary one, wherein workers allied with the peasant classes were supposed to carry out a democratic revolution, i.e. perform a function usually assigned to bourgeoisie in the classical Marxist thought, and continue permanently pushing the Russian society, as well as the whole world, towards the true socialist revolution. Thus, what was at stake for Trotsky and other Soviet leaders, their ideological differences notwithstanding, was *not* catching up to become like the most advanced imperialist countries. What made European great powers exemplary for people like Witte and Gorchakov, made them degenerate for the Bolsheviks. The latter, in their turn, aimed at surpassing the advanced capitalist stage, plagued by imperialism and great power chauvinism, by attempting to either perpetuate (Trotsky) or solidify (Stalin) a revolutionary breakthrough.

Hence, in the eyes of the Soviet elites, the USSR, and later its socialist allies, constituted the Second World not in terms of being inferior to another world that could be called the First – the understanding that many Western observers adopted in the second half of the XX century –

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<sup>39</sup> Leon Trotsky, *The permanent revolution & results and prospects* (Red Letter Press, 2010).



but in terms of presenting a qualitatively different and more progressive alternative to unjust capitalist societies. Consequently, all insecurities related to the Soviet Union's international status were rooted exclusively in the fact that the unequal distribution of capital in the world was making the terms of this struggle somewhat unequal. Yet, when it came to social progress, the Soviet elites certainly perceived their country to be ahead of everyone else around.

### 7.2.3.2 Non-Soviet representations

Contrary to the common belief, the Second World, as imagined outside of the Soviet Union, was also not originally positioned between the First and the Third worlds on the modernization ladder. The French demographer Alfred Sauvy, who is usually credited as the inventor of this paradigm, initially wrote about the Three Worlds in a 1952 issue of *L'Observateur* to criticise the fierce competition for dominating the Third World that unravelled between the First World and the Second.<sup>40</sup> Yet, even though Sauvy certainly presented the Third World as being the most underdeveloped and disadvantaged, he did not draw any development-based distinctions between the first two worlds. In fact, he did not even specify which world was which among the two remaining (i.e. Western capitalism and Eastern communism). Instead, he emphasised their mutual constitution and interdependence. This should not seem surprising, because Sauvy's understanding of the Three Worlds was most likely inspired by the idea of Three Estates, the first two of which were Lords Spiritual and Lords Temporal, i.e. the clergy and the nobility (indeed, it would have been difficult for Sauvy to assign the former role to capitalism and the latter – to communism). Yet, when it came to the Third World, things were much clearer, “[b]ecause that third world, ignored, exploited, like the Third Estate, it too want[ed] to be something.”<sup>41</sup>

Speaking to the Bandung Conference Political Committee in 1955, Jawaharlal Nehru also made no hierarchical distinctions between the two “great power blocs” characterizing them in

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<sup>40</sup> Alfred Sauvy, “Trois Mondes, Une Planète [Three Worlds, One Planet],” *L'Observateur*, 14 August 1952, <https://goo.gl/asJw44>, accessed 23 September 2013.

<sup>41</sup> Sauvy cited in Carl E. Plutsch, “The Three Worlds, or the Division of Social Scientific Labor, circa 1950-1975,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (October, 1981): 571.

purely ideological terms as communist and anti-communist.<sup>42</sup> Positioning himself within the third bloc, or the 'Third World' as it was reinterpreted a bit later, Nehru believed that the main characteristic of this group of states was ideological non-alignment, not underdevelopment. His ideas later affected the philosophy behind the Non-Aligned Movement spearheaded by Josip Broz Tito, Sukarno, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Kwame Nkrumah, as well as Nehru himself.

Mao Zedong's Three Worlds theory outlined by Deng Xiaoping in his speech in the UN General Assembly in 1974 was also embedded in a quasi-tripartite understanding similar to the early Soviet one with antagonism at its core.<sup>43</sup> Yet, the distribution of states across the Three Worlds was notably different. For Mao, the USSR and the US, with their normatively problematic imperialistic ambitions, constituted the First World. Intermediate states like Japan, Canada and European countries were part of the Second World. Latin American countries, the whole of Africa, most of Asia and China together made up the Third World, which, again, may have been disadvantaged in terms of economic resources, but still played the main role in a dialectical confrontation with imperialist powers. The defenders of Mao's theory drew heavily on the Leninist and Stalinist descriptions of world divisions but replaced the Soviet Union with China.

### **7.2.3.3 From antagonism to hierarchy**

In the West, the idea that the First and the Second Worlds must be hierarchically differentiated emerged together with the modern paradigm of development. Yet, its domination was not instantaneous. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, however, the hierarchical tripartite structure of the world got sedimented and was by then reflected not only in the Western political thinking, but also in the division of labour between different social scientific disciplines. Carl E. Pletsch demonstrates this very lucidly in his masterful deconstruction of the Western version of the Three Worlds model.<sup>44</sup> Pletsch shows how the social world, constructed discursively as

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<sup>42</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *Speech to the Bandung Conference Political Committee*, April 1955, <https://goo.gl/ZNegcK>, accessed 2 August 2018.

<sup>43</sup> Deng Xiaoping, *Speech at the Special Session of the UN General Assembly*, 10 April 1974, <https://goo.gl/q9UxGD>, accessed 18 July 2018.

<sup>44</sup> Pletsch, "The Three Worlds, or the Division of Social Scientific Labor, circa 1950-1975".

consisting of three unequal and hierarchically organised parts, got symbolically divided between various social sciences. Disciplinary generalists from sociology, economics and political science studied the First world. Area Studies people predominantly concentrated on socialist countries, i.e. the Second World. The ‘underdeveloped’ Third World was left to anthropologists.

Symptomatically, the main aim of the scholars of sociology, economics and political science was nomothetic, i.e. they wanted to uncover general laws applicable to all humans, for they unwittingly held their object of study – the First World – to be the purest and the most developed form of human coexistence, unspoiled by either ideology or tradition. Anthropologists, in their turn, approached the studied societies in an idiographic fashion, i.e. they emphatically rejected law-like regularities emphasizing that each case was a *sui generis* entity that needed to be understood on its own terms. Because of this, a good knowledge of local traditions, history and language was a must for every aspiring anthropologist. Area studies experts, according to Pletsch, were “a compromise, adaptations of first world social science to particularistic second and third world context.”<sup>45</sup> They needed to know languages, customs and history, and, at the same time, possess some expertise in one of the social scientific disciplines. Yet, neither area studies specialists nor anthropologists sought to make sweeping generalizations in their scholarship, because, allegedly, the societies they chose to study were either affected by the power of political ideologies (and hence their behaviour deviated in at least one important respect from the universal ideal of scientific rationality), or were stuck in the webs of pre-modern tradition (which positioned them even further away from the scientific norm).

Thus, by the middle of the second half of the XX century, the Western version of the Three Worlds paradigm got firmly interweaved with modernization theory, which reorganised the elements of that model hierarchically. In this new version, the Second World was believed to be modern, “but contaminated with an admixture of ideology that prevent[ed] it from being

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid: 582.

altogether efficient or natural.”<sup>46</sup> Hence, the presumption that many Western social scientists came to hold was that in the course of universal progress, the Second World should slowly get rid of the fetters of ideology and eventually join the First World, which was imagined to be the most natural and totally free. At the same time, the Third World, as many of its students were noticing, was finding the Second World’s emphasis on social justice very appealing. This suggests, as Pletsch has argued, that in the minds of the Western social scientists, “the path of modernization [led] from tradition through an ideological stage into truly modern and utilitarian conditions.”<sup>47</sup> This situation created what Theodor Shanin called in the end of 1980s “the most persistent prejudice of all, [i.e.] the belief [of the Western societies] that everybody (and everything) is naturally ‘like us’, but somewhat less so (and that the best future mankind can have is to be like us but even more so).”<sup>48</sup>

Consequently, thanks in no small part to Western social scientists, in the second half of the XX century, the world was reimagined again to conform to the most basic structure that underpinned international life before the 1917 revolution. That structure presumed the existence of a community of the most advanced (Western) states that represented the most natural state of humanity. Outside of this ‘free world’ there were two more groups of polities: the relatively well-performing socialist states that, however, needed to free themselves from unnatural and obsolete regimes of their political organization, and the ‘underdeveloped’ Third World countries that became the target of developmental assistance that should have allowed them to catch up. In that model, the most powerful of socialist states – the Soviet Union – experienced problems with recognition that were very similar to those of XIX-century Russia that *de facto* was a part of the great power concert, but chronically lacked full acceptance due to the perceived backwardness of its political regime.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid: 577.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid: 577.

<sup>48</sup> Theodor Shanin, “Foreword” in: Viktor Kozlov, *The peoples of the Soviet Union* (Hutchinson and Indiana University Press, 1988), p. xi.

<sup>49</sup> Neumann, “Russia as a Great Power, 1815-2007”.

#### 7.2.3.4 Soviet reaction to re-emerging hierarchy

Quite naturally, the Soviet Union did not fully internalise the hierarchically organised tripartite model. The ‘Second World’ label that came to possess a set of problematic connotations related to underdevelopment never became a self-designation for the socialist block. This term, in the development-related meaning, is completely absent from the Soviet discourse of the Cold War time. Certainly, the ideas of progress and modernization were crucial components of the Soviet political ideology. It is sufficient to recall that one of the most well-known Cold War metaphors is ‘a race’. Yet, from the Soviet position, this race remained to be a rivalry between different political models, between competing modernities, even if one of those modernities was visibly weaker in economic terms (all due to the problematic history of capital accumulation). Thus, ever since the USSR abstained from voting in favour of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the Soviet take on normative universals was always uneasy, because the Soviet society contained at its very core a claim for a new universality, a new organizing principle for social relations. For this reason, as Mark Lipovetsky noticed,<sup>50</sup> the Soviet Union did not really fit well into the Popperian definition of a ‘closed’ society, which was supposed to be immobile and inflexible. On the contrary, the Soviet society could also be said to have been founded on a “new faith in reason, freedom and the brotherhood of all men,” which, according to Popper, was “the only possible faith, of the open society.”<sup>51</sup> More attentive observers, however, did identify the Soviet cultural project as a new type of modernity, which was “based not only on repressions, but also on mass enthusiasm, triggered, among other things, by new possibilities for developing human personality, provided by the Soviet regime.”<sup>52</sup>

Importantly, this global structure that was envisioned by the Soviet Union as a competition of two different modernities did not undergo a qualitative change when peaceful coexistence

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<sup>50</sup> Mark Lipovetsky, “Trickster i ‘zakrytoye’ obshchestvo [Trickster and ‘Closed’ Society],” *NLO*, No. 100 (2009): 6.

<sup>51</sup> Karl Popper, *Open Society and Its Enemies, Volume 1. The Spell of Plato* (London: Routledge, 1991[1966]), p. 184.

<sup>52</sup> Lipovetsky, “Trickster and ‘Closed’ Society”: 6. See also: Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times. Soviet Russia in the 1930s*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and N. Kozlova, *Sovetskie lyudi: Stseny iz istorii* [Soviet People: Scenes from History] (Moscow: Evropa, 2005).

became a diplomatic reality. To a large extent, even that seemingly non-violent setup was perceived by the Soviet elites as a continuation of the global class struggle by other means.<sup>53</sup> Hence, it was not until perestroika when the Soviet leadership began to embrace discursively the idea that the world should be treated as one functional whole that is based on universal human values and is climbing the ladder of progress that, even if it was not leading everyone into exactly the same direction, required common efforts and a limited universal consensus to stay upright. Gorbachev attempted to promote this vision in his 1988 speech in the UN emphasizing that his position presented a revolutionary rethinking of the global order. “A different world [that Gorbachev saw in front of him] entered an era when the progress [would] be shaped by universal human interests.”<sup>54</sup> “Awareness of that,” added the Soviet president, “dictates that world politics, too, should be guided by the primacy of universal human values.”<sup>55</sup>

In other words, Gorbachev called for a de-ideologization of relations between states, i.e. delivered what Western social scientists expected him to deliver. Still, while ‘purifying’ the international from ideological concerns, Gorbachev insisted that he did not want to do the same with the Soviet domestic regime. Rather, what he still had in mind was “a *fair* rivalry of ideologies [where] everyone could show the advantages of their social system, their way of life and their values, not just by words or propaganda, but by real deeds.”<sup>56</sup> Similarly, in almost each one of his books, Gorbachev repeatedly disavowed the commonly held Western opinion that he started perestroika because he had become disillusioned with the socialist ideals and ends. “This is a false conclusion,” he wrote dismissively.<sup>57</sup>

The end of this story is well-known: in the beginning of the 1990s, Russia, as Yeltsin put this, became “a great country [in fact: ‘great power’], which has made its choice in favour of liberty

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<sup>53</sup> Yuri Krasin, *Mirnoye сосуществование – форма классового бор’бы* [Peaceful Coexistence is a Form of Class Struggle] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’svo politichskoy literatury, 1961).

<sup>54</sup> Mikhail Gorbachev, “Speech at the UN General Assembly,” *United Nations A/43/PV.72*, 8 December 1988, p. 8.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. 12, emphasis added.

<sup>57</sup> Mikhail Gorbachev, *On My Country and the World*, translated by George Shriver (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 67.

and democracy.”<sup>58</sup> The world “of two poles, two opposites, ... [that] was shaken by the storms of confrontation [and] was close to exploding” became the thing of the past.<sup>59</sup> Notably, this happened because “reason [began] to triumph over madness, [and] the people of Russia have found strength to shake of the crushing burden of the totalitarian system.”<sup>60</sup> In Yeltsin’s opinion, “Russia has made its final choice in favour of a civilised way of life, common sense and universal human heritage.”<sup>61</sup> Thus, by democratizing its domestic regime, it symbolically re-joined the family of humanity, which was founded on the universal principles of freedom and dignity, the principles axiomatically attributed to reason and common sense.

Importantly, it re-joined this unified world with a self-ascribed status of a great power, which, as the abovementioned dent in translation could demonstrate, was not unanimously accepted by Russia’s interlocutors. Yet again, after seventy plus years, Russia found itself in a position of an under-civilised civiliser, an aspiring member of the international concert founded on normative universals who enjoyed only partial recognition of its duties and rights, i.e. the position in the imagined structure of international order it occupied before 1917. It is this ambivalent position that post-communist Russia has been trying to make sense of ever since, when it spoke about being a great power. In doing so, Russia, as well as the great power discourse it produced, was mired in ambiguities that resembled the ones it had to battle with in the XIX century.

Importantly, by saying that contemporary Russia speaks about greatpowerhood in a fashion that is similar to the one from the XIX century, I do not mean to say that the XIX-century discourse has resurrected fully and completely in Russia’s political imagination. The assuredness with which Yeltsin and pretty much everyone else around him spoke of Russia’s great power status probably came from the experience of the Cold War (when the special status of the Soviet Union

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<sup>58</sup> Boris Yeltsin, *Speech in the US Congress*.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

was hardly in question), not from reanimated memories that were almost a century old. As such, the present day Russian great power discourse is probably an agglomeration of different historical paradigms, some exerting more influence and some less. Yet, as I tried to argue in the beginning of this section, one could talk of a structural resemblance that becomes evident, when one thinks about the general image of the world, as well as the hierarchies that shape it. Below, I present a few observations about Russia's post-Cold War great power discourse, emphasising the paradoxes and ambiguities it contains.

### 7.3 After the fall

The paradoxes that haunted Russia's modernization projects in the XIX century resurfaced after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 1991, Russia re-socialised into a system that was cognate to the one that shaped international life before 1917. Having done so, it yet again found itself lagging, speaking relationally, and yet again refused to accept the position of a learner, insisting instead on its great power status from very early on. That rediscovered great power discourse, just like the great power ideology of the XIX century, bore a mobilizational function. Instead of being established through relational assessment and/or recognition, it was legitimised by Russia's glorious past and, at the same time, projected into the future, finding little or no support in the political realities of that time. What is more, just like in the past, liberal Westernisers, who oversaw Russian foreign policy until 1996, often interpreted Russia's greatness as "a burden" or "destiny," instead of seeing a competitive advantage in it.<sup>62</sup>

Thus, disagreeing with Andrei Tsygankov, who did not include greatpowerhood into the ideological toolkit of Liberal Westernisers,<sup>63</sup> I argue that even the most liberal minds, such as Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev (1991-1996), never abandoned great power rhetoric, merely transforming its content. Its function, however, remained almost identical to the one this

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<sup>62</sup> Andrei Kozyrev, *Preobrazhenie* [Transfiguration] (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1995), p. 51-52.

<sup>63</sup> Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), p. 62.



rhetoric played in the second half of the XIX century. In his 1995 book, Kozyrev addressed the issue of political greatness explicitly. In a section suggestively entitled ‘What is the meaning of greatness for a great power?’ (*V chyom velichie derzhavy?*), he admitted that “in the contemporary world the role [i.e. greatness] of a state is determined not only by its military might (although it preserves its importance), but – more and more – by its position in the world economy, science and culture, as well as by the living standards of its population.”<sup>64</sup> Probably realizing that Russia would score low on all those accounts, Kozyrev also argued repeatedly “in front of various audiences in Russia and abroad [that Russia] was destined to be a great power. It emerged as one from all the ‘times of troubles’ and historical crises that fell to its lot. It will undoubtedly emerge [as a great power] from the current crisis.”<sup>65</sup> For this to happen, it was necessary, according to the Foreign Minister, to abandon the interests of Russia-empire, and to fully realise the interests “of Russia – great democratic power [*velikoy demokraticheskoy derzhavy*].”<sup>66</sup>

Importantly, to refute the claims of those who believed that, in the early 1990s, “spineless [and] ‘smiley’” Russia was just an obedient student of the West, Kozyrev insisted that “the early, ‘romantic’ as they call it, period of Russian foreign policy was not only natural, but necessary [for the fulfilment of Russia’s strategic goals]” – the goals of a *de facto* regional hegemon and an aspiring democratic great power.<sup>67</sup> In this sense, it is curious that Kozyrev entitled his book *Preobrazhenie*, which bears unmistakable religious connotations and means ‘transfiguration’, i.e. the revelation of his godly greatness and glory by Jesus Christ. Applied to post-Soviet Russia, this seems as the fittest term to describe its take on political greatness, which always evaded scrutiny and comparison, but was, at the same time, always there, ready to be revealed to persuade those who were losing belief, most importantly – the citizens of the Russian Federation itself.

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<sup>64</sup> Kozyrev, *Preobrazhenie*, p. 51.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 51.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p. 51.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 54.

Putin, too, often utilises the great power rhetoric in a similar manner. Whichever content he chooses to fill the idea of Russian greatness with, when it comes to discursive mechanics, the operation of this idea is usually identical or similar to how it worked before. He often refuses decisively to discuss Russia's great power status in relative terms. Despite his habit to play with numbers, all comparisons stall when it comes to Russia's greatness. Of course, the Russian elites never fail to mention that they run a state which possesses nuclear weapons. Yet, outside strategic community, they rarely count warheads. In most cases, nuclear weapons are simply presented as an attribute of a great power. At the same time, Putin and other Russian officials prefer to project Russia's greatness into the past or the future, emphasising in the latter case that greatpowerhood is *the only* possible future for Russia, if it wants to survive in its current borders. When it comes to the present, Russia often claims that its greatness is premised on creativity (whatever it is supposed to mean) and capability to manage crises (as opposed to order). As such, Russian greatness is (1) legitimised by the past that is long gone and is not returning, (2) projected into the future, whose coming is uncertain and requires a mobilization on a tremendous, 'greatpowerly' scale, and (3) mostly remains unrealised in the present, because creativity and crisis management are exceptional modes of conduct, not daily routines. In addition, Russian elites often demonstrate their irritation when some (mostly Western) observers try to subject Russia's capabilities to rigorous assessment and pass their judgment on whether Russia qualifies as a member of the great power club or not.

In addition, for a great power, contemporary Russia has a curious attitude towards globalised norms. If one agrees with the English School that the main functional specificity of great powers is the management of international order, then establishing and upholding a consensus on international norms should be one of the key tasks of every major actor. Indeed, norm-making was a traditional business of great powers throughout the XIX and the XX centuries. Russia, however, often exhibits an ambivalent take on globalised norms. On the one hand, it does appeal to a fairly traditionalist set of normative universals, including the supremacy of international law, the tantamount importance of global peace and security, and the principle of non-intervention.

Russia chooses to dress up in the style of precedents and conventions even its most disrupting international demarches, such as the annexation of Crimea, creating an impression of a conservative, rather than revolutionary, force. On the other hand, in the process of interaction with the outside world, Russia constantly argues that the current normative order is in crisis and that emergency measures are necessary to salvage it.<sup>68</sup> Acting on its own perception of the crisis, Russia often ‘switches on’ the emergency mode and infrequently breaks the rules, justifying this by immediate and essential necessity. In response, the West labels Russia a revisionist power and denies a proper recognition of its great power status.

Yet, in fact, the discursive vibe has been similar ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Since the end of the Cold war, Russia, as the proverbial expression goes, has been a great power ‘rising from its knees.’ However, to truly lift itself up (and even to keep itself together), it always needed to utilise emergency measures. In 1993, it was the shelling of a democratically elected parliament in the name of freedom and democracy. A super-presidential constitution that was adopted shortly after was also supposed to aid Russia move away from dictatorial rule. By 2000, that constitution received its super-president, whose main achievement, according to the population at large, became “the restoration of Russia’s great power status” (curiously – along with “preventing Russia’s disintegration”).<sup>69</sup> Yet, from the position of the international normative consensus, such strongman mentality is precisely what seems to be holding Russia back from receiving full and unproblematic recognition. Thus, the internalised progressive vector of Russia’s development combined with the perception of lagging behind and the willingness to capitalise on its alleged transformative engines that come across as emergency measures, but in fact become normal for Russian domestic context, lock the country in a never-ending race after its own projection.

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<sup>68</sup> Dynkin et al, *Russia and the World: 2016*.

<sup>69</sup> Vladimir Dergachev, “Rossiyane nazvali osnovnye pretenzii k Putinu za vremya ego pravleniya [Russians named the main failures of Putin’s rule],” *RBC*, 7 May 2018, <https://goo.gl/9nzU4Z>, accessed 3 August 2018.

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