Russification: Word and Practice 1863–1914

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LATE IMPERIAL RUSSIA is often portrayed as a repressive and russifying state, in Lenin's words a "prison house of nations." Certainly there is much truth in this portrayal: non-Russian ethnicities from Tatars to Poles, Jews to Moldavians, Lithuanians to Komi, all suffered from some form of legal and/or cultural discrimination in this era (in particular after 1863). On the other hand, it was precisely these roughly two generations from the Great Reforms of the 1860s to 1914 that witnessed a blossoming of non-Russian national cultures and the development of modern political movements among non-Russian nationalities to demand national and political rights. Obviously russification (*obrusenie*) was a failure. But what did "russification" mean for contemporary Russians? What did Russian officials think they were doing, what policies were adopted, and how were these policies carried out on the ground? Obviously one paper cannot answer these questions in full, but the present state of research does allow us to hazard a few arguments and conclusions.

We must first of all always keep in mind that the Russian Empire at least since the reign of Ivan the Terrible had been a multinational state. At the same time, however, the ruling elite in Russia never saw matters in quite that way.[1] The centrality of Russian culture and in particular the Russian Orthodox religion was paramount, and the concept of diversity (certainly in any positive sense) quite lacking. While the Russian language distinguishes between *rossiiskii* and *russkii*—the first term being more strictly geographical and not necessarily ethnic and the second the normal ethnonym for Great Russians—it should be

[1] For two quite different views on Russia as empire, see Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1997); and Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and its Rivals* (New Haven: Yale University, 2001).

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remembered that Russians in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, both officials and "public" (*obshchestvo*), very seldom used *rossiiskii* except in official formulations (such as *Rossiiskaia Imperiia*—"Russian Empire"). Even when referring to such matters as "Russian state idea," where one might expect *rossiiskii*, the strictly ethnic *russkii* is almost invariably used.

We must also be careful not to impose our own cultural and moral expectations and categories on the past. While we take for granted the value of cultures per se, irrespective of their utility or "level of civilization," on the whole nineteenth-century Russians (and, it should be noted, most other Europeans) saw cultures and religions in a rather clear hierarchy. While non-Russian cultures and diverse religions were tolerated in the empire (and contemporary Russians of a nationalist bent made much of this toleration), toleration does not necessarily imply respect or affection. The writings of the period (both official documents and published sources) reflect rather clearly the assumption that "European civilization" was valued over Asian or African culture, and that Christianity was on the whole considered more progressive and "true" than other religions. Russian nationalist writers predictably praised the purity and truth of Orthodoxy, contrasting it with the false, "jesuitical," and power-hungry nature of Catholicism and sterile, overly rationalistic, and barren Protestantism.

While contemporary educated Russians did not on the whole respect culture per se, they did esteem certain elements of culture, in particular high culture and historical tradition. For this reason, while officials and Russian nationalists rarely have a positive word for Poles, they never advocate (and indeed would have considered absurd) the "russification" of the Polish nation in the sense of replacing Polish cultural traditions with Russian. The cultural value (and strength) of Polish literature and the Catholic religion could not be denied. On the other hand, just to take one close example, the Lithuanians often disappear entirely in discussions of policy in the Northwest Provinces (present-day Belarus and Lithuania), though they constituted a larger percentage of the population than did Poles.[2] Because the Lithuanians lacked a long tradition of written language, Russian officialdom felt considerably freer in dealing with them—in particular in the ill-fated attempt to force Lithuanians to adopt the Cyrillic alphabet for their language. Jews were similarly "allowed to exist," though their religion and culture were often denigrated as "Asian," medieval, and backward.

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[2] Theodore R. Weeks, "Russification and the Lithuanians, 1863–1905," *Slavic Review* 60.1 (Spring 2001): 96–114.

Another factor that bedeviled the concept of russification in the sense of total cultural assimilation was the basic conservatism of the Russian Empire. Identity continued to be seen much more in terms of origins than as a personal choice. Russian administrators, who never succeeded in coming up with a legal definition of "Pole," despite the decades of restrictions on that ethnic group, regularly spoke of individuals "of Polish descent" or, alternatively, "of Russian descent," making identity a function of birth. Certainly, Russians with names like Witte, Bunge, or Wyszniegradski were far from rare, but even Witte himself complained in his memoirs that certain hyper-Russians refused to consider Russian anybody whose surname didn't end in -ov.[3] And we have the literary evidence of Tuzenbach in Chekhov's *Three Sisters*: "Perhaps you think—this German is getting over-excited. But on my word of honor, I'm Russian. I can't even speak German. My father is Orthodox. . . ." Tuzenbach's special pleading alerts us to the complicated and contentious issue of "What is Russian?"—an issue that in many ways has not been settled to this day.[4] But it is clear that while some individuals "of foreign descent" could be accepted as Russians, this acceptance was never automatic or particularly cordial.[5]

Edward C. Thaden has distinguished between three varieties of russification that he sees going back to the time of Catherine the Great at least. In the middle of the nineteenth century, he pointed out, the active verb form *obrusit'* (to russify, make Russian) began to predominate over the passive *obruset'* (to become Russian). He has also distinguished between three varieties of russification, namely, unplanned, administrative, and cultural.[6] Unplanned russification refers to the natural process whereby certain individuals take on Russian culture and language, usually over several generations—as in the case of Chekhov's figure Tuzenbach. Administrative russification is the demand by the Russian government that the Russian language must be used in administration

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[3] Sidney Harcave, trans. and ed., *The Memoirs of Count Witte* (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1990), 272.

[4] For mainly literary discussions of this theme, see Robert Belknap, ed., *Russianness: Studies on a Nation's Character* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1990).

[5] The most obvious example of a suspicious attitude toward integrating one ethnic group into the Russian nation would be the Jews. See, for example, Irvin M. Aronson, "The Attitudes of Russian Officials in the 1880s toward Jewish Assimilation and Emigration," *Slavic Review* 34.1 (1975): 1–18.

[6] Edward C. Thaden et al., *Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland, 1855–1914* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1981), 7–8. See also his "Russification in Tsarist Russia" and "Russian Nationality Policy, 1881–1914," in E. C. Thaden with the collaboration of Marianna Forster Thaden, *Interpreting History: Collective Essays on Russia's Relations with Europe*, East European Monographs, No. 304 (Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 1990), 211–30.

throughout the empire, even in areas where few native Russians resided. Finally, cultural russification refers to an active policy that aims to replace a population's native culture with Russian. My own research suggests that, while administrative russification (at least in principle) became nearly universal after the 1860s (Poles and Catholics were effectively barred from government employment in the western borderlands), cultural russification—even among Belarusians—limped behind and the attempt to "bring closer" to Russian culture (or, if you will, to russify) Poles and Lithuanians was a complete fiasco.

Certainly, the Russian government felt the need to safeguard its borderlands, in particular after the spectacular growth of the state to the west and south during the eighteenth century. There needed to be a common language of administration (though, in fact, German continued to be used in the Baltic in administration well into the nineteenth century) and a common loyalty to the Romanov dynasty. But there was no immediate necessity for the masses to be Russian. This "need" began to be perceived only in the second half of the nineteenth century, and even then was very much disputed within Russian society and officialdom. While the centralism that was the hallmark of the Russian imperial state (despite its many inefficiencies) pushed for at least bureaucratic russification, the conservative nature of ruling elites in the state allowed for a considerable amount of leeway for non-Russians, both elite and peasant.

Furthermore, the Russian state was faced with the enormous problem of "russifying" its Russian subjects. Not only did Russian officialdom aim to make good Russians out of the peasants of Belarusian and Ukrainian ethnicities, it seems clear that peasants in Tambov or Kursk, though indisputably Great Russian, had little national consciousness in the sense of a feeling of solidarity and shared experience with other Russians throughout the empire. Again, religious identities were far stronger than nationality. While our information on provincial life is often sketchy, it seems very likely that the phenomenon described by Eugen Weber in *Peasants into Frenchmen* was even more pressing in Russia.[7] That is, peasants tend to identify with a village or at most a region, but seldom with a "nation." As the number of schools increased and as more Russian peasant lads were inducted into the reformed army (from the mid-1870s), one may posit that the level of "common Russianness" must have increased, but we need more specific research on this topic.[8]

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[7] Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1976).

[8] See, for example, the suggestive chapter "Nationalism and National Identity," in Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature 1861–1917* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1985).

Before we turn to more specific matters, we must consider why russification in whatever form became so pronounced in the second half of the nineteenth century. The reasons for this are many. First of all, after the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, the Russian state found itself compelled to take into account "the public" on a scale hitherto unthinkable. To be sure, the empire failed rather spectacularly to "popularize itself," and in part this failure is attributable to the unwillingness to appeal more strongly to the Russian nation as a basis of political legitimacy. Benedict Anderson speaks suggestively of "stretching the short, tight, skin of the nation over the gigantic body of the empire."[9] While Anderson often gets his facts wrong for Russia, the metaphor is both appropriate and suggestive of the problems facing even a rather modest and tolerant program of, so to speak, "civic russification," that would have recognized bilingualism and respected non-Russian cultures.

Another reason behind russifying tendencies from the 1860s was the Polish Rebellion of 1863. Unlike most other minority nationalities, the Poles presented (at least in the eyes of Tsar Alexander II—but that was enough) a direct threat to the stability and integrity of the Russian Empire. After the insurrection was crushed, the Russian authorities put into place a number of policies to reduce Polish cultural influence, in particular over peasant folk such as Belarusians and Lithuanians (and to some extent Ukrainians).[10] As we will see, the Russian authorities always understood these policies as defensive, that is, aimed at preventing polonization of this "eternally Russian land" (present-day Belarus, western Ukraine, and Lithuania). While the Poles were respected as the bearers of a centuries-old national tradition, the strength of this culture also inspired fear in Russian nationalists.

Similarly, from the 1870s St. Petersburg began increasingly to distrust the German elements on the western frontier. The unification of Germany in 1871 upset the balance of power established by the Congress of Vienna. The industrial and military might of this new power could easily be turned against Russia, and it was at least plausible to see in the German elites a potential "fifth column." The personal dislike of Tsar Alexander III for the Germans (fomented by his Danish-born wife) certainly also played a role here in the anti-German policies

[9] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 86.

[10] See, for example, Theodore R. Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863–1914* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 1996), esp. chap. 5: "East Meets West: Russification and Coexistence."

adopted in the 1880s.[11] There was also, however, a general feeling that Russia's interests would be best defended if the borderlands were themselves more Russian in character. Other factors such as modernization and a generalized rise of national feeling and nationalism throughout Europe also propelled the Russian government toward russifying measures.

Why, one may ask, did the Russian government fail to push russifying measures to their logical extreme? At least three reasons may be given. First, simple numbers. According to the census of 1897, ethnic Russians made up only 43.3 percent of the total population. Even if we accept official Russia's definition of Belarusians and Ukrainians as being mere "branches" of the larger Russian nation, that percentage only goes up to 65.3.[12] Second, the Russian state never had the resources to launch a thorough-going program of cultural russification. One should bear in mind that even in the empire's final years, the majority of Russian children—especially in the countryside—failed to attend any kind of school at all.[13] Finally, the ruling elites of the Russian Empire, for all the nostalgic Muscovite utterances of the last two tsars, never felt entirely comfortable with Russian nationalism. Nationalism is, after all, an implicitly democratic movement, claiming as it does that the state should embody the aspirations of the nation. Certainly this was far from the *Weltanschauung* of Alexander III or Nicholas II, though they came closest of any tsars to embracing Russian language and Russian Orthodoxy as a model for order and political reliability.[14] Nicholas II was not a nationalist leader by any means, and not just because he wrote letters to the tsarina mainly in English.

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[11] See, for example, Edward C. Thaden et al., *Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland, 1855–1914* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1981). On the "German question" in the south (which involved peasants rather than landowners), see Dietmar Neutatz, *Die "deutsche Frage" im Schwarzmeergebiet und in Wolhynien: Politik, Wirtschaft, Mentalität und Alltag im Spannungsfeld von Nationalismus und Modernisierung*, Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte des östlichen Europas, vol. 37 (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 1993).

[12] Statistics from 1897 cited in A. I. Kastelianskii, ed., *Formy natsional'nago dvizheniia v sovremennykh gosudarstvakh. Avstro-Vengriia. Rossiia. Germaniia* (St. Petersburg: "Obshchestvennaia pol'za," 1910), 280.

[13] According to contemporary figures, in the empire only 30.1 percent of children aged eight to eleven attended schools (in cities 46.6 percent, in the countryside 28.3 percent). While this figure does not distinguish between Russians and other nationalities, there seems little reason to think that Russians were significantly "above average" in this respect (in 1897 the literacy rate among Russians was 22.9 percent, almost exactly that of the empire as a whole—21.2 percent). Statistics from *Rossiia 1913 god. Statistiko-dokumental'nyi spravochnik* (St. Petersburg: Blits, 1995), 326–27.

[14] Richard Wortman shows brilliantly the gap between would-be "Russian national" ceremonies and the realities of power in his *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, vol. 2: *From Alexander II to the Abdication of Nicholas II* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2000).

Up to now we have discussed the when and why of russification in general terms. The rest of this paper will be devoted to more concrete examples of the rhetoric surrounding russification. First we will examine an official—and notorious—voice of russification, in the person of General M. N. Muraviev ("the Hangman," as he came to be known) and other officials in the Northwest Provinces. We will then consider discussions of russification in Russian society, using as a concrete example the writings of Ivan Aksakov.

Russification: Official Perceptions and Justifications

When one is reading through official documents, reports (*otchety*), discussions within the Ministry of the Interior, correspondence, and the like, it is striking how infrequently the word russification (either *russifikatsiia* or *obrusenie*—or any of their cognates) is used. Of course, one is only struck by such an absence because of a disappointed expectation. Anticipating that discussions of non-Russian regions were dominated by the urge to russify, one finds that in fact many other factors—most of them pedestrian and banal matters of everyday administration—most often outweighed any consideration of the "Russian national task." At least, that has been the experience of this researcher when looking at the region of the Western Provinces and the Kingdom of Poland (roughly present-day western Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, and parts of Poland). It will be interesting to compare these tentative conclusions with those reached by researchers studying other areas, in particular non-Christian and non-European borderlands, of the Russian Empire.[15]

The following remarks will concentrate on the Northwest Provinces, where the landowning class was predominantly Polish (at least in the 1860s, but to some extent even into the twentieth century), towns were small and populated by various ethnicities, in particular Poles, Jews, and Russians, and the peasantry was Belarusian (in the east) and Lithuanian (in the west). This region differs from most other "non-Russian" areas in that the Russian government (and to a great extent

[15] Russians were certainly not immune from the general European superiority complex vis-à-vis Asians or Africans. But in practical terms it does not seem that Russia pursued radical russifying agendas in Central Asia or the Caucasus. On the contrary, at least in Central Asia the government was at pains to avoid stirring up trouble with local Muslims, and hence considerably limited the ability of Orthodox priests to proselytize among them (even while speaking—at least in some instances—of the need to "assimilate the local population with the Russian nationality"). T. Weeks, "Slavdom, Civilization, Russification: Comments on Russia's World-Historical Mission, 1861–1878," *Ab imperio* 2 (2002), 238.

the Russian public) considered these provinces to be "eternally Russian" land, buttressing this opinion with endless and often tedious historical arguments harking back to the time of Riurik and Co. At least from 1863 Russian policy was officially one of russification—this land was to be re-claimed by the Russian nation and cleansed of Polish and Catholic influences. Hence one would expect russification here to be more consistent, harsh, and unrelenting than in other areas (such as Central Asia or even the neighboring Baltic provinces, where the Russian element was far smaller—at least according to St. Petersburg's own terms).[16] In fact, as we will see, while the government never repudiated russification as a long-term goal, it did not devote significant resources to this goal. Furthermore, even when enacting such harsh measures as the interdiction of Lithuanian publishing in Latin letters, officials unfailingly emphasized the defensive, anti-Polish nature of this measure and not the attempt to make Russians out of Lithuanian peasants. To back up these statements, I will consider two groups of sources: the writings and actions of M. N. Muraviev and various annual reports from Kovno province written from 1863 to 1903. While this source base is obviously narrow, I believe that the conception of russification revealed here reflects broader trends. These sources reveal a lack of consistency in implementing, and indeed in understanding of, "russification."

One of the best spokesmen for this policy—in effect its creator—was General (later Count) Mikhail Nikolaevich Muraviev, who was governor general of the Northwest Provinces from 1863 to 1866. Muraviev's career was long linked with these provinces, where he served during the early 1830s and helped put down the 1831 Insurrection. Already in late 1830 Muraviev had written on the need to "draw together" Mogilev province, where he was governor, with the rest of the Russian Empire. Muraviev pointed out that "the majority of the population of Belorussia was essentially [fundamentally—*korennoe*] Russian, aside from the landowners" and went on to advocate a number of measures, mainly aimed against the Catholic and Uniate clergy, with the purpose of "drawing together" (*sblizhenie*) Belorussia and Russia.[17] Perhaps because he already saw the local population as Russian,

[16] Regarding the Baltic provinces, one should bear in mind that the russification measures of the 1880s, including the transformation of Dorpat University into the Russian-language Iur'ev University, took place in the context of very mixed nationalities. Ironically, by weakening the German upper class, Russian officialdom almost certainly aided the cause of Latvian and Estonian nationalisms—which was very far from being the government's aim. On this era the best introductory source remains Thaden et al., *Russification.*

[17] M. N. Murav'ev, "Vsepoddanneishaia zapiska Mogilevskago grazhdanskago gubernatora Murav'eva o nravstvennom polozhenii Mogilevskoi gubernii i o sposobakh sblizheniia onoi s Rossiiskoiu Imperieiu" in "Chertyre politicheskiia zapiski Grafa Mikhaila Nikolaevicha Murav'eva Vilenskago," *Russkii arkhiv* (June 1885), 161–75.

he never used the word *obrusenie*, using instead *sblizhenie* (bringing near, drawing together). In fact, even long after 1863, one encounters *sblizhenie* (and *sliianie*—"merging") in official documents far more frequently than any specific terms for russification. Perhaps this is simply a matter of word choice, but I would argue that it indicates a deep desire to emphasize unity and order over any kind of activist cultural offensive. Typically, Muraviev's complaints about the Catholic and Uniate clergy emphasized their role in polonizing Russians; hence any measures against these churches would be purely defensive. And, as is well known, at the end of the 1830s the Uniate church in the Northwest Provinces was entirely disbanded and its members "voluntarily united" with Orthodoxy.[18]

Despite the action taken against the Uniates in 1839, Muraviev considered that the majority of his recommendations from 1830 had been ignored. He was in a far stronger position in 1864 when he sent a similar memorandum to St. Petersburg. Here he excoriated "Polish presumptuousness and madness" that dared to consider this land Polish. As before he emphasized the need for a strong and consistent government policy that would "recognize earlier errors in the administration of the Northwest Territory, recognize it definitively as Russian, being an ancient property [*drevnee dostoianie*] of Russia," and put in place "the necessary regulations [to ensure] that in this land there should not be in any way allowed the slightest signs of Polish propaganda. . . ."[19] Muraviev advocated a number of measures to this end, from improving the living conditions of the local peasantry to education to strengthening the local Orthodox Church. In general all measures are consistently aimed against Polish and Catholic influences, but nowhere does one encounter the term "russification." Nor did Muraviev seem particularly interested in russifying Poles: he expressly stated his desire to rescue Belarusian peasantry from the cultural and religious clutches of the Polish *szlachta*, but never specifically advocated a policy (other than general repression and supervision) for the Poles themselves. One could argue that Muraviev aimed at cultural genocide of

[18] On the "uniting" (*vozsoedinenie*) of the Belarusian Uniates with the Orthodox Church, see "O vozsoedinenii uniatov s pravoslavnoiu tserkov'iu v Rossiiskoi Imperii," *Khristianskoe chtenie* (April 1839): 351–423; and G. Shavelskii, *Poslednee vozsoedinenie s pravoslavnoiu tserkov'iu uniatov belorusskoi eparkhii (1833–1839 gg.)* (St. Petersburg: Sel'skii vestnik, 1910). A more recent discussion of this event is contained in T. Weeks, "Between Rome and Tsargrad: The Uniate Church in Imperial Russia," in Robert P. Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky, eds., *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2001), 70–91.

[19] "Zapiska o nekotorykh voprosakh po ustroistvu Severo-Zapadnago kraia" (dated 14 May 1864), in "Chertyre politicheskiia zapiski . . . ," *Russkii arkhiv* (June 1885), 186.

the Poles, but such an extreme argument can hardly be sustained, given the expectations and mores of this period. Far more convincing is the argument that Muraviev wanted to isolate Polish culture and weaken its influences, and if it were to disappear from this land, so much the better. But this is hardly a case of activist russification.

Muraviev (and others after him) always characterized the Northwest as "Russian." Leaving aside the rather important Polish and Jewish communities, what about the almost one million (by 1900) Lithuanians residing there, mainly in Kovno (Kaunas) province? While Belarusians with their East Slavic tongue and mainly Orthodox faith could conceivably be placed within the Russian family, the Lithuanians, who spoke a non-Slavic language and were by all accounts fervent Catholics, were far more difficult from a Russian nationalist point of view. Hence the Russians adopted a (possibly unconscious) strategy of simply ignoring the Lithuanians whenever possible. In 1864 this was not possible, in particular in light of the fact that Lithuanian Catholic peasants had often supported the insurrection. Consistent with his desire to eliminate Polish influences, Muraviev urged the government "to introduce the teaching of Lithuanian [*Zhmudskaia gramota*] in Russian letters in all schools of Samogitia." He also emphasized the need in "Samogitia, that is, Kovno province [for] special observation and continual local surveillance in schools [*nadzor za uchebnoiu chast'iu*]," including the appointment of a special inspector "who will be responsible for the successful development of Russian schools and who will concern himself with the destruction in them of the influence of fanatical Catholic clergy."[20] And, indeed, not only was it forbidden to print Lithuanian in the traditional Latin script, but as the teaching personnel in the (admittedly few) government schools of Kovno province were replaced by Russians, the possibility of teaching Lithuanian literacy—in any script—disappeared.[21]

Muraviev's words and policies are both strikingly straightforward and elusively ambiguous. On the one hand, he certainly pushed through (often in the face of opposition in St. Petersburg, in particular in the person of P. A. Valuev, minister of the interior) harsh and repressive

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[20] Ibid., 190–91.

[21] On this period in Lithuanian cultural history, which ironically witnessed a great leap in Lithuanian national consciousness, see Vytautas Merkys, *Nelegalioji lietuvių spauda kapitalizmo laikotarpiu (ligi 1904 m.)* (Vilnius: "Mosklas," 1978). Discussions of the rationale behind and the carrying out of this policy may be found in Lietuvos centrinis valsybinis istorijos archyvas, Vilnius (LVIA), f. 378, BS 1865, b. 1775; Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv, St. Petersburg (RGIA), f. 1282, op. 2, 1898, d. 1974; and Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii, Moscow (GARF), f. 215, op. 1, 1897, d. 93.

measures against Poles and Polish culture. He stated clearly that the land was Russian, the schools must be Russian, and the predominance of the Orthodox Church must be resurrected. On the other hand, he did not (at least not explicitly) advocate russification of either Poles or Lithuanians (or, for that matter, of the numerous Jews of the region). As long as these non-Russian elements would reconcile themselves to the hegemony of Russian culture in these provinces, Muraviev was unconcerned about the language that they spoke at home. He also brushed aside any suggestion that his actions aimed at the destruction of the Catholic church per se. Rather, he insisted that the Russian Empire was and continued to be tolerant of non-Orthodox people, but could not afford to ignore treason and armed insurrection.[22] And yet it must be admitted that the sweep of Muraviev's rhetoric and actions did seem to aim, over the long run, at a complete russification of this territory. Perhaps these two interpretations can be reconciled as "minimum" (practical) and "maximum" (rhetorical) variants of the same project. Just as likely, however, Muraviev, as a conservative man born in the eighteenth century, shied away from overly ambitious programs of social engineering and concerned himself primarily with re-establishing lasting order.

In any case, as partisans of Muraviev pointed out again and again in the ensuing decades, his program was not consistently carried out even as early as the late 1860s. To quote one typical source, "From the time of General Potapov's administration [1868–74] there began in the region . . . new attempts of reconciliatory attitudes toward the Poles. . . ."[23] Potapov is similarly described as devoid of the "patriotic inspiration" that imbued Muraviev's program, and interested merely in keeping order and ingratiating himself with local Polish society.[24] While the Russian government never repudiated Muraviev's "program," by the turn of the century it was clear, as the reactionary governor general Vasilii Trotskii wrote to St. Petersburg in 1898, that "our system [since 1863] has up to now failed to bring out the desired results."[25] A year later the same governor general defined this program

[22] For a sympathetic account of Muraviev and his policies, including the execution of insurgents (among them clergymen), see "An Englishman," *The Polish Question and General Mouravieff* (London: J. Causton & Sons, n.d. [ca. 1864]).

[23] P. N. Batiushkov, *Belorussiia i Litva. Istoricheskiia sud'by Severo-Zapadnago kraia* (St. Petersburg: "Obshchestvennaia Pol'za," 1890), 373.

[24] A. N. Mosolov, *Vilenskie ocherki (1863–1865 gg.). Murav'evskoe vremia* (St. Petersburg: Suvorin, 1898), 161.

[25] RGIA, f. 1263, op. 2, st. 253–332, 1899, d. 5385, l. 588 (annual report from governor general of Vil'na for 1898).

in the following terms: "Our political system [in the Northwest Provinces] since the crushing of the last Polish mutiny [*miatezh*] of 1863 consists essentially of the creation of a counterweight to Polish influence."[26] In other words, nearly two generations after 1863, the highest official in the Northwest Provinces doubted that Polish influence there had been significantly lessened, not even to speak of russifying the local population.

The annual reports of the governor of Kovno (Kaunas) province reflect this fact. The peasant population of this province was overwhelmingly Lithuanian, though the towns were populated mainly by Jews and Poles. Despite this fact, in the reports sent annually from Kovno to St. Petersburg, very frequently the non-Russian ethnicity of the province's majority is not mentioned at all. Looking through twenty-seven annual reports written by many different governors over a span of forty years (1863–1902/3), I have found the word "russification" used *one single time*, in 1896.[27] To be sure, it is possible to pursue a policy without naming it, but this very infrequent use of the word (and, as we will see, the context in which *obrusenie* was used in 1896) should alert us to reconsider our own use of the word "russification" to describe the policy of the Russian government during these decades. It is a rare report that did not mention Catholicism, Poles, or Jews, but Lithuanians (or "Samogitians"—*Zhmudiny*) are mentioned per se in less than half of them. Again, a term like "peasant" or even "Catholic" in this province referred, in fact, to Catholic peasants of the Lithuanian ethnicity, but surely it is significant that the governors found it unnecessary to mention their ethnicity—while Jews and Poles, both of whom made up much smaller percentages of the total population, were mentioned specifically time and again. Reading the reports, one also observes a shift toward more explicit recognition and discussion of the Lithuanians' ethnicity from the 1890s.

The first specific mention of Lithuanians (*zhmudskii narod*) in these reports appeared in 1870, when the governor wrote of the "sympathy of local peasants toward becoming literate in Russian [*usvoenenie russkoi gramoty*] and toward Russian schools, despite the secret discouragement [*protivodeistvie*] of the landlords and Roman Catholic clergy." The governor did admit the inadequate number of schools in the province at the time (only 162 *narodnye shkoly* with 4,670 pupils)

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[26] RGIA, f. 1282, op. 3, 1900, d. 355, l. 3.

[27] The reports (Kovno province, *gubernatorskie otchety*) I read in the Russian State Historical Archive in St. Petersburg were from the following years: 1863, 1865, 1867, 1869, 1870, 1871, 1873, 1874, 1876, 1878, 1880, 1882, 1883, 1885, 1887, 1888, 1889, 1890, 1892, 1893, 1894, 1895, 1896, 1897, 1899, 1900/01, and 1902/3.

and stated that increasing literacy (that is, literacy in Russian) would be "a force for pacification of the region and for fusion with Russia [*sila umirotvoreniia kraia i sliianiia s Rossiei*]." The peasants' attachment to the Catholic religion was mentioned, and the governor insisted on the need to get rid of the current bishop, M. Volonchevskii, while at the same time dividing "Catholicism" from "polonism" and reassuring the peasantry that their religion would be respected as long as it did not take on "the character of political demonstrations." The governor concluded, using for the first time the ethnonym *zhmudskii* ("Samogitian" or Western Lithuanian), "Sympathy for the Polish cause among the Samogitian people [*narod*] neither existed nor will exist so long as the local administration does not cease to keep a vigilant eye on the activities of the Polish landlords and *szlachta*."[28] Thus even when the Lithuanians are mentioned by name (at the time it was customary to speak of "Lithuanians" [*litovtsy*] to the east and "Samogitians" [*zhmudiny*] to the west), this is only to distinguish them from the Russian administration's chief obsession in the land: the Poles.

Six years later a report bewailed the fact that "the local population [*tuzemnoe naselenie*] as of yet remains far from harboring the desired level of sympathy and trust toward the Government." At a time when universal military service and elective town government had just been introduced in the province, the need to "draw closer" to the Russian center was even more vital. To quote the governor: "I am firmly convinced that for the achievement of moral merging of local people into one Russian family [*nravstvennoe sliianie tuzemtsov v odnu russkuiu sem'iu*] it will be necessary to demonstrate to them that religious faith and [national] origin of members [of this family] will never deprive anyone of equal rights [*ravnopravnost'*] and that there will rather only be made a strict demarcation between those worthy [*dostoinyi*] and unworthy of bearing the glorious name of a loyal subject of the Russian Tsar."[29] At first glance, the phrase "moral merging of local people"—nota bene, no ethnicities mentioned—"into one Russian

[28] RGIA, f. 1284, op. 69, 1871, d. 133 (Kovno province report for 1870), esp. l. 8 (on *sliianie*), l. 23 (on the Catholic religion), and l. 26v (on the *zhmudskii narod* and polonism). The bishop referred to in this report is, of course, the important figure Motiejus Valančius, who played a significant role in spreading the Lithuanian language in local churches. It is interesting that the Russian administration unfailingly complained of Valančius as a foe of the Russian government and polonizer. For more on Valančius and Russian nationality policy, see V. Merkys, "Biskup Motiejos Valanczius a polityka narodowościowa rządu Rosji," in Jerzy Kłoczowski et al., eds., *Belarus. Lithuania. Poland. Ukraine. The Foundations of Historical and Cultural Traditions in East Central Europe* (Lublin: Institute of East Central Europe, 1994), 305–21.

[29] RGIA, f. 1284, op. 69, 1877, d. 178, l. 8v.

family" would appear to mean total russification. But a closer look at the context makes it far more likely that the governor had in mind something more modest, that is, the achievement of a level of loyalty and trust between local peoples (not just Lithuanians, but also Jews and Poles) and the Russian government.

By the 1890s, mention of Lithuanians by name became more common. For example, in the 1890 report Governor N. M. Klingenberg mentioned his regret that nearly three decades after 1863 the Catholic clergy continued to wage war against all things Russian and had been successful in instilling it into the popular mind that "here the Pole, Samogitian or Lithuanian opposes [*protivostavliaet*] the Orthodox [person], and the Catholic [opposes] the Russian."[30] On the other hand, three years later the same man extolled the successes that had been made in spreading the Russian language: "Now [in 1893] the younger generation nearly universally can speak and read Russian."[31] One may doubt this optimistic assessment, in particular considering the statement made a decade earlier that in the entire province only 226 schools existed with just 12,588 pupils (for a population of some 1.4 million).[32] While the actual situation, one suspects, had changed but little in that decade, the governor clearly felt the need to emphasize his success in spreading Russian culture. In the same (1893) report, however, Klingenberg specifically recommended that, because of this success, existing restrictions on Lithuanian publishing should be lifted.[33] In other words, Lithuanians were "drawing closer" to Russians and should thus be allowed publications in their own language printed in the Latin script.

In 1896 Klingenberg was replaced by S. P. Sukhodol'skii as governor of Kovno province. In his first report, Sukhodol'skii wrote along similar lines that the local Lithuanian population was not dangerous or disloyal. Writing about the "Russian cause" (*russkoe delo*) in his province, the governor defined his task as follows: "that they [the population—*naselenie*], though not Russian by origin, should gradually and consciously [*soznatel'no*] become imbued with the healthy state principles upon which is founded the prosperity [*blagosostoianie*] of the mighty Russian State [*Russkaia Derzhava*]. . . ."[34] Stressing the loyalty of the local (Lithuanian) population and its enthusiasm for the newly crowned tsar (Nicholas II's coronation in Moscow took

[30] RGIA, Chital'nyi zal, op. 1, d. 43 (Kovno governor's report for 1890).

[31] Ibid., report for Kovno 1893, p. 1.

[32] RGIA, f. 1284, op. 223, 1884, d. 170, l. 48. In this same report the governor stated (l. 19v) that most Catholic priests were Lithuanians (*litovtsy*).

[33] RGIA, Chital'nyi zal, op. 1, d. 43 (Kovno, 1893), pp. 4–5.

[34] Ibid. (Kovno 1896), p. 8.

place in 1896), Sukhodol'skii even advocated introducing elective *zemstva* in the province. Furthermore, to stem the tide of contraband Lithuanian publications flowing over the very porous border with East Prussia (across the Neman [Nemunas] River from Kovno), the governor argued that St. Petersburg should abolish restrictions on Lithuanian publications in the Latin script. Just after this statement Sukhodol'skii uses the phrase "russification of Lithuanians": "For a more successful russification of the Lithuanians [*bolee uspeshnoe obrusenie litovtsev*] it is necessary above all to prevent the polonization of Lithuania [*ne dopuskat' opoliacheniia Litvy*]," that is, by allowing the publication of Lithuanian books in the Latin script.[35] The argument is somewhat convoluted, but one thing is clear: to "russify" the Lithuanians, they must be allowed to read books in their own language, printed in the Latin script. It would seem, then, that for Sukhodol'skii *obrusenie* referred (at least at that moment) not to total cultural assimilation, but to something along the lines of the civic "drawing near" to Russia expounded by earlier governors.

Russification and Russian Society

What did Russians think in the latter half of the nineteenth century about russification? First of all, it is almost certain that the majority of Russians did not think about it at all. The idea that nationalism or national feeling among Russians was a majority sentiment cannot be proved, and indeed almost all indices of literacy, social mobility, and political awareness indicate a society where local sentiments and religious feeling continued to predominate. The continual complaints by nationalist and right-wing Russians (in particular after 1905) about the difficulty of garnering support to defend "the Russian cause" attests to the weakness of the national idea among Russians.[36] On the other

[35] Ibid., p. 13.

[36] Nearly all Russian nationalists in the post-1905 period (and even before) are unanimous in the sentiment that "only Russians are not allowed to defend their national rights." This topic deserves careful study and discussion, which has only just begun with Don Rawson's interesting study, *Russian Rightists and the Revolution of 1905* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995).

For some contemporary examples, see, e.g., P. I. Kovalevskii, *Russkii natsionalizm i national'noe vospitanie*, 3rd ed. (St. Petersburg, 1912); T. V. Lokot', *Opravdanie natsionalizma (Rabstvo russkoi radikal'noi intelligentsii. Natsional-demokratiia)* (Kiev: "Petr Barskii," 1910); N. D. Sergeevskii, *Esh' menia, sobaka (Nasha glavnaia bolezn')* (St. Petersburg: Tip. A. S. Suvorina, 1907); and—possibly most famous of all—A. N. Kuropatkin, *Rossiia dlia russkikh. Zadachi russkoi armii* (St. Petersburg: Sklad V. A. Berezovskogo, 1910). The journals *Mirnyi trud* and *Okrainy Rossii* were the chief organs of this sort of "chip-on-the-shoulder" aggressive Russian nationalism.

hand, within Russian "society," that is, among educated Russians, national feeling was certainly growing apace in the second half of the nineteenth century. This was, after all, the era of Mikhail Katkov's *Russian Messenger*, the Panslavs, and N. Danilevskii's famous *Russia and Europe.* Already in the late 1840s Iurii Samarin had called for a more activist and russifying policy in the Baltic, and after the Polish revolt of 1863 he reiterated this call in his *Okrainy Rossii.*[37] Interest in national liberation movements in the Balkans also helped fuel Russian national feeling. At the same time, the concept of russification seldom appears explicitly in these works. While more study is certainly needed, at present I would conclude that Russian nationalist intellectuals wrote much more along the lines of "defense" and instilling Russian culture among the Russian peasantry (and fighting sedition and nihilism—the two nearly always went hand in hand) than in actively russifying non-Russian peoples. I believe that the situation was different in Asian Russia, but on the western frontiers I have found little evidence—at least before 1905—of great support (at least of explicit support) for russification.

In anticipation of a more thorough-going study, I would like to discuss just one example, namely, the Slavophile/Panslav Ivan Aksakov. No one can accuse Aksakov of neglecting Russian national interests or of being particularly liberal in his feelings or writings about the Poles. And yet reading through hundreds of pages of his articles from various journals on Poles, Jews, and the "west-Russian issue" (*zapadnorusskoe delo*), one finds that the emphasis is always on defense, countering polonism and Catholicism, essentially on helping "Russians" (for us, Ukrainians and Belarusians) recognize their true Russian-ness. Aksakov does, to be sure, use the term *obrusenie* with far greater frequency than the official sources we have considered here, but once again it is significant that Aksakov speaks always of russifying the land, not, for example, of "russification of the Jews" or of any other non-Russian ethnicity. In Aksakov one does encounter, however, a great ambiguity in the use of this term. On the one hand, he consistently (and indignantly) denied that the Russian government had ever aimed to russify Poles. On the other, his writings polemicizing on the need for a deep and thorough-going russification of the Western Provinces at

[37] On Samarin, see Baron B. E. Nol'de, *Iurii Samarin i ego vremia* (Paris: Société Anonime Imprimerie de Navarre, 1926); Peter K. Christoff, *An Introduction to Nineteenth-Century Russian Slavophilism: Iu. F. Samarin* (Boulder: Westview, 1991); Loren D. Calder, *The Political Thought of Yu. F. Samarin, 1840–1864* (New York: Garland, 1987); and Edward C. Thaden, "Samarin and Official Policy in the Baltic Provinces," *Russian Review* 30 (1974): 405–15.

times appear to demand not just linguistic, but even religious, assimilation of the local population.

Aksakov's insistence on the religious side of russification comes through clearly in an article published in the newspaper *Moskva* in early 1867. The new editors of the semi-official *Vilenskii vestnik* had attempted to argue that no connection existed between national (*narodnyi*) and religious (*veroispovednyi*) questions. Hence, according to that newspaper, the government could russify the province without impinging on Catholicism or Judaism. Aksakov strongly disagreed. He said that lukewarm and superficial submissiveness (*pokornost)* would not suffice, and even a general adoption of Russian (*vseobshchee usvoenie russkogo iazyka*) in and of itself would not be enough. "And let it be clear to the Vilna newspaper that by itself the Russian language is not quite sufficient for us to assimilate [*srodnit' s soboiu*] the Polish, Jewish, Lithuanian nationalities [*natsionalnosti*] and even that part of the Belarusian that has actively absorbed the Polish spirit [*deiatelno prichastilas polskogo dukha*]."[38]

Was Aksakov, then, advocating a total russification and religious conversion of the local population? At first such an argument seems plausible, but on second glance, Aksakov's point is clearly elsewhere. For Aksakov, Russian-ness was inextricably linked with the Orthodox religion. Thus the idea of being Russian and, say, Catholic, was absolutely repugnant and abhorrent to him. "One may *be* Russian and *call oneself* Roman Catholic or *be* Roman Catholic and *call oneself* Russian."[39] The two concepts were for Aksakov utterly and completely foreign to one another; he (and many other Russian nationalists) absolutely refused to admit the possibility, even theoretical, of a "Russian Catholic" (and "Russian Jew" was also for him highly contradictory and troubling). In the late 1860s attempts were made to introduce Russian into so-called "supplementary services" in Catholic churches of the Western Provinces (essentially, in Belarusian areas) and Aksakov adamantly opposed such a move. Aksakov advocated instead that the link between "Russian" and "Orthodox" be emphasized, that Orthodox churches in the area be given greater support, and that every possible precaution be taken to prevent Catholic propaganda. While he does speak in the passage quoted above of "assimilat[ing] the Polish, Jewish, Lithuanian nationalities," the Russian verb *srodnit' s soboiu* could just

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[38] Ivan Aksakov, "O sviazi veroispovednogo voprosa s narodnym v Severozapadnom krae," in idem, *Pol'skii vopros i zadno-russkoe delo. Evreiskii vopros. 1860–1886* (Moscow: Tip. M. G. Volchanina, 1886), 417–23. This article is dated 17 January 1867.

[39] I. Aksakov, "O znachenii katolitsizma i evreistva v Zapadnom krae" (24 January 1867), ibid., 426.

as well be interpreted as a somewhat stronger synonym for "drawing nearer" without necessarily implying total cultural assimilation.

In any case, Aksakov (like, one must admit, nationalists as a rule) is not entirely consistent. Many years later while reviewing the failure of the "Russian cause" in the western territory, Aksakov indignantly denied that the Russian government had ever aimed to russify the Poles. "Russia demands of the Poles only obedience and loyalty [*pokornost i vernost*], the renunciation of foolish political reveries [such as] the idea of *historical* Poland; she demands a sincere recognition [*priznanie*] of the necessity for one united supreme Russian state principle [*neobkhodimost edinstva verkhovnogo russkogo gosudarstvennogo nachala*] for the entire Empire."[40] Explicitly, Aksakov stated that the Russian state never aimed to eliminate the Polish nationality, but implicitly, in particular in his earlier articles, he had argued that the Russian government should do everything possible to weaken the Poles and Polono-Catholic influence. In his defense, it must be remembered that Aksakov always made a very strong distinction between *Polsha*—that is, provinces where ethnic Poles formed the majority of the population—and the Western Provinces, which for him were indubitably historically and culturally Russian. In essence Aksakov "allowed" Polish culture to exist in *Polsha* while denying its rights (though never explicitly) in the Western Provinces. Aksakov's use of the term "russification" was ambiguous and never explicitly demanded the imposition of Russian culture onto non-Russians, but his general "program" would seem to imply just that. Into the early twentieth century, especially after 1905, this kind of program would become even more explicit.

Conclusion

Our excursion into the national world of Russian officials and at least one Russian nationalist suggests some tentative conclusions about russification as a word and concept in the period 1863–1905. First of all, the term (*obrusenie*) was not widely used, in particular not by official figures, though its use picked up significantly toward the turn of the century. Second, even when the term was used its meaning was ambiguous. It could mean the establishment of order, a spreading of Russian as a second language, or even the instilling of state patriotism and dynastic loyalty. On the other hand, as we have seen in the writings of

[40] I. Aksakov, "Zastoi russkogo dela v zapadnom krae po usmirenii miatezha 1863–1864 goda," ibid., 652. This article was originally published in the newspaper *Rus'* on 1 May 1884.

Ivan Aksakov, the ambiguity of the concept could allow demands of political loyalty to extend even to the religious sphere (though the explicit push for religious conversion was seldom explicitly advocated). Part of the difficulty with russification as a concept stemmed from the unclear content of the term "Russian." Was this entirely ethnic, linguistic, and cultural? Or could one be "Russian" in the sense of a loyal subject of the tsar, all the while cherishing one's own nationality and native tongue? Both of these interpretations are possible, and indeed at times a single document meanders from one to the other. The indeterminacy in the word's definition should, at the very least, alert us to the need for further research into the perplexing and contradictory nature of russification as a reality. Graduate students in search of a thesis, take note!

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