# Nikita Mikhalkov's Russia: The

# Nation as 'Motherland'

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# ABSTRACT

The present study contributes to the partial disambiguation of the notion of 'Russianness' by means of an investigation of several significant films pertaining to Russian director Nikita Mikhalkov.

In addition to this, the present research explains the shift in the public response to Mikhalkov's films starting 2010, when his film *Burnt by the Sun 2: Exodus* was released.

So, what is Russianness for Mikhalkov? What does this shift say about the way Russia positions itself with regard to its own identity? These are the questions answered throughout my research paper.

In order to properly answer these questions, I am beginning with an account of the history of Russian thought from the 19th Century to present times, while focusing on the two-century long debate between the two dominant intellectual groups in Russia: the Slavophiles and the Westernizers.

The specific methodology related to analysis of audio-visual material contains iconic and semiotic analysis, following the model developed by Carey Jewitt and Rumiko Oyama using the social semiotics of visual communication. I have paired these methods with Hansjörg Pauli's model of soundtrack analysis which focuses on the way music contributes to the way in which images convey certain messages.

As a result, I have found that the essence of Russianness for Mikhalkov, repeatedly illustrated by his films, is strongly connected to traditional elements he regards as marks of authenticity. These elements contradict everything related to modernism and the attempts to turn Russia towards liberal democratization, aspects that are inherently Western.

This helps answer the second question, about the radical shift in the public response to his films starting 2010. Apart from being countered by the Russian intelligentsia, who increasingly rejects the type of social identity that Mikhalkov connects it to (elite, but state-populist, and European, but not Western), his openly Eurasianist ideological affiliation is currently widely unpopular. This made for a radical change in the way his films are perceived, even if the films in themselves are not that different one from another, in terms of symbols, portrayals and conveyed messages.

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# Introduction

Russia is now at a crossroads, politically, economically and spiritually. In his paper *East or West? Russia's Identity Crisis in Foreign Policy*, Andrei Piontkovsky, the director of the Center for Strategic Research in Moscow, writes about a geopolitical and psychological crisis in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russia is described as being permanently at a crossroads throughout its history, having to set a course between East and West. Also, for the past 15 years, it has been engaged in a quest for a new identity.[1]

For film director Nikita Mikhalkov, national Russian identity is a concept tied to a romanticized history. His central metaphor, around which almost all his films revolve, is *Russia as the motherland*. Without exception, he sees and metaphorically portrays the Russian land as a maternal figure – for the Russians, that is. Moreover, the ties of the Russian people with their motherland go even further back in time, becoming even more deeply rooted – they go back to what is for Mikhalkov the cradle of Russian spirituality: Czarist Russia. It is Czarist Russia, and not the Kievan Rus' (ninth to thirteenth centuries) who constitutes this defining image, because the very first metaphor of the Russian land as the motherland emerged as a consequence of an ideology in conflict with the increasingly bureaucratic and proprietary administrations of the Czars. Out of the disappointment tied to the autocratic, fatherly image of the leaders in the Kievan Rus' emerged the image of a suffering, widowed mother awaiting her rightful husband.[2]

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[1] Andrei Piontkovsky, "East or West? Russia's Identity Crisis in Foreign Policy," *The Foreign Policy Centre* (January 2006), pp.5-6.

[2] Joanna Hubbs, *Mother Russia: The Feminine Myth in Russian Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 167-168.

Why Nikita Mikhalkov, and not other Russian film makers?

Out of all Russian directors, Nikita Mikhalkov is by far the most preoccupied with the question of Russianness. Throughout his film work, Mikhalkov paints portraits of Russia in all its possible forms. Moreover, he paints a portrait of the Russian individual heroic figure (namely, General Kotov in *Burnt by the Sun*)[3] by attempting to define Russianness and what it supposedly means to be Russian; what makes one Russian and what the implications of this identity really are, especially in the context of a fast changing world.[4]

Nikita Mikhalkov's work was generally well received by the public, until 2010, when *Burnt by the Sun 2*, the sequel of the critically acclaimed *Burnt by the Sun* (1994) was released. This study will analyze the shift that occurred in the public response to Mikhalkov's films, and will thus answer two questions: 'What is Russianness for Mikhalkov?', and 'Why did such a radical shift occur in the public reception of his films?'.

Russianness is often described as a paradox, oscillating between magnificent cultural developments from an old, majestic, imperial past (bringing to mind artists, authors and composers such as Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Rachmaninov, Mussorgsky), and the gloominess associated with Soviet Russia, bringing to mind concentration camps and gulags, as well as with its economic inertia. Journalist Robert Parsons of Radio Free Europe even stated that 'the idea of defining a concept of Russian national identity is almost as old as Russia itself -

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[3] Susan Larsen, "National Identity, Cultural Authority, and the Post-Soviet Blockbuster: Nikita Mikhalkov and Aleksei Balabanov," *Slavic Review* 62, no. 3 (2003): 191–511.

[4] A good example is a line from '12' (2007), where one of the characters sitting around the table explains how important it is for a Russian that things should not be characterized by frivolity, but they should have a 'personal' side, and how a certain story is 'very Russian'.

and just as elusive.'[5] This ambiguity made for numerous ways of representing and understanding Russia, but none are more likely to reach such a vast public on a global level than mass media depictions. These representations have a tremendous effect on the way we look at Russia, whether we agree with them or not.

Due to its complex nature, film can be a very powerful tool. Mikhalkov covers a significant number of genres and none of his films resembles another. Nostalgic for Czarist Russia and an admirer of Chekhov, many of his films are adaptations of more or less known pieces of pre-revolutionary Russian literature. As a public figure, he is highly controversial. There has not been a single film directed by him that does not deal, in one way or another, with Russia and Russianness. Cinematographer Vladimir Osherov even used the concept 'Nikitophobia' in his recent book, one of the few ever written exclusively about Mikhalkov, stating that he is currently 'the most hated film maker in Russia'.[6] As Birgit Beumers describes it in her book, *Nikita Mikhalkov: between Nostalgia and Nationalism*, he 'has always been a controversial figure, swiveling between officialdom and the intelligentsia's dissidence, between popular and auteur cinema, between patriotism and nationalism, artist and prophet, storyteller and moralist, director and public figure, aesthete and politician.'[7]

In order to identify the main aspects of Russianness as seen by Mikhalkov, I will focus primarily on three key-historical periods: late Czarism, Stalinism and the post-Soviet period. These are crucial historical times marked throughout his work. His construction of Russianness is deeply contextualized historically, offering insights on the relationship

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[5] Donald Winchester, "Russia's Identity Crisis," *Vision Journal*, 2008, http://www.vision.org/visionmedia/current-events-politics-russian-identity/5814.aspx.
[6] Vladimir Osherov, *Seeking the Truth: Nikita Mikhalkov and the Russian Dilemma* (Los Gatos, CA: Smashwords, 2013), p. 7.
[7] Birgit Beumers, *Nikita Mikhalkov: Between Nostalgia and Nationalism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), p. 2.

between contemporary Russian life and the cultural traditions of the Soviet and Imperial past.[8] The main films I will focus on for analysis are: *A Few Days in the Life of Ilia Ilich Oblomov* (1980), with a focus on pre-revolutionary Russia, *Burnt by the Sun* (1994) and *Burnt by the Sun 2* regarding Stalinism, and *Anna: from 16 to 18* (1994), which is in itself an account of Russian history from 1980 until 1991.

The present work contains two main chapters. The first chapter offers a historical background in 19th and 20th Century Russian thought – to be more specific, it is meant to be an account of Russia's position with regard to the Western world, as well as a short guide to the debates between the Slavophiles and the Westernizers, two main groups of intellectuals who were divided into two schools of thought that emerged in 19th Century Russia. This is crucial in order to provide a pertinent analysis or the relationship between Russia and 'the West', and to better understand present socio-political situations and positions taken by Mikhalkov in his films regarding Russia's future direction, as well as the changes that occurred in the public response.

The following chapter begins with a brief account of the most prominent metaphor tied to Russia: the *mother figure*. The first subchapter in the second chapter will be dedicated to the metaphor of Russia as a motherly figure in Mikhalkov's films and will offer a closer look at the continuity, or lack thereof, in Mikhalkov's depictions of Russia in *Oblomov, Anna: from 16 to 18, Burnt by the Sun* and *Burnt by the Sun 2*.

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[8] Susan Larsen, "National Identity, Cultural Authority, and the Post-Soviet Blockbuster: Nikita Mikhalkov and Aleksei Balabanov," *Slavic Review* 62, no. 3 (2003): 191–511.

Finally, by the second and last subchapter it becomes possible to identify the connections between Mikhalkov's public persona and the shift in the interpretations of his work. His immersion into Russia's political life and his public declarations have caused a considerable decrease of his popularity, both in Russia and abroad, and my argument is that this had a major influence on the responses to his subsequent films.

As visual forms of communication have gained more popularity and as their constantly increases, the application of visual research methods becomes more widespread in the social sciences. Methods based on visual material such as video or photography were accepted as a subjective and reflexive form of qualitative data production, and are now entrenched in major fields of inquiry, including sociology, educational research, criminology, social and cultural geography, media and cultural studies, discursive and social psychology, political science and policy analysis.[9]

I am planning on using specific methodology related to film analysis. This mainly consists of *iconic analysis* (a method consisting of focusing on image and sound and concerning itself with how pictorial elements convey the meaning of film), supported by visual *semiotic analysis*. Both analyses are built around the metaphors constructed by Mikhalkov in his work, with a special attention dedicated to the central metaphor, present in almost all his films: Russia as the main motherly figure – Russia as 'the motherland'.

A cognitive metaphor is a form of using a concrete, tangible idea in order to frame an abstract idea and to better understand it. It is not only a tool of poetic imagination, but also

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[9] Hubert Knoblauch, Alejandro Baer, Eric Laurier, and Sabine Petschke, Bernt Schnettler, "Visual Analysis. New Developments in the Interpretative Analysis of Video and Photography," *Sozialforschung* 9, no. 3 (September 2008).

pervasive in everyday life. The essence of metaphor is experiencing and conceptualizing one thing in terms of another, which allows one to have a better understanding of the realities of the world. It is not only present in language, but in thought and action. Our conceptual system plays a central part in defining our everyday realities. Human thought processes are largely metaphorical, and so is our conceptual system's nature – this is precisely why metaphors as linguistic expressions are possible.[10]

In a study conducted by Elisabeth El Refaie on visual metaphors understood through the example of newspaper cartoons, she argued that visual metaphors are best described in terms of their underlying metaphorical concepts and viewed them as the pictorial expression of a metaphorical way of thinking, congruent with the cognitive metaphor theory. A definition of visual metaphors in cognitive terms is not as straightforward as it seems, given that the boundaries between the literal and the metaphorical are often blurry and highly dependent on the context they are being exposed into. Also, the form in which a metaphor is expressed usually has a strong influence on both its impact and its perceived meaning.[11]

At the moment, iconic analysis prevails in the area of visual analytical methods in social science.[12] It derives from single image and it is closely related to techniques of film production, thus being mostly useful for film-related educational institutions. It is image that we first see when watching a film, we interpret what we see and imagery is what will probably have the highest impact on conveying a certain message to the public.

[10] George Lakoff, Mark Johnsen, *Metaphors We Live by* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2003): 4-10.
[11] Elisabeth El Refaie, "Understanding Visual Metaphor: The Example of Newspaper Cartoons," *Visual Communication* 2, no. 1 (2003): 75–95.
[12] Luc Pauwels, "Visual Sociology Reframed: An Analytical Synthesis and Discussion of Visual Methods in Social and Cultural Research," *Sage Journals* 38, no. 4 (2010): 545–81.

Semiotics (or *the study of meaning-making*) is defined as the philosophical theory of signs and symbols. As a research method, it incorporates the study of metaphors, symbols and communication. My research will be focused mainly on visual semiotics, as this study focuses on visual material (film).

In the case of film, a semiotic approach grasps the nature of time and provides a new understanding of the particular filmic sign process that relates a sign or a symbol to the existence or non-existence of objects.

Carey Jewitt and Rumiko Oyama developed an analytical model using the *social semiotics of visual communication* ('the description of semiotic resources, what can be said and done with images and other visual means of communication, and how the things people say and do with images can be interpreted') [13]. As Jewitt and Oyama pointed out, social semiotics replaced *codes* with *semiotic resources*. The difference between the two is that the notion of 'semiotic resource' involves the change and power imbalance in the visual signification process, as defined by its two ends: representation (encoding) and interpretation (decoding). Because semiotic resources have been produced within cultural histories, deriving from specific interests and goals, only certain social actors (such as producers of mass images) can establish or modify the rules of visual representation.

In order to make sense of visual messages, producers and viewers use semiotic resources as cognitive ones.[14] Semiotic resources are mobilized in order to create a field of possible meanings that are to be activated by the producers and viewers of the images subjected to

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[13] Carey Jewitt and Rumiko Oyama, "Visual Meaning: A Social Semiotic Approach," in *The Handbook of Visual Analysis* (London: Sage Publications, 2001), 134–57.
[14] Ibid.

analysis. These meanings are not certain, neither are they permanently established. Nevertheless, the number of meanings that can be attributed to a certain semiotic resource is highly limited, given the fact that whoever makes the rules of visual representation favors certain interpretations over others, thus constraining meaning potentials. [15]

A distinctive trait of the social semiotic paradigm is the preoccupation of changing dominant ideological assumptions through semiotic action. Systematic social semiotic analysis offers the possibility of reconsidering the meanings inherent in certain constructs, rather than seeing them as irrevocable, or natural.[16] Methodologically, social semiotic analysis of visual material is done according to three meta-functions (which allow the deconstruction of the object of analysis into three types of meaning): *representation* (the story of the visual material: setting, along with what seems to be happening in the image)*, interaction* (the relationship to the viewer) and *composition* (the image's layout, placement and relative salience). [17]

I will pair iconic and visual social semiotic analysis with another relevant method for film studies: the qualitative analysis of the relation between image and sound. The scientific model I plan on applying to this research is Hansjörg Pauli's. In 1976, he proposed three basic categories of relation between film music and motion pictures, providing a theoretical framework for research findings: *paraphrasing* (the music is additive, congruent with the image), *polarization* (the music has a specific character and puts into motion the ambiguous

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[15] Giorgia Aiello, "Theoretical Advances in Critical Visual Analysis: Perception, Ideology, Mythologies, and Social Semiotics," *Journal of Visual Literacy* 26, no. 2 (2006): 89–102.
[16] Rick Iedema, "Analysing Film and Television: A Social Semiotic Account of Hospital: An Unhealthy Business," in *Handbook of Visual Analysis* (London: Sage Publications, 2001), 183–206.
[17] Carey Jewitt and Rumiko Oyama, "Visual Meaning: A Social Semiotic Approach," in *The Handbook of Visual Analysis* (London: Sage Publications, 2001), 134–57.

character of the image towards the one of the music – otherwise put, the music disambiguates the image) and *counterpoint* (the specific character of the music contradicts the specific content of the picture so that the music conveys irony or comments on the picture in a different way). In all three cases the music strongly contributes to shaping the meaning of the picture.[18] By establishing the relationship between image and sound, by identifying and explaining visual and iconic metaphors, we can provide an accurate interpretation of film, and a further, in-depth analysis of the messages conveyed and their relevance for the topic of Russian identity.

Sound designer Walter Murch remarked that 'Despite all appearances, we do not see and hear a film, we hear/see it'. This phenomenon is called conceptual resonance and it occurs between sound and image: the sound influences the way we see the image, and this new image makes us hear the sound differently, which in turn makes us see something different in the image, and so on. A new meaning emerges from the way sound and image work together, thus they should not be analyzed separately from one another. Where the audio-video relationship is not direct or causal, the interaction becomes one of added value, so that the sound adds to the given image in order to create the definite impression, in the immediate or remembered experience one has of it. This expression comes naturally from what it is seen and already contained by the image itself. Sound is able to provide an

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[18] Claudia Bullerjahn, Markus Güldenring, "An Empirical Investigation on Effects of Film Music Using Qualitative Content Analysis," *Psychomusicology* no. 13 (1994): 99–118.

emergent meaning apparently inherent in the image, but it is actually caused by the way that image relates to the sound.[19]

I will observe shifts in public reception through mainstream film websites, film reviews and ratings, as well as the literature written on the topic.

A considerable amount of attention has been given by scholars to the question of Russianness.[20] Nevertheless, little has been written on Mikhalkov's films in relation to this issue, and whether his viewers agree with him or not, he came to be a person of reference for the question of Russianness, or Russian identity. His work and personality end up shaping the public's opinions, whether this happens for or against his visions on Russia. Today we may say that one would be closer to finding truths about this issue simply by taking Mikhalkov into account – from the elements he chooses to depict, and the way in which he chooses to depict them, to observing how his work has been received by the public. My study thus attempts at pointing out a new angle from which this intensely researched topic of Russian identity can be researched. Focusing on such a controversial personality in his attempt to shape the way we look at Russia can be more fruitful, as the shifts in the public response to his films are more likely to point out not only agreement, but also mass disagreement with certain key issues. Analyzing positive responses, as well as negative ones, significantly broadens our perspectives when looking at a complex issue like interpretations of and shifts in Russian identity.

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[19] Karen Collins, *Playing with Sound. A Theory of Interacting with Sound and Music in Video Games* (Cambridge: Massachusets Institute of Technology Press, 2013).

Mikhalkov's films encompass more than the present cultural crisis – they tells us about the past ones as well, and by understanding this past we can better explain the present situation where Russian culture is currently torn between 'letting in the Western ways', which it is usually seen as virtually opposed to, and remaining loyal to its own traditions and values. I will show that Nikita Mikhalkov uses film as an instrument for identity shaping and preservation – the film maker reminds people of their roots, cultivating an attachment to a romanticized history, by means of which his work becomes an enabler for consolidating and preserving identities. It is quite clear that Russia's identity crisis would be solved by Mikhalkov by encouraging people to return to a tradition of spirituality, rather than by guiding them towards the West, into what would probably be seen by him as self-oblivion.

Hated or not, Nikita Mikhalkov certainly offers relevant and valuable perspectives on Russian society and history. In Osherov's words, Mikhalkov 'illustrates all the dramas and complexities that dominated Russian culture during the last one hundred years, long before he was even born'[21].

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[21] Vladimir Osherov, *Seeking the Truth: Nikita Mikhalkov and the Russian Dilemma*, Shmashwords edition, 2013, p. 6.

# Chapter 1 – Russianness and the West

Contemporary debates about Russia's position vis-à-vis Western Europe and the relationship between the two are surprisingly similarly to the debates in the 18th Century, when these issues first began to be raised. The environment today is politically and socially different, but the question of Russia's choice regarding its future direction, as well as the choice between finding an answer within or outside itself, remain of present concern.

In the 18th Century, Russia was different from the rest of Europe in terms of political organization. Most European powers (except for Austria-Hungary) were slowly becoming nation-states and had the goal of becoming constitutional political systems. Meanwhile the Czarist Empire was maintaining its political tradition in the form of autocratic regimes.

The Muscovite autocracy only began to build an imperial tradition after the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453. The first step towards this was made by means of the emergence of the theory of Moscow as 'the Third Rome' (the second being Constantinople).[22]

With Rome and Constantinople as world capitals of Catholicism and Islam, Moscow would become both a political and religious center - the Christian Orthodox capital of the world. The theory behind this idea stated that Muscovite Rus' was the historical successor of the Byzantine and Roman empires, which, from the theory founders' perspective, fell because of their deviation from 'the true faith'; thus the statement that "two Romes have fallen, a

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[22] Joseph Esherick, Hasan Kayalı, and Eric Van Young, *Empire to Nation: Historical Perspectives on the Making of the Modern World* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), p. 306.

third stands, and a fourth there shall not be." The prior development of political thought in Russia, the growth of national consciousness given the reunification of the Russian lands, the liberation from the Tatar yoke, and finally, the consolidation of the independence of the Russian state contributed to the development of the theory of Moscow as 'the Third Rome'. At the same time, this theory encompassed reactionary traits, such as 'national exclusivity' and 'divine favoritism'. It contributed to the formation of the official ideology of the centralized Russian state and stood against the Vatican's struggle to extend its influence over the Russian territories. The concept also became the basis for the idea of unity among the Slavic countries of the Balkan Peninsula during the 16th and 17th centuries. [23]

The terms 'czar' and 'empire' were embraced in the 16th and 18th Century. In 1547, Ivan IV officially assumed the title of 'czar' (*Caesar* in Latin), thus turning the realms of the autocrat into a *tsarstvo*. Two centuries later, in 1721, Peter the Great formally adopted the Latin term *imperiia* and called himself *Imperator (Emperor) of all Russia*.[24]

The theory of 'Moscow as the Third Rome' undoubtedly made way for the development of national conciousness in the Czarist Empire. Nevertheless, 'nationality' is a highly ambiguous term when it comes to Russia. The word used to indicate the idea of national unity was not *natsional'nost'*, but *narodnost'* (in Russian, *narod* is the term used for the singular form of the noun *people*, as well as *commonality*, *populace* or *folk* – not in the de-personalized sense of the word *masses*; in the Soviet Union it was commonly used in relation to the proletariat). This ambiguity did not end at terminology, as in the 19th Century, *narodnost'*

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[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.

began to constitute the central element of the debate between the believers in the traditional dynastic state and those taken by the new wave of nationalism.

Until 1917, the dynastic position was ideologically dominant. This, however, began to be contested once Russia was influenced by German and French-type romantic nationalism. The intelligentsia started to question the 'imagined boundaries' of the area, and the essence of what being Russian truly meant. The 'Russian' intelligentsia was not entirely Russian though. Among its members there were also ethnic Germans and Ukrainians. They agreed that the territories that had been part of the 'gathering of the lands' in the 16th Century (the principalities of Novgorod, Muscovy, Pskov, Tver, Riazan, Vladimir and Suzdal) were conceived as part of 'the motherland'. But what about the Slavic Ukrainians, Belarusians? An equal ambiguity was present with respect to traditionally Muslim populations in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. [25]

But what was Russia after all, and what did being Russian mean?

First, there is a distinction between the two meanings of the word 'Russian'. The identification of individuals as 'Russians', both by themselves and by others has always been very blurry. Usually, anyone traveling abroad from the Soviet Union was labeled as 'Russian', regardless of their ethnicity, which makes for a civic connotation of the term, in addition to the ethnic connotation.[26]

Moving on from terminological issues, Igor' Aleksandrovich Zevelëv described Russianness as a plural entity; a formation of concentric circles suggesting multiple, overlapping

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[25] Ibid.
[26] Igor' Aleksandrovich Zevelëv, *Russia and Its New Diasporas* (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace Press, 2001), p. 32.

identities. At the core he placed the ethnic sense of identification, ethnic Russians of the Russian Federation for whom identity was not that ambiguous. These were the *russkie*.[27] Surrounding this core, there are broader circles, which include the non-ethnic Russians of Russia. Together with the *russkie*, they share a civic identity of *rossiyane* (Russian citizenry). From this point, variations emerge: Russians of the near abroad, who combine the core Russian ethnic identity with their civic identity (ethnic Russians in Ukraine, for example), Russian speakers of the near abroad who display a sense of cultural identity, along with several others (as is, for instance, a Russian speaking ethnic Ukrainian, citizen of Kazakhstan). To this already complicated model, intermarriage adds even more variations, to the point where defining Russianness becomes not only an infinitely laborious task, but nearly impossible.[28]

Interestingly enough, the very term *russkie* appeared during the Crimean war. This makes for a rather illustrative example of how identification strengthens and emerges in opposition to a perceived 'other'.

## Russian Pre-Enlightenment and the Elites' Westernization

Being significantly larger than virtually any other European country, Russia was usually regarded with fear and being different politically made things worse in this respect.

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[27] The term is used in reference to the ethnic connotation of Russianness.
[28] Igor' Aleksandrovich Zevelëv, *Russia and Its New Diasporas* (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace Press, 2001), pp. 32-33.

Naturally, there is meant to be more mutual understanding between states that share a political pattern.

The first steps towards the immersion of Russia into the Western culture can be traced back to the turn of the 18th century, in the times of Czar Peter the Great. Historians agree today that this was a period of pre-Enlightenment in the Russian Empire. Enlightenment elements were only properly introduced in the area by Catherine the Great, who became the head of the Empire later, after the first half of the 18th Century, in 1762.[29]

As a result of a group of young men being sent from the Russian Empire to Western Europe in order to absorb knowledge of foreign languages, arts and skills, changes were implemented in Czarist Russia. A social and economic 'Westernization' (or *zapadnichestvo*, the term often used by Russian intellectuals, meaning 'pro-Western-ism') took place in a rather forceful manner, in matters of taxes, military service laws, and facilitated import and export of goods. Eighteenth-century Russia is described by philosopher Isaiah Berlin as an environment permanently oscillating between oppression and liberalism.[30]

Despite being confronted with a strong opposition, Peter the Great enforced Western elements in the areas of culture and education. Western dress and manners were introduced to the people of the Empire, until the reign of Elizabeth, when Russia distanced itself from these tendencies. [31]

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[29] Andrzej Walicki and Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka, *A History of Russian Thought: From the Enlightenment to Marxism* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1979).
[30] Isaiah Berlin, *Russian Thinkers* (London, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1978), p. 117.
[31] Ibid.

Nevertheless, Elizabeth was followed by Peter the Third in 1742. His wife, the German Catherine the Great, took over in 1762 during an overthrow and perpetuated the Westernizing tendencies in the Russian Empire. A friend of Voltaire's, she adopted French intellectualism and Montesquieu's 'The Spirit of Laws'. [32] French thought was intensely promoted during her rule. She tried to embody the image of an enlightened monarch, who would change the irrational course of history through reason and authority.[33] She proved herself very compatible with the principles and values of Enlightenment, and today she remains a vivid symbol of this movement in Russian history[34], thus marking the later emergence of the irreversible debate between Slavophiles and Westernizers in the 19th century.

## The Philosophical Letters

The Slavophile-Westernizer debate concerned the positive or negative effects of the Western cultural additions and Russia's upcoming choice regarding its social and cultural direction.[35] It gained philosophical significance between 1828 and 1830, when Pyotr Yakovlevich Chaadayev wrote eight *Philosophical Letters* that were received as quite unpleasant by the Russian intellectuals and government. It triggered a philosophical concretization of the debate, in that it harshly criticized everything Russian, especially the Russian Orthodox Church. [36]

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[32] Henri Troyat, *Catherine the Great* (Phoenix: Phoenix Press, 2000).
[33] Andrzej Walicki and Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka, *A History of Russian Thought: From the Enlightenment to Marxism* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1979).
[34] Id., p. 1.
[35] Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.235-6.
[36] Pyotr Chaadayev, "Philosophical Letters," in *Russian Philosophy*, ed. James Edie, vol. 1 (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1976).

Chaadayev was particularly opposing what he saw as Russia intentionally distancing itself from the rest of Europe by means of embracing the Orthodox Church instead of the Western European Christianity. His letters incorporate a religious philosophy of history according to which the Western Church was the embodiment of human unity and God had established his kingdom in the West, at least partly. By opposition, Russian Orthodoxy derived from what he called the 'despised, miserable Byzantium', characterized by religious separatism, which caused Russia to close itself off from universal historical development, seen by Chaadayev as possible only through unity.[37]

His letters were charged with what today is called 'slavophobia', a profound disgust for 'Russian ways'. In his first letter, published in 1836 in the Russian journal, *Teleskop*, he expressed opinions for which he was later declared insane by the government. Among his thoughts there were several according to which Russia had not contributed to the world at all – not with ideas, not with spirituality – moreover, he accused the Russian people ('we', as he wrote ) of destroying everything they touched and of killing any trace of progress that seemed to 'stand in their way'.[38]

He responded to having been declared insane with *Apology of a Madman*, where he stated that Russia's so-called 'lack of history' could turn out to be an advantage. Europe's past, on the other hand, was seen as bright and promising.[39] Like a blank sheet of paper, in the eyes of Chaadayev, the Russian Empire was free of historical baggage, ready for a new beginning.

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[37] G.M. Hamburg and Randall A. Poole, eds., *A History of Russian Philosophy 1830–1930: Faith, Reason, and the Defense of Human Dignity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.10.
[38] Pyotr Chaadayev, "Philosophical Letters," in *Russian Philosophy*, ed. James Edie, vol. 1 (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1976).
[39] Iver Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe: Identity and International Relations*, The New International Relations Series (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 30.

This beginning concerned Russia's proximity to Europe, which would, according to him, benefit both parties.[40]

I will not discuss here the validity of Chaadayev's claims; however, his rather eccentric approach and provoking open questions (such as 'Where are our wise men?', or 'Who will think for us now?') fueled an intense and long-lasting debate between two groups of Russian intellectuals who called themselves 'Slavophiles' (*slavyanofily*) and 'Westernizers' (*zapadniki*). [41]

Leonard Schapiro noticed that the *Philosophical Letters* became an important reading regarding the way Russia came to view itself. These letters, he says, are the reason why it was then believed that Russia would never be like the rest of Europe, which was, at the time, a frightening perspective. After and under the influence of the *Philosophical Letters*, Russia began to question its status as a 'European nation'.[42]

## Slavophiles and Westernizers: Shaping the Idea of Russianness

For some two hundred years, Russia's intellectual and political life was marked by an ongoing debate between the traditionalist Slavophiles and the Westernizers, who sought progress in the Western political and philosophical models. There were ideological divisions within each of the two groups, but no division was ever profound enough to overturn the one between Slavophilism and Westernism. In fact, the division was so strong that today it remains a valid discussion point, and a topic of debate.

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[40] G.M. Hamburg and Randall A. Poole, eds., *A History of Russian Philosophy 1830–1930: Faith, Reason, and the Defense of Human Dignity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.11.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Leonard Schapiro, *Rationalism and Nationalism in Russian Nineteenth-Century Political Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

Initially, the term 'slavophile' was considered derogatory and it referred to the followers of Aleksandr Semyonovich Sishkov, a vice-admiral and member of the council of Admiralty and the Russian Academy. Shishkov was strongly opposed to any linguistic loans from other foreign languages to the Russian language, basing his attitude on the idea of the identification of language with thought. For example, according to his theory, no Russsian could conceive the idea of a 'revolution', if the French loan word for it (*revolyutsiya*) were eliminated from the Russian language.[43] This group, which was related to Shishkov's language-purifying theory, was considered an outsider in the debate. The debate about Europe was political and Universalist.[44] Moreover, the Slavophiles were the ones who articulated the first comprehensive idea of a distinct Russian identity.[45]

The Slavophile group was concerned with the inner wholeness of the human being. Within their conception of *tsel'naia lichnost* ('integral personhood') lay Ivan Vasilyevich Kireyevskii's 'integral consciousness of believing reason', that reconciled faith and reason. This 'believing reason' was different from European rationalism by means of bringing the subject and object of knowledge together in an immediate, concrete intuition. This grounded the self in the divine source of all being, resulting in a revelation that reached the ontological essence of reality, and eventually God.[46] Kireyevskii is considered to be one of the first leader representatives of Slavophile thought, together with Alexei Khomiakov, a nobleman with an

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[43] William Mills Todd, *The Familiar Letter as a Literary Genre in the Age of Pushkin* (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1999), p. 48.
[44] Iver Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe: Identity and International Relations*, The New International Relations Series (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 30.
[45] Susanna Rabow-Edling, *Slavophile Thought and the Politics of Cultural Nationalism*, ed. Thomas M. Wilson, SUNY Series in National Identities (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006).
[46] G.M. Hamburg and Randall A. Poole, eds., *A History of Russian Philosophy 1830–1930: Faith, Reason, and the Defense of Human Dignity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.11.

affinity for German romanticism and a high knowledge of Orthodox Christianity[47], and Ivan Sergeyevich Aksakov, a Russian Slavophile intellectual. Aksakov became very prominent as a leader and tribune of Pan –Slavism, but his position changed several times throughout his lifetime.[48]

Each group incorporated intellectual elites with slightly different perspectives. For instance, philosopher Nikolai Danilevsky depicted Europe as an old and historically drained environment, soon to be reinvigorated by the young Slavic people, who would take over the world.[49] On the other hand, philosopher Konstantin Leontiev imagined an alliance between the Orthodox Church and Islam and opposed all conflicts between the Russian Empire and the Ottomans.[50]

Fyodor Dostoyevsky adopted similar ideas in the *Diary of Winter*, but his Slavophilia was not entirely conscious, since Slavophile thought was not exactly taken seriously in the literary circles in the middle of the 19th century. In Aleksandr Miliukov's memoirs there is proof that Dostoevsky believed in the capacity of traditional Russian peasant institutions such as the commune, to build a foundation for a new social order which would fit better in Russian society than the ideas of Western socialists.[51]

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[47] William Leatherbarrow and Offord, eds., *A Documentary History of Russian Thought From the Enlightenment to Marxism* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ardis Publishers, 1987).

[48] Stephen Lukashevich, *Ivan Aksakov, 1823-1886: A Study in Russian Thought and Politics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965).

[49] Alexander Tchoubarian, *The European Idea in History in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: A View From Moscow* (London: Routledge, 2014).

[50] Dale Lawrence Nelson, *Konstantin Leontiev and the Orthodox East* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975).

[51] K.A. Lantz, *The Dostoevsky Encyclopedia* (Greenwood Publishing, 2004).

On the other hand, Dostoyevsky welcomed a dual perspective when it came to defining *the motherland*. In this duality, he thought, resided the uniqueness of Russianness. 'We, Russians', he wrote in 1876, 'have two motherlands: our *Rus'* and Europe.[52] For Dostoyevsky, the very nature of Russianness was dual, so his was a perspective according to which the question whether Russian identity is Eastern or Western did not apply.

The Slavophiles were usually seen as conservative critics of modern society. As Susanna Rabow-Elding pointed out in contrast with common belief[53], Slavophilism was basically about a critique of contemporary Russian society and an initiative for social change. Far from being an 'escape from reality', like it has been called due to its apparent idealism, the core of Slavophile thought was oriented towards a rational confrontation with what was then perceived as a genuine social crisis. Let us not forget that it emerged during the reign of Nicholas I, who imposed a rather oppressive regime on the people of the Russian Empire. His regime left freedom of expression to the private sphere – without free press, a parliamentary government or political parties, people usually met in salons and private clubs to discuss social issues.[54]

It was commonly believed by the Slavophile group that upper classes should turn away from everything European and find guidance in the Russian people. The 'turn to the self' was a very popular concept among the Slavophiles at the time. Imitation of the West was

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[52] Andrei Piontkovsky, "East or West? Russia's Identity Crisis in Foregin Policy," *The Foreign Policy Centre*, January 2006, p.4.
[53] See M. Raeff, Russian Intellectual History. An Anthology (New York: Harcout, 1966);
S. Carter, *Russian Nationalism. Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (London: Pinter, 1990); L. Greenfeld, *Nationalism.*

*Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
[54] Susanna Rabow-Edling, *Slavophile Thought and the Politics of Cultural Nationalism*, ed. Thomas M. Wilson, SUNY Series in National Identities (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), p. 23.

critiqued, in that it was believed to perpetuate the identity crisis among the educated Russian intellectual elites. This crisis was triggered by Romantic demands that created pressure for an original contribution to the advancement of humanity – exactly what Chaadayev was complaining about in his 'Philosophical Letters'. Thus, the Slavophiles concluded that the only way in which Russian culture would be accepted and appreciated worldwide was for it to finally make a contribution to universal progress.[55]

In complete contrast with Slavophile romanticism, the Westernizers derived their ideas from the philosophical framework of Hegelianism. They shared Chaadayev's perspective on the role of Europe in Russia's development, which was expected to happen along Western European lines. However, the religious dimension of this proximity to Europe was not adopted by the Westernizer group.

Some of the most prominent representatives of Western thought in this particular debate were Alexander Herzen, Mikhail Bakunin and Vissarion Belinskii. In 1840, the group split into the liberal and revolutionary democratic wings, as a consequence of an inner dispute between Herzen and historian Timoftei Granovsky.[56]

Westernizers were clearly opposed to the Slavophiles through numerous differences, but one of the core elements that separated the two was the anthropocentrism that characterized Western thought. Their model was not the integral, but the 'autonomous personhood', meaning a free, self-contained individual who fulfills him or herself 'through

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[55] Ibid.
[56] G.M. Hamburg and Randall A. Poole, eds., *A History of Russian Philosophy 1830–1930: Faith, Reason, and the Defense of Human Dignity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.12..

conscious action in history and work toward progress'.[57] Herzen, for instance, believed that

self-realization was a necessary task of personality, which was supposed to be accomplished

through action. The 'reality of personhood' could only be attained through freedom and

dignity, which was in turn obtained through self-determination. Nevertheless, his Hegelian

belief in historical progress suffered once he immigrated towards the West and witnessed

the defeat of German socialists during the 1848 revolutions. He then developed a proximity

to the Slavophiles by means of reframing his political beliefs. Instead of German socialism,

Herzen was now turning to Russian socialism, formulated by him as a concept regarding

Russian progress based on values he imputed to the peasants (very much like the

Slavophiles).[58]

However, progress was viewed differently, not only by the two groups, but also by different

members of the same group. While Herzen saw its potential in the peasantry, Belinskii

claimed that the nation was made up of the middle and upper classes, which represented

progress and intellectual movement, two elements that, for Belinskii, reflected on the spirit

of the nation. This made sense for Belinskii, in that, educated, enlightened, and somewhat

gifted with consciousness as they were, the middle and upper classes constituted a

prerequisite for intellectual and moral interests, which in turn, were pre-conditions for

progress.[59]

Despite their concern for the primacy of the personhood in social life and history, the

Westernizers never fully developed a philosophical concept for it. Personhood was rather

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[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Susanna Rabow-Edling, *Slavophile Thought and the Politics of Cultural Nationalism*, ed. Thomas M. Wilson, SUNY Series in National Identities (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), p. 76.

considered an answer to a social problematic, a mere part of a philosophical world view than an independent philosophical problem. This is not to say that the need for the development of the phenomenon was ignored by the Westernizers. Even being merely an element in social philosophy, personhood was regarded as the highest of values, constituting an axiom that needed no analyzing. [60]

Russianness was constructed by each of the two sides in antithesis with the depiction of the other group's representation.[61] The Russian 'other' was as much imagined and invented as the Western 'other'. In fact, these strong antithetical representations played a significant part in the identity construction of both groups. This is not to say there were no cultural differences, and everything in terms of distinction was imagined. However, 'othering' became a tool that, much like in other cases, served the social-psychological need for self identification.

For the Slavophiles, Russianness was associated with youth and freshness. Slavs were patient, quiet, peaceful, meditative, while Westerners were 'restless and turbulent'. Orthodoxy was also placed in antithesis with Catholicism – the Orthodox valued contemplation, tolerance, calm and the withdrawal from politics, as opposed to Catholics. Slavophiles had a clearly defined image of 'the good, simple, eternal Slavic peasant' whom they venerated conceptually and held as a symbol of Russianness. Westerners were

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[60] G.M. Hamburg and Randall A. Poole, eds., *A History of Russian Philosophy 1830–1930: Faith, Reason, and the Defense of Human Dignity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 39.
[61] Joseph Esherick, Hasan Kayalı, and Eric Van Young, *Empire to Nation: Historical Perspectives on the Making of the Modern World* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), p. 310.

perceived as a threat to the Orthodox Church and the peasant community as traditional Russian trademarks – thus, as a threat to the very soul of Russia. [62]

Westernizers did not constitute a cohesive group, ideologically speaking. What united them in terms of ideas was the opposition to Slavophilism. Regarding Russia, Belinsky, for instance, built on Chaadev's arguments, stating that it was a country without history, without a literature of its own, and what Slavophiles regarded as 'Russian literature' was in fact a product of imitation with no historical continuity, and any 'real' literature that appeared in Russia was due to the Western influences in the area that came with Peter the Great.[63]

In Belinsky's eyes, Russia was culturally backwards, and still at an early stage in its historical development. He shared the Westernizers hostility towards folk songs and ballads, stating that the national character of Russia was best embodied by the elites, and not by its peasantry. For Belinsky, nationality had nothing to do with the external attributes of popular tradition, and he displayed profound disgust at the Russian literature 'reproducing the life and language of Russia's most backward social component'.[64] What was backward for Westernizers, Slavophiles treasured as a mark of authenticity and a valid basis for self-identification.

Slavophiles shared with Westernizers the disregard for the Czarist imperial state. This they regarded as an alien, at times inauthentic and anachronistic institution.

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[62] Joseph Esherick, Hasan Kayalı, and Eric Van Young, *Empire to Nation: Historical Perspectives on the Making of the Modern World* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), p. 310.
[63] Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought: From the Enlightenment to Marxism* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1979), p. 139.
[64] Ibid.

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# Cultural Nationalism and the Question of Russian National Consciousness

Rabow-Elding noted that, placed in the context of cultural nationalism, Slavophile thought may easily be framed within the Meineckean division between the *Staatsnation*, where belonging to a certain nation is based on a common constitution and political history, and the *Kulturnation*, where membership is not a consequence of one's choice, but it is one based on a shared cultural heritage. While political nationalism was derived from the idea of sovereignty of the nation and self-determination, cultural nationalism pleaded for national individuality.[65] The battlefield hosting the Slavophile versus Westernizer debate was thus a cultural one, and originated in a cultural dilemma regarding national identity.

As opposed to Slavophile nationalism which was mostly oriented towards national culture, Western nationalism was state-oriented and focused on political power. The main concern of the Slavophile group was the understanding of the *Kulturnation* as 'the Land'.[66] Hostile to Peter the Great, they were nevertheless not anti-czarist; they believed the ancient Russian institution of the Czar should remain untouched by Western influences, which they distanced themselves from. The Czar should be 'married to the Land', and rather be a patriarch instead of an ancient regime-style autocrat.[67]

For Konstantin Aksakov, the distinction between 'Land' and 'State' held the idea of freedom from politics and the impenetrability of the inner life of the spirit. This was the very

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[65] Susanna Rabow-Edling, *Slavophile Thought and the Politics of Cultural Nationalism*, ed. Thomas M. Wilson, SUNY Series in National Identities (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), p. 76.
[66] Iver Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe: Identity and International Relations*, The New International Relations Series (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 35.
[67] Id., p. 32.

expression of the Slavophiles' defense of freedom of consciousness and expression. These principles were no different from those defended by the Westernizers; the difference lied in the way it was to be materialized. In contrast with Western thought, Slavophile understanding of these so-called 'rights' did not include them being guaranteed by law. But the very meaning of, and expectations tied to including a principle in the judicial system were different in both Slavophile and Western thought. [68]

It was commonly believed by the Slavophile group that upper classes should turn away from everything European and find guidance in the Russian people. The 'turn to the self' was a very popular concept among the Slavophiles at the time. Imitation of the West was critiqued, in that it was believed to perpetuate the identity crisis among the educated Russian intellectual elites. This crisis was triggered by Romantic demands that created pressure for an original contribution to the advancement of humanity – exactly what Chaadayev was complaining about in his 'Philosophical Letters'. Thus, the Slavophiles concluded that the only way in which Russian culture would be accepted and appreciated worldwide was for it to finally make a contribution to universal progress.[69]

In opposition to the Slavophiles and their critique of imitation, Westernizers claimed that Russia was already developing along Western lines anyway, and despite the different conditions that had prevailed there, it should try to accelerate this development.[70] The reason for this was that, according to them, the differences between Russia and the West were mere manifestations of Russia's believed 'cultural backwardness'. Due to the

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[68] G.M. Hamburg and Randall A. Poole, eds., *A History of Russian Philosophy 1830–1930: Faith, Reason, and the Defense of Human Dignity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 13.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Iver Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe: Identity and International Relations*, The New International Relations Series (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 35.

assumption that the Western paradigm is a universal one, the assimilation of what was called 'the European culture' was considered to be an obligatory task on the way to progress.[71]

By 1875, under Alexander II, the Russian Empire had gone through a series of reforms, known today under the name of 'The Great Reforms'. Serfdom had been abolished; there were now European-style courts in Russia, with independent judges, lawyers and trial by jury open to the public. A new system of conscription was introduced as an element of the modernization of the armed forces: males were all liable, with terms of service set between six months and seven years, depending on the conscript's level of education. Elective agencies of self-administration were organized for districts, provinces and cities in the Empire.[72]

The darker side of these reforms resided in the fact that they favored exclusively the nobility and disregarded the peasantry, which at the time constituted the majority of the population. Moreover, as liberal and enlightened as the Great Reforms were, the socio-economic environment in Russia was not exactly fit for such radical changes, not to mention in a complete opposite direction than the one it usually went towards. The nobles were aware of the benefits that came as a result of the reforms, and after the assassination of Alexander II, they protested demanding a representative government.[73]

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[71] G.M. Hamburg and Randall A. Poole, eds., *A History of Russian Philosophy 1830–1930: Faith, Reason, and the Defense of Human Dignity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.27.
[72] Daniel Field, "The 'Great Reforms' of the 1860s," in *A Companion to Russian History*, ed. Abbott Gleason (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Blackwell, 2009), pp. 200-208.
[73] Ibid.

The Slavophiles saluted the reforming initiative of the Czar. After the 'Great Reforms', they began to be convinced of the concretization of Russia's divine role in world history. According to some Slavophile perspectives, Russia was going to be the one to unite all nations, including the Western ones, into one single harmonious entity.[74]

However, this was not a direction that the Western world seemed to find agreeable at the time. The dominating trend in Europe was going to move towards an increasing nationalization of states, beginning with France and Britain. Nationalism became the most effective legitimizing formula for the modern state, and it was understood as a political tie similar to brotherhood/sisterhood between people sharing a common language, culture and homeland.[75]

Under these circumstances, a special kind of attention was suddenly given to the Czarist Empire's treatment of its minorities. Its episodes of violence against the peoples in Central Asia, as well as the highlanders of the North Caucasus, made for the threat of Russia's isolation from the newly 'civilized' Western states, which seemed to have forgotten their own previous colonial practices.[76]

Economically, Russia was now being confronted with issues similar to the ones of the Ottoman Empire. Diversity became very expensive; unaffordable, to say the least, considering the constant drain in state treasury from policing peripheral territories, and also

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[74] Dmitry Shlapentokh, *The French Revolution in Russian Intellectual Life: 1865 - 1905* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2009), p. 60.
[75] Joseph Esherick, Hasan Kayalı, and Eric Van Young, *Empire to Nation: Historical Perspectives on the Making of the Modern World* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), p. 311.
[76] Ibid.

in terms of military expenses. The czar's armies had been defeated in the Crimea War (1856), and were facing another one, in the war with Japan (1905).[77]

The twentieth century thus marked the last stage in the crisis of absolutism.[78] Czarist officials began developing strategies for the transformation of the autocracy into a national empire. This posed great challenges, the first one being the 'nationalization' of the Russian people by inducing the feelings of solidarity and loyalty to co-ethnics, who would have to understand themselves as belonging to *russkie*.[79] This was surely going to be a highly difficult task, which was not made any easier by the social and economic situation in Russia at the break of the twentieth century. Class cleavages were the main cleavages in Russian society, and the lower class had to endure the most difficulties as a consequence of the losses following the Russian-Japanese war.[80] The social unrest began when 100 000 factory workers in Sankt Petersburg who were forced to work long hours for the production of military supplies went on strike. The demonstrations were peaceful, but the Russian army opened fire on the workers, killing two hundred people and hurting many others. This caused public support for the czar to decrease, as the government crushed the uprising, killed thousands of rebels and rebel villages were burnt. Afterwards, Czar Nicholas II allowed an elected national assembly with limited powers in order to stabilize the situation, but this

was short-lived. In 1907, Nicholas II was again ruling Russia by relying on the army and bureaucratic power.[81]

The Slavophiles attempted to find a middle-way that did not agree with the desire of the autocracy to preserve the status quo, or with the Westernizers' concept of a democratic Russia.[82] Meanwhile, the idea of a 'Slavic Renaissance' had emerged in Russia. By 'Renaissance', we usually understand a phenomenon that occurs when a new culture emerges by taking a previous culture as a model or a cultural era. This is done by means of assimilating its legacy, principles, instructions and typological features. In a more superficial, journalistic sense, 'Renaissance' becomes merely a synonym for enthusiasm, animation or vigorous development. These two meanings determined the naming of the 'Slavic Renaissance' idea, one that had finally managed to successfully fuse Western Europe and Russia. [83]

The first account of the idea of the 'Slavic Renaissance' belonged to Faddei Frantsevich Zelinskii. In 1905, he pronounced the idea in the second edition of his lectures, *Ancient World and We* (*Drevnii mir i my*), he drew the image of a world frozen in expectation, along with the breaking dawn, explaining that what the world was waiting for 'the word of Slavic Renaissance'. Later on, this idea was developed by philosopher Viacheslav Ivanov, in his 1907 article, *Cheerful Craft and Clever Cheer* (*O veselom remesle i umnom veselii*), which

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[81] William J. Duiker and Jackson Spielvogel, *Cengage Advantage Books: World History, Complete* (Boston, MA: Wadsworth, 2012).
[82] Ibid.
[83] Sergej S. Khoruzhij, "The Transformations of the Slavophile Idea in the Twentieth Century," *Russian Studies in Philosophy* 34, no. 2 (1995), pp. 7-25.

was debating the question of the nature of what was happening in Russian culture at the time.[84]

Ivanov's perspective was that in all epochs, development was conditioned by the interaction between two worlds: Hellenism and barbarism. Hellenism was seen as the cradle of culture, while barbarism was the world of changing historical organisms, which could transform themselves into culture only through reunification with its Hellenic source. Ivanov concluded that Russia had just reached its birth into culture, and its destiny was asking to be fulfilled.[85] This idea of the 'Slavic Renaissance' became a trademark for the Russian 'Silver Age' (turn-of-the-century period in Russia), and we usually find the two interlinked in the literature referring to early 20th Century Russia.[86]

However, the Silver Age did not last long. Slavophile members of the intelligentsia were forced to choose between the two remaining directions: autocracy and Western democratization. They ended up choosing the autocratic alternative, since their anti-Western core meant that a different choice would have eliminated them as a reality of Russian political thought.[87]

The 1917 Revolution ruptured political and philosophical thought in Russia. A radical reinterpretation of pre-revolutionary thought followed, and thinkers such as Belinsky,

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[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 88.

Herzen and Pisarev became early exponents of revolutionary thinking within the Marxist-Leninist discourse.[88]

One would expect pre-1917 Russian thought to become inaccessible and thought of as irrelevant once the new ideological trend emerged. However, books containing the writings of 19th Century thinkers could easily be found in public libraries and second-hand bookstores, and were never included in the 'special depositories'. Nevertheless, it was often reinterpreted, censored, and politically conditioned.[89]

For approximately twenty years, Slavophile discourse was almost forgotten, due to its conservative nature which contrasted with the Marxist-Leninist discourse. However, private lectures were still given sometimes, and Slavophilism was remembered as the source of the original problems in Russian philosophy, and a significant phenomenon in Russian thought, stable and grounded, as opposed to Westernism, volatile and ephemeral, 'just a soap bubble that produced nothing but phrases before bursting'.[90]

Slavophile thought was re-introduced once Stalin came to power and introduced his politics of russification and nation-building, which brought back the discourse of *narodnost'*. In 1939, Nikolai Druzhinin published an article on 'Herzen and the Slavophiles', in which he inaccurately claimed that no research had been done on Slavophilism since 1917. The central issue became the historical evaluation of Slavophilism, along with differentiating between the progressive and the retrograde in the platform of the Slavophiles. To this, Sergei Dimitriev added in 1941 that the opposition between Slavophiles and Westernizers

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[88] Galin Tihanov, "Continuities in the Soviet Period," in *A History of Russian Thought*, ed. William Leatherbarrow and Derek Offord (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 321-322.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.

was novel and relative, since Slavophiles were favouring a 'Prussian route' toward Russian capitalism.[91]

Until the 1940s, the mainstream view on the Slavophiles was depicting them as upholders of tradition and thinkers with conservative leanings. In 1940, Lidiia Ginzburg, a distinguished liberal intellectual of the Soviet age, noticed how debates on Slavophilism in the Soviet Union would begin, as they did before 1917, as debates on aesthetics and literature, but would always end in debating ideology and philosophy. Literature and aesthetics became the center of the second defining moment in Soviet debates on Slavophilism. [92]

A factor that contributed to the weakening of the Russian national consciousness was the inconsistency of the fight put up by various Soviet regimes against Russian nationalism. Out of all, Stalin's was the most inconsistent such regime. Initially, he followed Lenin's view of the Great Russian chauvinism as the main threat to Soviet unity, and thus justified the existence of variations of local nationalism in the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, after 1934 (the Sixteenth Party Congress) until his death in 1953, Stalin's actions accounted for an increasing distance from Lenin's perspective. Instead of Soviet internationalism, he promoted Russian achievements, and he intensely promoted the Russian language among the non-Russian republics of the Soviet Union.[93]

By the end of the 1960s, Slavophiles were regarded as idealists, but it was believed that they should not be excluded from the history of Russian thought solely on this basis. After all,

even if it opposed materialism, idealism was still needed in the world, being the ground on which deep philosophical discoveries were born.[94]

During the late 1970s and the early 1980s, philosopher Arseny Gulyga returned to nineteenth-century Russian thinkers and joined the supporters of Russian exceptionalism, in an attempt to revive the *pochvennichestvo* (the conservative version of Slavophilism developed by Fyodor Dostoevsky, Konstantin Leontiev and Nikolay Danilevsky), which held the idea of Russian uniqueness. This was done, among others, through the revival and elevation of 19th century Russian literature to a source of indispensable philosophical ideas.[95]

Slavophile writers gathered around the *Nash sovremennik* magazine believed that the imperial pattern which characterized the Russian people first in the Czarist Empire, and now in the Soviet Union (also structured and conceived as an empire) inhibited Russian national consciousness. The efforts made in order to obtain a popular internalization of a Soviet identity instead of a Russian one, as well as past efforts dating back to imperial times, to extend the Empire's borders, and not so much to strengthen national feeling, made for a rather inarticulate national consciousness.[96]

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[94] Ibid.
[95] Id., p. 327.
[96] Igor' Aleksandrovich Zevelëv, *Russia and Its New Diasporas* (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace Press, 2001), pp. 36-37.

# Slavophiles and Westernizers: Contemporary Debates and Ideological Developments

What does it mean to be a Slavophile or a Westernizer today? How did the ideological framework change? Unfortunately, Slavophilism became a trend in Russian nationalism; actually, it is the oldest we know of so far.[97] Today, we find it materialized in the form of *neo-Slavophilism*.

The neo-Slavophiles started their political and ideological quest in the forefront of the movement against the old regime in 1900-1904. However, their political position was undermined and core aspects of their ideology were eliminated.[98]

The tradition of the 19th Century Slavophilism is continued by post-communist Neo-Slavophilism. Neo-Slavophiles explain the failure of Marxism in Russia through the discrepancy and incongruity of the communist doctrine with Russian traditional social ideals and moral standards established in community life. These ideals contrasted with the violence associated with what ended up being called 'communism' in the USSR.[99]

During the first years of perestroika, when criticism of the communist system was encouraged by *glasnost*, neo-Slavophilism was the dominant trend in Russian nationalism. Much like 19th Century Slavophilism, the neo-Slavophile ideology kept the concept of the *Kulturnation*, which characterized its variation of nationalism - a cultural one. Russian neo-

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[97] Vadim Joseph Rossman, *Russian Intellectual Antisemitism in the Post-Communist Era* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

[98] Mikhail D. Suslov, "Neo-Slavophilism and the Revolution of 1905-07: A Study in the Ideology of S.F. Sharapov," *Taylor & Francis Journals*, Revolutionary Russia, 24, no. 1 (2011).

[99] Vadim Joseph Rossman, *Russian Intellectual Antisemitism in the Post-Communist Era* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), p. 244.

Slavophiles believe that *culture is the core element of Russian national identity*, especially in the form of literature and the moral code of the traditional Russian community. Other groups of nationalists tended to emphasize religion, geopolitical affiliation, racial factors or social orientation as distinctively Russian, but former leaders of the nationalist wing of the dissident movement in the Soviet Union took to the neo-Slavophile ideology and contributed to its advancement. Among these figures we find Alexander Solzhenitsin, Leonid Borodin and Igor Shafarevich, who could often be read in neo-Slavophile publications.[100]

After the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, conceptions of Russian identity were broken and divided, thus stimulating debates and ideas of national self-perception. The talks were mostly about Russia being at a crossroads in history. However, this is a recurrent theme in Russian history; the only difference resided in the context. A new millennium was beginning, and Russia was on a quest for a new idea; however, the 'Russian idea' was so old it preceded the Soviet Union, and the arguments of the liberal and nationalist groups today still echo the century-old Slavophile-Westernizer debates.[101]

The idealization of Russian peasants is another element shared by both 19th Century Slavophile thinkers (Dostoevsky, for instance) and post-communist neo-Slavophiles. In their interpretation of Russian culture, the most authentic of its constituents is the peasantry, which is why they condemned the Soviet regime for their systematic exploitation and for the de-peasantification policy which was consequently seen as a de-Russification – Russia was now, in their eyes, stripped of its essence and of its soul. The organic, living

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[100] Ibid.
[101] Andrei Piontkovsky, "East or West? Russia's Identity Crisis in Foregin Policy," *The Foreign Policy Centre*, January 2006, p. 4.

environment of the Russian peasant, characterized by a bond between members of a moral community, was replaced with an artificial, mechanical society.[102]

The murder of Czar Nicholas II and his family is seen by neo-Slavophiles as a crime against the Russian people. This idea is also adopted by representatives of National Orthodoxy, since the Czarist rule was interpreted as the materialization of the will of God.[103]

There is an ongoing debate about whether Slavophilism today is liberal or conservative. After all, the Slavophile intellectuals such as Aksakov, Kireev, Khomiakov, Romanov, Shcherbatov, put together a project of an autocratic system based on local self-government, a project containing liberal elements of humanist origin, such as freedom of conscience, tolerance of the non-Russian and non-Orthodox subjects of the Empire, freedom of the press, and very importantly, it incorporated a strong criticism of the bureaucratic imperial regime, offering alternatives in the form of comprehensive reforms. [104]

On the other hand, neo-Slavophilism took to anti-Semitism and developed a strong hostility towards Western political practices. It also adopted a Messianic belief in the development of a truly liberal political regime, where the Christian ethnic would accompany civil rights – all in all, a utopia. [105]

It thus becomes obvious that, in order to understand Russia and to find out how it understands itself, one needs to escape the 'Conservative versus Liberal' frame of thought,

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[102] Vadim Joseph Rossman, *Russian Intellectual Antisemitism in the Post-Communist Era* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), p. 244.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Mikhail Suslov, "'Slavophilism Is True Liberalism': The Political Utopia of S. F. Sharapov (1855–1911)," *Russian History* 38, no. 2 (2011): 281–314.
[105] Ibid.

mostly popular in... the West. Even if one approached this issue from the viewpoint of the European division into 'left' and 'right', it would still not be ideologically close enough to Russia.

The liberal voices that constituted the Westernizer group in Russia immediately after the dissolution of the Soviet Union enjoyed a short-lived period of popularity. However, in 1993 they began facing serious challenges. Apart from internal issues, such as the economic collapse that reflected negatively on the quality of life, there was also the question of foreign policy. On one hand, there was the growth of the discourse regarding the opposition to Russia's foreign policy, which favoured Western interests over its own. On the other hand, Russia's war in Chechnya received harsh criticism from the West, while NATO was criticized by Russia for its actions against Bosnian Serbs and for the plans for the military alliance's expansion. All these made it difficult for the Westernizers to gain terrain in the debate. But what do we mean when talking about post-1990 Westernizers in Russia?[106]

As neo-Slavophilism continues the Slavophile ideological tradition in Russia today, 'Westernism' has its own contemporary correspondents. Officially, the Westernizer political voices today are represented by the LDPR (the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia). Political liberalism in Russia was divided into two different approaches during the first decade of the twentieth century: the Universalist approach and the Particularist one. Each of the two implies a distinct prioritization of how to understand political liberalism in Russia.[107]

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[106] Oxana Shevel, "Russia and the Near Abroad," *Great Decisions*, 2015, pp. 3-4.
[107] Axel Kaehne, *Political and Social Thought in Post-Communist Russia* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 8.

Universalism incorporates core concepts of liberalism: rights and freedoms, and the rule of law. It is characterized by a pluralistic political culture and principles facilitating political liberalism, such as civility and tolerance. In the Universalist approach, modernization works as a catalyst of liberal democracy and the emergence of capitalism features the important role of an entrepreneurial class.[108]

According to the Particularistic approach, Russian civilization is opposing Western European 'Democratism'. Core concepts have particularistic definitions, and the state is involved in the development of civil society and liberal values. Ethical principles are meant to regulate politics and Capitalism is dominated and guided by state bureaucracy. Particularism is characterized by a consensual political culture.[109]

Once we get acquainted with these aspects of the history of Russian thought, we will develop a better understanding of the films directed by Nikita Mikhalkov, which are always centered on the questions of Russia and Russianness, in one way or another. We never get an explicit account of his ideological sympathies simply by watching his films, as he himself has stated during an interview in 2010, after the release of *Burnt by the Sun 2*.[110] However, once acquainted with significant trends in Russian thought, it is possible to accurately interpret and decode meanings and symbols within audio-visual metaphors present throughout Mikhalkov's film work. This is what the following chapter is dedicated to, starting with his central, recurrent metaphor for Russia: the mother figure.

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[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Karin Badt, "Russia Is a Cruel Place: A Conversation with Directors Nikita Mikhalkov and Sergei Loznitsa," *The Huffington Post*, 2010, U.S. edition.

# Chapter 2 – Nikita Mikhalkov's Russia

In his book, *Theory of Film*, Bela Balazs explains the importance of film as potentially the greatest instrument of mass influence ever devised in the course of human cultural history and designates it as the art form with the highest capacity of influencing the minds of the general public.[111] Thus, it is no surprise that the study of film was designed to accommodate various academic disciplines, in order to broaden the scholars' perspectives on diverse issues.

Nikita Mikhalkov's films are especially significant when researching topics regarding Russian history, culture and identity. They feature numerous metaphors of Russia and aspects of its history, political and social life, but out of all, the most prominent one is the metaphor of Russia as a mother figure; Russia as *the motherland*.

In order to properly incorporate meanings into their corresponding contexts, I will briefly explain the origins of this famous portrayal.

Everyone is familiar with the traditional *Matrioshka* doll, the object of numerous Russian national legends. She is symbolically tied to the ancient Ugrian goddess Jumala of the Urals, who was said to 'contain all things within her body'[112]. It is a round-shaped doll broken apart at the stomach, that contains several other such dolls, each smaller than the last one, which makes for a traditional children's puzzle-type toy. Apart from its practical function, it has a strong ideological meaning. The *Matrioshka* (the first syllable of her name, a diminutive of

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[111] Bela Balazs, *Theory of the Film (Character and Growth of a New Art)* (London: Dennis Dobson LTD, 1970), p. 17.
[112] Joanna Hubbs, *Mother Russia: The Feminine Myth in Russian Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 11.

the word *matriona*, means *mother*) is the very embodiment of the idea of *Mother Russia*, enfolding Russia's vision of itself as a nation. The great motherly doll figuratively gives birth to identical children in a continuous manner. The oldest Matrioshka dolls we know of today date back to the nineteenth century, and they contain a girl, a boy, then another girl, and finally a baby. The identities of the doll have changed various times until today, when it is commonly a female figure containing other identical girls, all wearing a brightly coloured *sarafan* (a peasant dress). [113]

There is a distinction between the motherland seen through the eyes of the peasantry, and later, through the eyes of Russian intellectuals. Matushka Rus' (Little Mother Russia) is the home of the Russian peasant; but not the closed, artificial space we usually call 'home'. Here, the mythological Mother Earth and the historical Mother Russia come together in the creative power attributed to the land. This particular home is deeply organic, a source of life and nourishment who is self-sufficient, a self-inseminated motherly figure whose 'sons' are all 'brothers' among themselves. [114]

The intellectual's *motherland* is a lost paradise, since the bourgeois have lost their connection to the soil, unlike the peasantry. It is a place of nostalgia for communion and collectivity. Both Mother Earth and Mother Russia are expressions of creative power.

In the peasant tradition, all nature linked with the soil is part of the wholeness of the central motherly entity. Theological culturologist Georgy Petrovich Fedotov wrote about how 'nature was embracing, and man was unwilling to master her'. She is essentially good, but

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[113] Ibid., pp. 11-12.
[114] Ibid.

she is also a destroyer, somewhat like God himself. This is the sacred dimension of *Russia as the motherland*. The fertile land of the now Ukrainian steps becomes less welcoming in the forests of the North, where the climate is especially harsh, to a certain level destroying itself.[115]

In the context of the 1970s Soviet Union, 'A Few Days in the Life of I.I. Oblomov' was carefully modeled so it would have a politically fashionable meaning – a critical view of the Russian nobility and its lazy, bohemian lifestyle. In fact, this movie speaks loudly and clearly about different views on the sense of human existence and how its perception can be influenced by the cultural context.

Even a new word was invented in Russian language, inspired by this social representation of a specific way of life - *oblomovshchina*, defined as 'carelessness, want of energy, laziness, negligence' has its own place in every Russian dictionary, originating in Goncharov's novel, where the word itself is used.

The action takes place in 19th century Russia, in St. Petersburg. From the very beginning we are being introduced to a lethargic Oblomov, described by the narrator as one 'whose natural state was simply lying around'. He is soon to be 30 years old and 'finds himself in the same place as 10 years ago' (existentially speaking), lives with his old servant, Zahar, and sleeps all day, dreaming about his careless childhood with a nostalgia so strong it hurts. The central target-character of this nostalgia is Oblomov's mother, whom he keeps calling in his dreams, and for whose presence he mostly yearns. [116]

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[115] Ibid., p. 14.
[116] Nikita Mikhalkov, *Neskolko dney iz zhizni I.I. Oblomova* (Mosfilm, 1980).

The metaphor is crystal clear every time he runs aimlessly (or so it seems) through the fairytale-like fields, looking for his 'mother'. A connection to the landscapes and national soil is obvious here, the image of the child running in the fields being a metaphor for the nostalgia for a past Russia, and one could argue, as Birgit Beumers did, that Mihalkov is a special kind of 'romantic nationalist'.[117] However, except for nostalgia and strong attachment, there are no dangerous elements to the national feeling expressed – especially concerning attitudes towards 'the other', symbolized here by his childhood best friend, Stoltz.

Beumers observed how Stoltz and Oblomov were antithetically presented as symbols of the Slavophiles (Oblomov) and the Westernizers (Stoltz)[118]. In 1859, when Goncharov's *Oblomov* was published, the debate was heavily active, as I have mentioned in the first chapter.

As a child, Oblomov was guarded by peasant nannies that used to tell him horrific stories inspired by Russian folklore, and they both left a strong mark on the young Oblomov's mind and imagination. He has always been overly protected (like a citizen-child by his 'mother-state'), as opposed to Stoltz, educated in the spirit of what is said to be 'German rigor' and sent away from home as soon as he finished school, so he could make it on his own. Stoltz is energetic, dynamic, sociable, goal-oriented, ambitious and innovative. Oblomov, on the other hand, is contemplative, analytical, somewhat solitary and very shy. Both their perspectives on the sense of existence are concentrated in a few lines: '*I do not like this life. None of these people are happy. One is unhappy with having to go to work in his office everyday, another one sighs because happiness has avoided him. This is their goal in life.*

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[117] Birgit Beumers, *Nikita Mikhalkov: Between Nostalgia and Nationalism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), p. 63.
[118] Ibid.

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*Neither do I like your social life – they way you admire the symmetrically seated guests – how peaceful they are sitting around the table, playing cards. A wonderful example for a mind that wants a little action! Don't you see they are the ones being asleep their whole lives, the way they stand there? Am I more condemnable than them because I lie in bed without poisoning my mind playing cards? They set up meetings, they invite each other for meals, but there is no hospitality, neither do they like each other. What kind of life is that? What am I supposed to learn there?*'. Stoltz replies, somewhat aggressively: '*And you? What is there to learn from you? [..] That pale man, as you call him [...] looks younger at 60 than you do at your age.*'; '*I don't want to teach anyone anything*', Oblomov replies. '*What for? At 60, a man is supposed to look 60, not 35. [...] Let's assume he lives another 100 years and buys another 100 plantations like Oblomovka. What for? Each man thinks about what is good or bad for his health, what doctor will see him... each man wonders how he should live. But what for? No one wants to think about that. What is your life? Does anybody need you?'.* '*Ah, Ilia*', Stoltz's answer arrives quickly; '*It is easy to lie around all day and judge the ones who are doing something.*'. Oblomov then replies with an illustrative metaphor: '*There is a tree in front of my house. Maybe it has been there for 500 years or more, and it will be there for 1000 more years. How many leaves grew, and then fell this whole time... and how many others will grow and fall... and every leaf has only one life in this tree. Maybe the tree feels the leaves and needs them. This means that part of them will be kept there in the next years, like in the ones before. It's the same with us, no matter who we are. Ever since we are born, there is a sense in our existence. This thought makes me happy – I even feel like crying. Then,*

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*I looked into a book on botanic, and found out that trees did not live that long. I was ashamed of not remembering anything from what I've learned.*'[119]

When Stoltz tries to help Oblomov by convincing him to adjust to his own lifestyle, the attempt fails spectacularly, and it threatens their friendship by bringing tension in the relationship.[120]

The Oblomov - Stoltz relationship dynamic is highly representative for what is commonly known today as 'the polarized view on nationalism', concerning an antithesis between 'the East' and 'the West'. The two are fairly different, but remain best friends who care about each other – neither of them is a negative character, and neither one is better than the other. Nevertheless, their personalities incorporate popular stereotypes concerning the comparison between the 'Oriental' and the 'Occidental' ways of and views on life. In the end, they can co-exist peacefully and harmoniously, and even be best friends, as long as none of them imposes his lifestyle and way of thinking on the other. Surprisingly enough, this idea is anything but nationalistic.

Mikhalkov never omits to incorporate vast, sun-soaked, fairytale-like Russian landscapes in his films. He has often been labeled as 'nationalist' because of his romanticized portrayals of Russia, supported by painting-like landscapes that seem to transcend the palpable world and by strong metaphors ('the mother' is particularly common when talking about Russia). In her book on Nikita Mikhalkov, Birgit Beumers follows a trendy argument according to which his nationalist pride is disguised in the concern for landscape – specifically, the

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[119] Nikita Mikhalkov, *Neskolko dney iz zhizni I.I. Oblomova* (Mosfilm, 1980).
[120] Ibid.

destruction of the landscape.[121] Indeed, the destruction of the Russian landscape is present both in *Burnt by the Sun* and *Burnt by the Sun 2*. However, there is a difference between a metaphor of disagreement with political changes happening in one's country and disguised nationalism.

My perspective on Mikhalkov's films is slightly different from Beumers'. First, I do not see any efforts to disguise anything from Mikhalkov's part. His attachment to his homeland is not only crystal clear, but he has explicitly talked about it several times, when speaking for the public.[122] I consider the term 'nationalist' to oversimplify a very complex collection of works that go beyond nationalism itself. What is perpetuated in his films is not pure nationalism, but a traditional Slavophile rhetoric regarding the *Russian soul,* originating in the peasantry and in the adoration of the greatness of the Russian lands. These representations are meant to speak more of his own perspectives and feelings on the topic, in a rather introspective fashion. After all, art is usually a process of revealing aspects belonging to the artist's inner world.

Unless nationalism is insightful, kind and tolerant towards 'the other', Mihalkov's film *Oblomov* is not a nationalist one – on the contrary, it encompasses highly complex perspectives on differences and how they should be dealt with, relativism and the meaning of life.

The need for one's mother is portrayed in *Oblomov* as something that transcends generations. Much like himself as a child, Oblomov's own boy now runs through the fields,

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[121] Birgit Beumers, *Nikita Mikhalkov: Between Nostalgia and Nationalism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), pp. 96-97.

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calling for his mother. Slowly, he disappears into the dream-like landscape, but his calls can still be clearly heard, while in the background, we hear an Orthodox chant interpreted by the Russian National State Choir. We are thus reminded of a 'better time', when religion was not yet the 'opium of the masses', while we are being suggested that the individual self ends up getting lost without that much needed motherly figure to look up to when in search of our own identity.

We do not encounter the counterpointing function of soundtrack in *Oblomov*, neither do we find polarization, as we will in *Burnt by the Sun.* Instead, the music paraphrases the image, compensating with a melodic and dramatic instrumental soundtrack, which generally focuses on building a certain atmosphere charged with nostalgia throughout the film. The only exception was the Orthodox chant at the end.

Russia had a predominantly agrarian culture for centuries. In the Russian peasant tradition, the earth is the origin of all things, and they all derive from her fertility. The great *baba* (woman) is the soil which encloses the historical Mother Russia within its boundaries. As for Russia's cultural evolution, it was characterized by a shift from Mother Kiev (a city popularly called *the birth-giver*) to *Mother Moscow*, commonly associated with *Great Mother Russia*'s heart. When the capital was moved to Sankt Petersburg once the autocratic regime was installed, Russia showed a masculine face to the Western world. While its masculine side was meant to inhibit possible adversaries and show a physically strong facet, its motherly nature was kept as an internal aspect. [123] The masculine was the facade, while the feminine

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[123] Ibid., pp. 13-14.

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was linked to inner feelings and perspectives – the way the children feel about their mother, who nourishes and protects their emotional and physical integrity.

This is made evident in an illustrative scene showing Nadia and her father together in a boat, surrounded by a remarkably picturesque landscape. He gives her advice and guidance: 'Follow your path, follow it well…and, above all, work hard. Respect your parents and *cherish your Soviet motherland*. […] Can we drift like this for all our lives?'[124], to which Nadia replies, 'Yes, but with mother.'. Naturally, the 'mother' here is the motherland, not Marusyia, Kotov's wife, as we might be inclined to believe. She is then reassured by her father that they would not leave without her, after which they seem to melt into the beautiful, dream-like landscape. The motherly and fatherly embodiments of Russia are now united through the very symbol of their fertility: Nadia. Even Kotov's wife's name, Marusyia, is ultimately reminding of '*Mama Rossiya*' (*Mother Russia*). Nadia herself is a living myth that somehow seems to survive throughout the film[125], because she is the living symbol of the utopian ideals of the 1905 Revolution, a child so innocent she is blind to external evil intentions – a child who is going to be a 'mother' herself, but unfortunately, a disillusioned mother (and she somewhat becomes one, in 'Burnt by the Sun 2', where, as a woman, she nurses Russian hurt soldiers during World War II). Nadia is innocent, but not naive. She is loyal to her father, taught to be a true patriot, she is blunt and honest. What better symbol than such a child in order to represent the revolution that was supposed to reform Russia, morally speaking?

[124] Nikita Mikhalkov, *Utomlennye Solntsem* (Sony Pictures Classics, 1994).
[125] Peter C. Kunze, "Child's Play: Nadia and Romantic Childhood in Nikita Mikhalkov's Burnt by the Sun," *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 7, no. 1 (2013): 25–38.

She is also a vital character who shifts the audience favour away from Dimitriy towards Kotov. General Kotov, a well-known and respected Civil War hero, is a strong believer in the socialist revolution and in the USSR. With a remarkable idealism, he dedicates himself to this cause, convinced that his perpetual struggle will provide future generations with a better world to live in. Dimitriy has thus come to strip Mother Russia of her rightful husband, General Kotov, a defendant of the country's very soul, and corrupt her towards alienation from its essence.

The image opening the film *Burnt by the Sun* is a Soviet red star glowing on top of one of the Kremlin towers. This imagery does more than simply contextualizing the film, in that it is characterized by a specific camera movement, where there is a close-up of the Soviet star in the beginning, followed by a zoom-out effect, allowing us to see three towers and a group of soldiers in military clothing walking on Bolshoy Moskvoretsky Bridge in Moscow. Thus, it is suggested from the very beginning that the clear, seemingly close and bright Soviet dream has distanced itself from people and from its very essence. A strong feeling of depersonalization is transmitted through that scene. The march of the soldiers seems lifeless, tired, without glory. The surroundings are empty and the lighting is gloomy, even though it is morning already (6 AM, to be precise). [126]

Dimitriy enters his home, where he is received by Philippe, a frenchman formerly hired by Dimitriy's father, probably to look after the house and his son. When he is asked to speak Russian, Philippe nostalgically remembers how he was once asked to speak French to Dimitriy. This is reminding of the imitation of French culture in pre-revolutionary Russia,

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[126] Nikita Mikhalkov, *Utomlennye Solntsem* (Sony Pictures Classics, 1994).

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when the Russian nobility of the 18th and 19th century spoke quite a lot of French. We are thus immediately introduced to a meeting between two worlds: Czarist Russia and the one who took it over - Soviet Russia. [127]

*Burnt by the Sun* is named after a 1930s song composed by Jerzy Petersburski. Originally a Polish tango, it became popular in the Soviet Union in the mid-1930s with new Russian lyrics. This song helps convey the central message of the film through a process of polarization (where the music has a specific character and puts into motion the ambiguous character of the image towards the one of the music – otherwise put, the music disambiguates the image). It becomes a symbol and a central motif throughout the film, being sung at key-moments by Nadia, who seems to enjoy the song very much and sings it very often, as if it were meant to be some kind of warning. It is a song about a lost love, whose sadness is compared through metaphors to the feeling of winter taking over after the burning sun. It is also a song about the pain of having to let go of a love that was dangerously idealized, like the sun that shines from afar, but burns once one tries to get close to it and experience its realities. The sun of the Revolution, seemingly bright and promising in the beginning, grows weary of glowing, becoming increasingly overshadowed by the disappointing outcomes, which weren't good enough to prevent such a regime as the Stalinist one. [128]

*Utomlennye solntsem* is the only piece of music in the soundtrack that makes for a process of *polarization*. The rest of it falls under the *paraphrasing* category (the music is additive, congruent with the image) – it does not disambiguate the image; it helps enhance the

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[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid.

meanings that it already conveys, and it creates a specific atmosphere, contributing to the contextualization of pictorial elements. The music is haunting and dramatic, making use of violins as a dominant instrument, but it has a distinctive warmth. Eduard Artemyev composed the soundtrack for *Burnt by the Sun*. He is also known for having produced the soundtrack to other critically acclaimed, famous Russian films, such as Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* and *Stalker,* as well as Konchalovsky's *Siberiade*.

At key-moments during the film, there is a recurrent image of a surreal sun floating around – not high in the sky, but so low it could 'fit' in Kotov's house. [129]This represents the fall of an illusion. Whatever is placed in the sky is associated with heaven, with sanctity – the sun is a symbol of royalty, bliss, absolute radiance. In certain cultures, the sun is the image of a central deity, such as the Sun-god 'Ra' in Ancient Egypt, for instance. The fact that this particular sun has reached such a low level resembles the fall of a god, of an ideal – what happens to an ideal when it is left in the hands of the people. As human beings, we can only take this sun to our own level, since we are mostly incapable of materializing ideals.

For a change, Mikhalkov reveals *Mother Russia* to the world, and not the autocratic fatherly figure which has mostly been reserved for Western eyes. After a long time of Soviet regimes and isolation from the West, he continues to reveal what he perceives as elements that have been hidden, misunderstood and misinterpreted about his homeland.

The mother incorporates the image of a *nest*, where children find themselves (their identity) and refuge, when needed.[130] In fact, the nest metaphor was so popular that in September

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[129] Nikita Mikhalkov, *Utomlennye Solntsem* (Sony Pictures Classics, 1994).
[130] Ibid.

1975, a collaborative artist trio (Mikhail Roshal, Victor Skersis and Gennady Donskoi) put together a performance called *Hatch, Eggs!* at the Hall of Culture pavilion at the Exhibition of Achievements of the National Economy. The performance consisted of all three of them sitting in a big nest, as if they were standing on eggs which were about to hatch. Viewers were also invited to sit in the structure in order to "help the eggs hatch". Near the nest, there were signs stating: "Quiet! Experiment in progress!". As opposed to Mikhalkov's motherly portrayals, this was a critique of 'the nest', which was why its existence was short lived.

Mikhalkov himself was not excused from censorship and constant watch. In his less known film, *Anna: ot Shesti do Vosemnadtsati*, he tells the story of the difficulties he had to go through in order to keep the film materials from prying state eyes for thirteen years, which was the amount of time that the making of the film required. It was not allowed to keep film material hidden, especially not film material that made for a critical history of the regimes in the Soviet Union.

This film covers the history of Russia, told from Mikhalkov's perspective, from 1980 until the end of the Soviet Union in 1991. None of his films deal more explicitly with the notion of Russian identity than *Anna: ot Shesti do Vosemnadtsati*.

Throughout the film, Mikhalkov follows one of his daughters; this time not Nadia, but Anna, as she matures from 6 years old to 18, and makes a parallel between Anna growing up and the historical evolution of the Soviet Union. Over twelve years, he asks Anna the same questions: 'What do you fear most?', 'What do you like most?', 'What would you most like to have?' and 'What is it that you dislike more than anything in the world?'. The film captures a child growing up in the Soviet Union and answers several questions: How much

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does she really understand from what is going on in her country? How does this affect her grasp of her own identity and her relationship with her homeland? How does this influence inner world; her fears, her perspectives? Here is what she ended up saying when interviewed by her father for the film, when she turned 17: *Maybe now I've come to realize one thing: my homeland, perhaps, is my only possession. That is, something which can be lost within a minute, because it's impossible to predict what's going to happen with our country. So there's a danger of losing whatever we have, a kind of inner pivot which is ever present.*[131]

When asked what 'homeland' meant for her, Anna responded vaguely that she didn't know. For her, as for so many of us, 'What is Russianness?' remains an open question. However, she described her homeland as 'something big and very beautiful, something to be treated with trust and love'. Mikhalkov wanted a clearer answer, and then she added that for her, the homeland was associated with the countryside. After the conversation, a scene follows, showing once again the vastness and beauty of the Russian land through a picturesque countryside landscape.

The nostalgia directed towards the motherly figure is doubled here, by the unfortunate passing of Mikhalkov's biological mother, whom the film is dedicated to. As Mikhalkov nostalgically talks about his mother, it becomes increasingly difficult to differentiate between the two motherly figures, suggesting a transcendence of the organic world into the sacred, spiritual motherly whole.

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[131] Nikita Mikhalkov, *Anna: Ot Shesti Do Vosemnadtsati* (Pyramide Distribution (France), 1994).

All throughout the film, the music paraphrases the visual material. Out of all the films analyzed within this study, *Anna: Ot Shesti Do Vosemnadtsati* has the bluntest, most easily identifiable message. Thus, the music was used as an instrument to increase the intensity of the message, rather than disambiguating it.

In the end, when the parallel between Anna and Oblomov is drawn, we can hear the music theme from *Oblomov*, which had been released fourteen years before *Anna: Ot Shesti Do Vosemnadtsati*. This was done in a very efficient attempt at paraphrasing the visual material. It considerably adds to the impact brought by reminiscing the purely Slavophile – like character that is Goncharov's Ilia Ilych Oblomov.

Edward Nicolay Artemyev was the soundtrack composer for *Oblomov, Burnt by the Sun*, and *Anna: Ot Shesti Do Vosemnadtsati*. His collaboration with Mkhalkov is apparently a long a fruitful one.

Mikhalkov makes a parallel between his 17-year old daughter and an imaginary 17-year old Oblomov. He wonders if at his daughter's age, Oblomov would have broken into tears as well when talking about his Russian motherland. In the end, he concludes that, despite the 'godlessness' (namely, the times of the Soviet Union) that separated the two, 'the all-embracing and truly passionate love whose force and purity make it known worldwide as the mysterious Russian soul could not be shattered'.[132]

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[132] Nikita Mikhalkov, *Anna: Ot Shesti Do Vosemnadtsati* (Pyramide Distribution (France), 1994).

## The Origins of 'Nikitophobia'

Cinematographer Vladimir Osherov invented the term *Nikitophobia* in his 2013 book, *Seeking the Truth: Nikita Mikhalkov and the Russian dilemma*. This was not at all far-fetched, as Mikhalkov ended up being currently 'the most hated film maker in Russia'.[133]

For Nikita Mikhalkov, the Soviet Union was a 'godless empire'. It had all the tools necessary for the maintenance of an empire, except for a God. Once again, we are introduced to the image of the Soviet regimes as the ones who stripped Russia of its soul, a soul that resided in Orthodoxy, without which Russia no longer had an essence of its own. In *Burnt by the Sun* (1994) and *Anna: Ot Shesti Do Vosemnadtsati* (1994), the presence of Orthodoxy did not bother the public. It seemed to be clear that Mikhalkov's goal was in no way the worldwide promotion of Orthodoxy, but to define Russia in a complete manner and to present the image he perceived as authentic to the Russian public, as well as the public abroad. However, in *Burnt by the Sun 2* (2010), Orthodoxy appeared again as a defining element for Russia, and the focus was the oppression suffered by religion during the Stalinist years. The portrayal was not exclusivist, since a religious Muslim soldier also appears in the film, and suffers from the same kind of oppression. However, in 2010 this element, much like other recurring elements in Mikhalkov's films, was dismissed by mainstream film publications and reviews as nationalistic and a means of promoting Orthodox Christianity.[134]

[133] Vladimir Osherov, *Seeking the Truth: Nikita Mikhalkov and the Russian Dilemma* (Los Gatos, CA: Smashwords, 2013), p. 7.
[134] Kirk Honeycutt, "Exodus: Burnt by the Sun 2: Film Review," *The Hollywood Reporter*, 2010, http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/exodus-burnt-sun-2-film-29667.

Burnt by the Sun 2 has been criticized by both mainstream Western and Russian publications. In April 2010, *The Guardian* published an article on the film, accusing Mikhalkov of sticking to Kremlin's version of World War II: the 'heroic Soviet triumph over Nazi Germany'.[135] This would not be a problem, except for the fact that the image of the Russian Army in the Second World War is in not honorably represented in the film. The Russians are disorganized, to the point where they precipitate in blowing up a bridge at the wrong time.[136] Mikhalkov himself stated that his goal was bringing to the light the drama of war and the suffering that it implied[137], not the victorious Soviet Union.

The dramatic daydreams of characters regarding their peaceful past and homeland were dismissed in 2010 as 'too repetitive'[138], while before they seemed to pose no problems to film critics and reviewers. In fact, Mikhalkov won an Academy Award in 1995 for the first part of *Burnt by the Sun*.

On the mainstream film website *Rotten Tomatoes*, *Burnt by the Sun* (1994) has a 4.3 out of 5 rating[139], while the second part was rated at only 2.7 out of five points.[140] *Oblomov* surprisingly received a score of 4.1. *Anna: Ot Shesti Do Vosemnadtsati* was not rated at all, seeing as the film was not properly popularized.[141] Considering the multitude of nostalgic

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[135] Luke Harding, "Nikita Mikhalkov's Burnt by the Sun 2 Becomes Russia's Most Expensive Flop," *The Guardian*, 2010, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/apr/27/nikita-mikhalkov-russia-war-film.

[136] Nikita Mikhalkov, *Utomlennye Solntsem 2* (Studiya Monolit, 2010).

[137] Xenia Prilepskaya, "6,000 Flock to Kremlin for 'Burnt by the Sun' Sequel," *The Moscow Times*, 2010, http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/6000-flock-to-kremlin-for-burnt-by-the-sun-sequel/404158.html.

[138] Luke Harding, "Nikita Mikhalkov's Burnt by the Sun 2 Becomes Russia's Most Expensive Flop," *The Guardian*, 2010, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/apr/27/nikita-mikhalkov-russia-war-film.

[139] "Burnt by the Sun (1994)," *Rotten Tomatoes*, n.d., http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/burnt_by_the_sun/.

[140] "Burnt by the Sun 2 (Utomlyonnye Solntsem 2) (2010)," *Rotten Tomatoes*, n.d., http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/burnt_by_the_sun_2/.

[141] "Neskolko Dney Iz Zhizni I.I. Oblomova (Oblomov) (1980)," *Rotten Tomatoes*, n.d., http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/oblomov/.

elements, and the repeated evoking of the exceptionally vast and picturesque Russian land, this is a curiously high rating.

The same thing happens on what is maybe the most visited film website of all, called *IMDB*. On *IMDB*, out of a number of maximum 10 points, *Burnt by the Sun* (1994) received an 8.0 rating out of 10, while the second part was rated at only 4.1. *Oblomov* is rated at 7.8, and *Anna: Ot Shesti Do Vosemnadtsati* received a 7.6 score. Considering these aspects, why the striking difference in the response to *Burnt by the Sun 2: Exodus*?

Things in the Russian socio-political realm, as well as abroad, have definitely changed since the early 1990s. Mikhalkov's close friendship with Russian President Vladimir Putin often generates suspicion regarding the honesty of his work, and the amount of political charge it carries.[142] In turn, Mikhalkov has declared in an interview for *The Huffington Post* that his closeness to the power elite and his films are two completely separate realities, and he makes a point of keeping things as such. He added that he never asked Putin for financial support, and that he manages to find funding for his films, as the state offers him a limited amount for each film.[143]

When accused of glorifying violence on screen, Mikhalkov responded that the false glamour on Russian television that one sees 24 hours a day represented a much bigger danger. The only desire for spectators, he added, was superficial: they wanted to be rich and famous, and pleasure was all they dreamt about. He ended mentioning that people whose central

[142] Xenia Prilepskaya, "6,000 Flock to Kremlin for 'Burnt by the Sun' Sequel," *The Moscow Times*, 2010, http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/6000-flock-to-kremlin-for-burnt-by-the-sun-sequel/404158.html.

[143] Karin Badt, "Russia Is a Cruel Place: A Conversation with Directors Nikita Mikhalkov and Sergei Loznitsa," *The Huffington Post*, 2010, U.S. edition.

value is comfort will, of course, not feel very well when seeing his movies.[144] It would be needless to go into details about many other film directors all over the world who made use of violence and were not attacked for it – moreover, in the case of director Quentin Tarantino, for instance, violence became a defining mark, and today most people are aware of his distinct hyper-real violence. Curiously enough, in the same year, 2010, Tarantino declared for The Telegraph that extreme violence in film was 'the best way to control an audience's emotions'.[145]

Another reason why Mikhalkov is now vastly hated is because it has become impossible for a large part of the public to separate his emergence as a political figure from his image as an artist, namely a film director.

Indeed, Nikita Mikhalkov's political activity is not at all compatible with the political trends present nowadays almost all over the world. He has more than once recommended that Russia renounce the ideal of liberal democracy, and embrace enlightened conservatism instead.[146]

In 2010, he sent a 63-page political manifesto to the Kremlin, describing the current Russian social order as 'a volatile mixture of West-oriented liberal modernization, arbitrariness of local bureaucrats and pervasive corruption'. According to him, the essence of the Russian people and of what they need is not reflected by modernization reforms, or by liberal institutions. He dismisses the liberal take on the market economy as unrealistic, a 'fairy-

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[144] Ibid.
[145] "Quentin Tarantino: Violence Is the Best Way to Control an Audience," *The Telegraph*, 2010, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/film-news/6975563/Quentin-Tarantino-violence-is-the-best-way-to-control-an-audience.html.
[146] Oksana Boyko, "Director's Directives," *Russia Today*, 2010, http://rt.com/politics/mikhalkov-political-manifesto-democracy/.

tale'. Instead, he recommends strengthening the role of the state and improving people's trust in the government, as well as Russia's image throughout the world.[147]

But what does Mikhalkov's enlightened conservatism consist of?

First, civil society in enlightened conservatism is as an engine for the country's growth. A fair combination of freedom and power based on the unity between truth and law, Mikhalkov said, leaves no need for revolutions or counter-revolutions. This unity constitutes the ideological basis for enlightened conservatism.[148]

Second, the respect for law and order deriving from this ideological alternative stands for respect for human rights. The electoral base of Russian conservatives, he claims, encompass all healthy aspects of Russian society: 'the good-willed and responsible, law-abiding, entrepreneurial, though not necessarily wealthy citizens'.[149]

One thing that is not featured in Mikhalkov's politically charged declarations is class struggle. He sees himself as an intellectual, a *bourgeois*, but identifies his motherland both with the painting-like, heavenly countryside landscapes, and with its supposed Imperial nature.

Briefly put, Mikhalkov is an Eurasianist at heart. Rumors about him running for office circulated and gained popularity, but nothing of the sort has happened for now. For Mikhalkov, Russians have 'a supranational, imperial mentality' that defines their position in the Eurasian system of coordinates. 'Failure to understand Russia's role and place in the

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[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid.

world', he said, 'is dangerous at the very least.' At its worst, it could be fatal to the Russian state, because by means of misunderstanding itself, Russia can end up facing the death of the Orthodox civilization, as well as 'the disappearance of the Russian nation and to the dismemberment of the Russian state.'[150]

Apart from the currently widely unpopular ideology of his choice, Mikhalkov is facing a kind of hatred that transcends established factional, political or philosophical divisions. Communists attack him for his constant criticism of the Soviet Union, while Russian Orthodox Church conservatives accuse him of being too liberal and Westernized, which is all too ironic. We can now easily conclude that the real problem the public has is not with Mikhalkov the artist, but with Mikhalkov as a public, political figure.[151]

Unfortunately, for now there is little to no separation between the two, and his popularity among both the Russian and non-Russian public is progressively decreasing.

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[150] Ibid.
[151] Vladimir Osherov, *Seeking the Truth: Nikita Mikhalkov and the Russian Dilemma* (Los Gatos, CA: Smashwords, 2013), p. 7.

# Conclusion

As Nikita Mikhalkov's older daughter Anna concluded herself in the film *Anna: Ot Shesti Do Vosemnadtsati* (1994), identity, whether personal or collective, is accepted as 'perhaps our most treasured and guarded possession'. If we lose an identity, we will most likely struggle to recover and re-form it.[152]

*Russian*, as well as *Russian identity* remains an ambiguous concept even for Russian citizens themselves, which has been described by Mikhalkov as problematic and possibly fatal for Russia's future.[153]

My research contributes to the gradual disambiguation of these notions, by choosing some of Nikita Mikhalkov's films as an object of study.

When looking at Russian film directors whose work goes back to the times of the Soviet regime it is important to know that the role of film director carries more weight there than it would have anywhere in the Western world. There were no film producers in the Soviet Union, as the role of the producer was being fulfilled by the state apparatus itself, in terms of funding, control of scripting, production and distribution.[154] That is why it was not until *Burnt by the Sun* (1994) that Mikhalkov released harsh, open criticism of some of the regimes in the Soviet Union (namely, Stalinism) on the big screen.

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[152]Donald Winchester, "Russia's Identity Crisis," *Vision Journal*, 2008, http://www.vision.org/visionmedia/current-events-politics-russian-identity/5814.aspx.

[153] Oksana Boyko, "Director's Directives," *Russia Today*, 2010, http://rt.com/politics/mikhalkov-political-manifesto-democracy/.

[154] Vladimir Osherov, *Seeking the Truth: Nikita Mikhalkov and the Russian Dilemma* (Los Gatos, CA: Smashwords, 2013), p. 8.

Mikhalkov himself states that his work is intended to matter both in terms of the construction of representations, and the way they inhere in artistic representations, as the two sets end up supporting each other.[155]

Rather than screening a political philosophy, Mikhalkov aims at responding to a Universalist, Western model for Russia. His films are characterized by an antithesis between a Russia rescued from following Western models of statehood and its false presumption of a national corollary. This may be a reason why the Russian intelligentsia has come to hate Mikhalkov and his cinema. They are attributed a social identity they resist: elite, but state-populist; European, yet not Western.[156]

I have chosen to link my research to an element in the absence of which one can not consider studying Russian identity: Russia as a *metaphorical motherland.*

This metaphor is often central to Mikhalkov's films, such as *Oblomov*, *Burnt by the Sun*, or even newer films, such as *12* (2007). In *12* Mikhalkov goes even further, portraying Czarist Russia as *the grandmother*, seeing as the motherly part was already popularly associated with Soviet Russia, and the cradle of Russian spirituality was undoubtedly, for him, Imperial Russia, and not the questionable autocracy that characterized the Kievan Rus'. Like a *Matrioshka* doll, out of Imperial Russia emerged Soviet Russia, but its essence ultimately remained the same.

So, what is Russianness for Mikhalkov?

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[155] Nancy Condee, *The Imperial Trace : Recent Russian Cinema* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 112-113.
[156] Ibid.

The exclusivist ethnic understanding of Russianness is not relevant to him. In his eyes, Russia's very nature is diverse, and incorporates many different peoples.[157] In fact, his central political vision targets the way in which a multiethnic community maintains coherence under a strong state leadership.[158] The mysterious Russian soul, as he calls it in *Anna: Ot Shesti Do Vosemnadtsati,* is both the mark and the essence of Russianness.

Nikita Mikhalkov is deeply committed to restore endangered values that, for him, constitute the very core of Russianness, and in the absence of which Russia would practically disappear. This is why he rejects modernism and the acquisition of modern values by Russia; he sees modernism as the main factor that deteriorates Russian authenticity.[159]

Orthodoxy is indispensable to the Russian soul, as portrayed by Mikhalkov. In the absence of a spiritual component, Russia will end up like its Soviet version has: Godless and empty of itself.

The divine dimension of the nation fuses with the metaphor of Russia as *motherland*. In Orthodox religion, the motherly figure is sacred, and so the motherland becomes sacred as well. In fact, the sanctity of the homeland is understood more profoundly, as it is linked to Mother Earth, from whom all things originate, and ancient Ugrian mythology as well.

The role of Orthodoxy in defining Russianness brings to the light the moral dimension of Russian identity, and for Mikhalkov, this moral dimension is chased away by Russia's fascination with liberal democracy.

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[157] Oksana Boyko, "Director's Directives," *Russia Today*, 2010, http://rt.com/politics/mikhalkov-political-manifesto-democracy/.

[158] Nancy Condee, *The Imperial Trace : Recent Russian Cinema* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 111.

[159] Ibid., p. 110.

Mikhalkov's discourse resembles the one adopted by the Slavophiles in the nineteenth and twentieth - century Russia. Today's ideological correspondent is Eurasianism, an ideology containing Neo-Slavophile elements. This is a widely unpopular ideological affiliation, especially in the Western World, which brings us to the question of the radical shift in the public response to Nikita Mikhalkov's films.

As a result of proving the visible continuity in the way in which Russia has been portrayed by Mikhalkov, as well as regarding the semiotic elements used in these depictions, I have concluded that the line between Nikita Mikhalkov as an artist and Mikhalkov as a public, political figure has become increasingly blurry overtime, and this culminated with the widely negative response to *Burnt by the Sun 2* (2010).

More and more elements in his films are linked with his real-life public, politically charged declarations, even though he has repeatedly declared his lack of such intentions in interviews. The films Mikhalkov made are rather an expression of his inner world related to his homeland and various existential questions, such as the very meaning of life in *Oblomov*, than an attempt to manipulate the public into venerating Russia.

For now, Nikita Mikhalkov does not give any signs of wanting to retire, and his controversial public persona is becoming increasingly associated with his films. Nevertheless, regardless of whether he is approved or not, his work remains a significant point of reference when embarking on the enigmatic and difficult task of understanding Russianness.

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